

Overcoming Endemic Violence Against Women

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Given the current historical changes taking place in South Africa, there is now, more than ever, a need to develop comprehensive and constructive dialogue around transformation of the present social conditions. It has often been the case that issues concerning women's rights have been overlooked when broad-based economic and political planning has taken place. This article seeks to ensure that gender oppression, and in this case particularly the problem of violence against women in South Africa, is given the consideration it deserves in the construction of a new democratic society free of oppression.

To define the parameters of violence against women, the incidence and origins of such phenomena in South Africa need to be detailed. Having established the relevant terrain, several strategies for overcoming such violence are then discussed.

Defining the Terrain

Abuse and violence against women have been with us for the duration of recorded history. Such abuse appears to be a virtually universal phenomenon, although anthropologists have recorded some exceptional societies in which violence towards persons and women in particular is virtually non-existent (Oakley, 1981). Abuse seems to be related to women's general status and value in particular communities.

However, discussion of "endemic" violence conveys the premise that such violence is widespread, common, and deeply entrenched in most societies. That is certainly the case in the South African context. So prevalent and widely tolerated is such violence that it has come to be perceived almost as normative and to a large extent accepted rather than challenged. This article seeks to address the question of how one attempts to overcome abuse and violence against women that manifests as an intrinsic, pervasive facet of gender relations.

Feminist analysis of violence against women has maintained that such violence is illustrative of a general devaluation and objectification of women (Dworkin, 1982; Brownmiller, 1976; Coveney et al., 1984) that is expressed most extremely in acts of

violence. Within such a framework abuse of women could be construed in the broadest terms; however, for this article the focus will be on violence against women encompassing a more limited spectrum of behaviour, namely rape and attempted rape, battery, and other forms of physical assault directed against women. Having specified the area of abuse to be addressed, it is important to look both at its range and incidence.

Incidence of Abuse and Violence in South Africa

Statistics in the area of women abuse are notoriously difficult to establish largely because of underreporting. This is due to several factors: the acceptance of such violence as normative by individuals and the authorities, lack of confidence in the police, the shame women experience in describing assaults particularly of a sexual nature, economic dependence on abusers, fear of future reprisals, and the difficulty in obtaining convictions (The London Rape Crisis Centre, 1984; Adams, 1987; Vogelmann, 1990). In South Africa, difficulties in obtaining accurate statistics are exacerbated by apartheid and the fragmentation that goes with its bureaucracy. For example, homeland statistics are recorded separately from those in the rest of the country; there is a lack of access to facilities such as the services of a district surgeon, particularly in rural areas; and the complex political relationship between the police force and community members that is often characterised by distrust. However, what statistics are obtainable seem to indicate that such violence is at least as high as in other parts of the world, and often far higher. It is generally established that the incidence of violence directed at women in particular tends to reflect the general level of violence expressed in any society. South African society in all its heterogeneity is an extremely violent society with levels of violence increasing rather than decreasing (Vogelmann and Simpson, 1990). It is not surprising that in this context violence against women is prevalent.

With regard to rape, official and non-official estimates vary considerably. In 1988, the official government statistic for the incidence of rape was 19,368 cases, of which 18,549 were black and 819 white (The Star, April 19, 1989). If one accepts the National Institute for Crime Rehabilitation (NICRO) assertion that only one in 20 rapes is reported to the authorities (Vogelmann, 1990), it is estimated that as many as 380,000 women are raped each year in South Africa, i.e., more than 1,000 are raped each day in a total population of approximately 34 million. While rape is a phenomenon not linked to any particular population group, the incidence of rape may not be evenly distributed throughout the population. There is some indication that township living conditions (e.g. poor lighting, lack of public transport, etc.) may exacerbate the likelihood of rape. The Star (one of Johannesburg's biggest daily newspapers) regularly reports the incidence of reported rape in Soweto as falling between 20 to 30 cases in a weekend. Again, this must be seen against a background of gross underreporting. It is patently evident that rape is at the forefront of violence against women in South Africa.

Statistics on battery are, if anything, more difficult to establish. Domestic violence takes place within an ideological context that views the family or household as a private domain within which conflict should be contained and settled without outside interference (Breines and Gordon, 1983). The title of Erin Pizzey's well-known text,

Scream Quietly or the Neighbours Will Hear (1981), epitomises this kind of attitude, which is also reflected in the attitude of many of the police force toward such assaults.

Social workers in organisations such as the Family and Marital Association of South Africa, Child and Family Welfare, the South African National Council for Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and the Mental Health Society report the description of battery to be commonplace among their women clients. Voluntary organisations established around women abuse, such as Rape Crisis and People Opposed to Women Abuse, also report that most of their calls come from battered women. Despite limited available research in the area, some statistics are available for the South African context. In a study of wife-beating among "Coloured" people in Mitchell's Plain in the Cape, social workers reported that 25% of their case loads were battery related. The South African Police in the same area reported that wife assault accounted for more than 15% of reported crime in 1981 and 1982 (Lawrence, 1984). At a symposium on battered women held at the University of Pretoria in 1984, it was estimated that violence is present in 50% to 60% of marital relationships, often leading to problems of depression, suicide, and drug and alcohol abuse (Ibid.) Once again the South African problem seems to rank at least as high as American statistics of between 30% to 60% of marital relationships (Gelles, 1972; Walker, 1979; Straus et al., 1980).

Although not a major focus of the article, the phenomenon of child sexual abuse is briefly considered as illustrative of the fact that abuse of women begins at an early age. Although not limited to the abuse of girl children only, clear gender patterns emerge. International statistics indicate that 97% of abusers are men and 92% of victims are girls (Herman and Hirschmann, in Howell and Bayes, 1981). According to a demographic study conducted on 107 cases dealt with by the Durban Child Welfare Society, the South African pattern appeared very similar with men (biological or surrogate fathers) as the abusers in 90% of cases and girl children the victims in 90% of cases (Collings, 1989:22).

Less widespread forms of violence experienced by South African women are threats and assaults under conditions of detention and imprisonment (Foster, 1987), assaults related to general political violence (Annecke, 1990), and the phenomenon of witch-burnings, in which many victims have been women. Witch-burning has generally occurred in rural communities and is associated with political and economic conflict that leads to scapegoating of vulnerable or marginalised individuals, e.g., women and the elderly (Ritchken, 1987). Such attacks appear to have been more frequently reported since 1985 (Ibid.). This phenomenon is yet another indication that gender discrimination plays a large part in the particular forms in which violence takes expression in South African society, as in most parts of the world.

Causes and Origins of Violence against Women

It is impossible to offer universal explanations of violence against women in South Africa. Without a full recognition of the diversity of race, class, and regional differences giving rise to assaults, this violence cannot be fully understood. Nevertheless, some common factors can be identified.

Although perhaps not characteristic of popular understanding of violence against women among the South African population, academic and theoretical perspectives

on such violence tend to rely on contemporary feminist analysis. Until the advent of the feminist movement and a new scholarship of feminist theory around violence against women (Brownmiller, 1976; Smart and Smart, 1978), the abuse of women by men was seen to be largely rooted in biological sex differences. These biologically determined sex differences were held to take expression in a masculinity characterised by dominance, competitiveness, assertiveness, aggression, and sexual appetite and a femininity characterised by passivity, dependence, irrationality, emotionality, masochism, and contradictory qualities of seductiveness and modesty (de Beauvoir, 1970; Oakley, 1981; Richardson, 1981).

Thus rape, battery and other forms of abuse directed against women were seen to be an inevitable consequence of sex differences, although socially undesirable. Men were excused of culpability for their actions since such behaviour was a "natural" masculine response to extreme situations and women were largely held responsible for their feminine "provocation" of their own victim role. Two commonly held beliefs about rape and battery clearly illustrate this perspective. First, it has been widely assumed that rape takes place in a context in which a man is unable to contain his overwhelming sexual urge and woman does not say "No" clearly enough (The London Rape Crisis Centre, 1984; Vogelmann, 1990). Second, the automatic response to many battery situations is for people to question what the woman did to provoke such an attack (Wilson, 1983; Adams, 1987).

This biologically rooted explanation for violence directed by men against women went largely unquestioned until the 1960s; and much of such ideology still holds sway in terms of popular belief as illustrated in several South African studies (Mina, 1986; Gould, 1988; Vogelmann, 1990). In the words of one rapist, interviewed by Vogelmann:

Now and then you get girls that want it. They go after it. They are walking around at night looking for men ... and then when the boys come they want to chicken out Then the guys just take them into the school yard. (1990: 67)

Feminist theory (Brownmiller, 1976; Smart and Smart, 1978; Dworkin, 1981) challenges this determinist, biological perspective by exposing the degree to which it is constructed within and serves to maintain a patriarchal social order. Feminism sought to demystify previous theory around women abuse and to locate both the structural and ideological basis of this particular aspect of patriarchal relations.

The fundamental premise underlying such exploration is that violence against women is an inevitable consequence of the power differential inherent in a patriarchal society and serves essentially as a means of social control over the weaker party, i.e., women (Smart and Smart, 1978; Barrett, 1980; Rorbaugh, 1981). It has been argued that the generalised fear of rape affects all women and acts to curtail their social mobility. As a consequence of this fear, women seek protection in relationships with men, usually that of marriage, but the contradiction is that within such relationships (further) violence often takes place. Hanmer (1981: 190) comments on this issue:

The pervasive fear of violence and violence itself has the effect of driving women to seek protection from men, the

very people who commit violence against them. Husbands and boyfriends are seen as protectors of women from the potential violence of unknown men. Women often feel safer in the company of a man in public and the home is portrayed as, and often feels, the safest place of all, even though statistically speaking, women are more likely to be violently assaulted in marriage and by men known to them.

The ideological contradictions inherent in such sexist beliefs about violence against women – e.g., rape is the extreme consequence of men's sexual appetite/lust and therefore "natural," and that "normal" men don't rape – stems largely from the lack of acknowledgment that sexuality and gender are socially constructed rather than biological givens (Dworkin, 1981; Coward, 1983). Thus, violence and abuse against women, particularly in sexual forms, have their roots in a socially and politically structured gender system, which in terms of Althusser's definition of ideology¹ has been internalised and is lived out by men and women as if it were a "natural" or "real" aspect of their identity. Thus, although most men and women would choose to distance themselves from the roles of aggressor and victim, as products of a patriarchal society they are inevitably caught up in gender relations that encompass the possibility of such demonstrations of power. As Barrett (1980: 45) argues:

For if sexual practice is the area in which systematic inequalities of power between men and women are played out, then all men are in a position to exercise this power (even if only by mild pressure rather than brutal coercion), whether or not they are inclined to do so.

The crux of such feminist arguments is that violence and abuse against women will only be eradicated through a fundamental change in gender relations at every level, which would involve the dismantling of patriarchy.

Gender, Race and Class

Thus far the discussion has centered largely on gender relations in relation to women abuse. However, gender relations cannot be separated from class and race structures, particularly within the South African context. While a universal phenomenon across race and class groups in this country, the expression of violence against women has to be viewed against this specific political context.

One of the most striking features of South African society is its stratification along class, race, and gender lines. If one accepts that violence and abuse against women is a manifestation of the power imbalance inherent within patriarchal relations, how does this interrelate with other hierarchically structured relations? It seems that women generally bear the brunt of men's need to assert power. In the South African political economy where working-class, and particularly black men, daily experience

themselves as oppressed and impotent, their frustration is likely to take expression in domination in another domain, i.e., in dominating women:

Men's experience of racism and economic deprivation often causes a reactionary backlash within the family – to the detriment of women – rather than opening up the space for resistance to race and class oppression. (Campbell, 1990: 14).

Thus, frustration engendered in the public domain is expressed more safely in the private domain with women the most accessible target against which to direct this frustration. Women are therefore subjected to dual oppression; indirectly they are subjected to men's anger in relation to their race and class oppression, and directly they become the focus of such anger due to patriarchal structures. African men's difficulty in reconciling their contradictory position in relation to women as opposed to their status in the workplace is well described by Campbell:

The commitment of working-class township fathers to the traditional role of father as ultimate authority in the family must be seen within the context of the contradiction between their position in the work-place and their childhood socialisation within a patriarchal social order. This socialisation was saturated with the old-fashioned values of a man as commanding unquestioning obedience from his family and as a proud, fearless respected force within the wider community. (Campbell, 1990: 15)

Thus, gender relations become further complicated, and perhaps more rigidified, in a highly stratified society. In addition, unemployment in South Africa is extremely high,² particularly among unskilled sectors of the population. The emasculation of unemployment (given the expectation of men as principal breadwinners) is also likely to result in assertions of power in relation to women. Ritchken (1987) argues that dire poverty experienced in many rural communities and the changing role of women were factors contributing to witch-burning in Lebowa. Thus, violence against women cannot be divorced from the broad social context, and any truly effective strategy to overcome such violence will need to address complementary forms of oppression.

The position of women in relation to the ongoing war in Natal clearly illustrates the interrelationship between broad social problems, in this case politically motivated violence, and women's oppression. A recent workshop held by women in Natal highlights many of the particular difficulties women face, including becoming subject to increasing violence, both generally and in the form of sexual violence.

During the war the incidence of sexual abuse has risen. There have been several reports of demands for sex for

protection, both within the ranks of organisations and as trade offs with the other side or security force personnel. (Personal account P.M.F.) The incidence of rape has also increased despite a recognised reluctance on the part of women to report it. (Daily News, June 12, 1990) Recently, soldiers of 32 Battalion have been charged with an attempted rape, and several incidents of sexual harassment have occurred. (Sunday Tribune, May 12, 1990) Women are regarded as property: D cited a case where a comrade justified a rape by his side because it was done in revenge for a rape committed by the other side. (Annecke, 1990: 19)

Overcoming violence against women in the South African context must be linked to overcoming violence in this society in general as well as to exposing and eradicating gender oppression. Some specific structural and ideological constraints facing women are highlighted as follows.

Structural and Ideological Constraints Facing Women

Perhaps the most fundamental structural constraint that South African women face is their economic dependence on men. Women's involvement in unpaid household labour and their precarious position within the work force have been well documented (Cock, 1980; Barrett et al., 1985). Such material dependence creates a situation of powerlessness or subservience that is most clearly demonstrated in conventional marriage. One consequence of this dependence is the perception by men that women and their children are in some sense owned by them and take on the identity of property involving a degree of objectification (Breines and Gordon, 1983). The still common custom of lobola exchange in many African marriages is a process negotiated by men around women's values as assets to the family and may have proprietary implications for how a husband perceives his wife. According to Ramphela (1989: 2):

The family is still a major sphere in which the domination of men is secured at the expense of women. Each family is a site for individual men to oppress women in their own particular way.

Thus, husbands and male partners often perceive it as their right to use violence against their women as a form of discipline or as a way of venting frustration. In many cases, dependent women also view such behaviour as legitimate. In discussing the experiences of township women in Natal, Campbell makes the following observation:

Some women are beaten by men ... and while obviously no woman likes to be beaten, many accept violence as an unavoidable part of women's lot. (1990: 17)

One of the main reasons that battered woman often stay in such abusive relationships is related to their own and their children's financial dependence on a male breadwinner. (Star et al., in Howell and Bayes, 1981; Adams, 1987)

Political Rights

Related to their position of economic weakness, women also have little power/control in the political domain. Although white women have the vote in South Africa, for many reasons, women in general exercise little power in both parliamentary and other forms of political organisation. Most political organisations are dominated by men and even in anti-apartheid organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC), women are often in the minority or marginalised (except for women's organisations in particular, which usually have less direct power).

This lack of political control ensures that women's concerns and perspectives on how society should be structured are not given sufficient weight. One aspect of this lack of political power is that violence against women has not become a broad political concern in that same way as unlawful detention, for example, has received attention as a violation of human rights.

A major consequence of a male-dominated political structure is patriarchally biased legislation.

Legal Constraints

Existing legislation inevitably serves the interests of the dominant group (Le Grand, 1973; Brownmiller, 1976). In the South African scenario, this group generally consists of the white population, the wealthy, and men. Legal definitions of rape and related court procedures, the lack of recourse to effective legislative controls in cases of battery, the legitimisation of rape in marriage, the lack of protection of children in incest court cases, and the fact that sexual harassment is not subject to designated legislation in South Africa (Mayne and Levett, 1977; Satchwell, 1981; Anderson, 1982) all serve as specific illustrations of structural impediments to legal control and deterrence of women abuse. The bias of such legislation is one of the factors that leads to a low level of conviction in cases of violence against women (e.g., approximately 50% in the case of rape) and allows offenders to continue without fear of retribution (Vogelman, 1990).

Law Enforcement

Besides the flaws inherent in existing legislation, the implementation of such legislation, particularly by the police force as well as court officials, has also come under criticism (Mayne and Levett, 1977). Often the South African police are viewed as unsympathetic toward or sceptical of women's reports of violence, despite stated

departmental policy (Darling, 1981; Vogelmann, 1990). In some cases, there have been reports of the police themselves (or other law-enforcement bodies such as the defence force) perpetrating violence against women (Evans, 1985; Ritchken, 1987). Such practices need to be challenged and improved if violence against women is to be seriously counteracted and dealt with as a punishable offence.

The Family/Heterosexual Relations

While some of the material factors related to the family and women's dependence on men have been highlighted, the family and its basis in heterosexual couple relationships also serves as a means of ideological control over men and women. In South Africa, as in most societies, men and women are socialised into viewing their pair bonding as an anticipated outcome of adulthood and that such bonding usually involves engaging in specific role behaviour, differentially defined in terms of gender. For example, one of these role stereotypes is the view of men as the initiator of such relationships (particularly the sexual component) and women as reciprocator. In marriage and other heterosexual relationships, it is expected usually by both parties that the man will assume greater power. Campbell suggests that such expectations are sufficiently strong to override existing structural inconsistencies. For example, commenting on her research on township families:

In female households patriarchal ideals often dominate. In a community where the ideology of a dominant male still holds great weight, a woman might not be accorded the respect and authority that a male would receive in this role It seems as if many women take the role of household head if they are forced to do so ... but as soon as a suitable man is available to fill this role, they stand back graciously and allow him to take over. (Campbell, 1990: 8-9)

These internalised stereotypes may lead people to enact the roles expected of them to their own and others' detriment. Thus, many men who engage in violence against women justify this in terms of their need to assert their socially expected control over women.

Many women who are raped question to what extent this was a consequence of their deviation from a specified feminine role (Burgess and Holstrom in Howell and Bayes, 1981), and it is common for battered women to view themselves as personally and socially lacking were they to admit that marriage or its counterpart had failed them as an institution and choose to exit from it (Bayes in Howell and Bayes, 1981).

Thus, in multiple ways the ideology constructed around heterosexuality, marriage, and the family acts to conceal and mystify violence and abuse against women. Such gender ideology is absorbed at every point of socialisation from birth onward, making its exposure a radical and complex process. However, two powerfully contributing agents of socialisation in relation to women abuse will be mentioned at this point; the media and the education system. These two areas are singled out in terms of

representing not only a means of instilling and supporting violence but also as potential sites for contesting existing ideology and overcoming violence against women.

The Media

Violence against women, particularly sexualised violence, such as rape and incest, is an area much used and abused by the media, since it attracts so much popular attention. While media exposure can serve to educate around and condemn such abuse, the mechanisms by which such material is disseminated also exist within a patriarchal, and in South Africa, a racial-capitalist society.

Thus, much media coverage serves to perpetuate existing stereotypes, reporting only on the most lurid assaults and emphasising the "innocence" of particular victims and the abnormality of the perpetrators. A combination of racial and gender stereotyping is apparent in the number of Black-men-on-white-women rapes reported on, in relation to their relative occurrence, which is in actuality about 5% of all reported rapes (Vogelman, 1990).

Media coverage in response to women abuse is problematic given the contradictions inherent in expressing outrage while also presenting women as commodities and encouraging sexual objectification. Feminist theorists have argued the links between the use of women and women's bodies in advertising (and, to a more extreme degree, in pornography) and the objectification of women that allows for men to violate their bodies (Faust, 1980; Dworkin, 1981).

Education

Again, much has been written concerning the gender bias inherent in most current education systems (Richardson, 1981; Oakley, 1981). In relation to violence and abuse against women specifically, a few issues need to be raised. Schools and other educational institutions are considered to be places in which people not only acquire knowledge, but also learn to challenge and question undesirable social practices. However, within most such institutions the subject of women abuse is considered largely taboo and existing stereotypes are perpetuated. For example, in a study of adolescents at a "Coloured" township school in Natal, Gould found that the majority of such children had accepted and internalised gender stereotypes unquestioningly and demonstrated strong associations between such stereotypes and their understanding of rape, e.g., "it is women who are cheeky who get raped" (Gould, 1988). Vogelmann (1990) also found the young rapists in his study to be largely ignorant of male and female differences in sexual arousal and sexuality in general. Since little or no formal instruction in relation to sexuality or gender relations is allowed to take place in schools, ignorance and stereotyping persist, and violence and abuse against women endure across generations.

Solutions to Violence against Women

Despite the high incidence of violence against women in South Africa, there are few highly publicised statements opposing violence against women from the major political parties or organisations. This may be the fault of the media, but it seems largely the

result of the lack of coherent policy on the issue by political organisations. Thus, if calls are made they need to be accompanied by a policy program and active work to transform the social conditions and relations on which violence against women is founded. Several different levels of intervention and solutions need to be addressed.

Feminist Movement and Women Leadership

One of the reasons for both insufficient calls and the lack of campaigns around the issue is because of a lack of organisations and the absence of a broad-based feminist movement within South Africa. Thus, there is no organisation that sees as its primary task the raising of issues regarding the social, economic, and political relationship between women and men. Rather, what is present are women's organisations. Some of them are dominated by a political conservatism and are government-supporting; alternatively, if they are more liberal, they tend to be white, middle-class dominated. Within the anti-apartheid movement, there are several women's organisations linked to various groupings such as the African National Congress, the Pan African Congress, and the United Democratic Front. Much of the aim and work of these organisations in the past has revolved around the perception of women as a constituency that needs to be mobilised and organised against apartheid and around community issues, e.g., rent boycotts, rather than in relation to issues specifically related to women's oppression, e.g., violence and abuse.

The political changes initiated by F.W. de Klerk on February 2, 1990 have provided many people with the sense that a change of political power is imminent. The move toward a post-apartheid South Africa seems more possible now than at any time in the past. This has altered, and will further transform, thinking within anti-apartheid organisations. There is a greater focus on the future and the needs and problems facing a post-apartheid South Africa. Having achieved liberation, women's organisations may have greater potential to take up issues specific to women. However, what is apparent is that liberation will not significantly alter the living and work conditions of most South Africans. It is important that the work around improving these conditions does not take place at the expense of work around reducing the incidence of violence against women. Since the possibility exists that the latter may occur, a feminist awareness needs to become a central part of women's organisations, and more specific organisations dealing with violence against women need to be created. These organisations may act as both resource and pressure groups. A post-apartheid government will in all likelihood need constant reminders that violence against women is a significant contributor to reducing the quality of life for South African women.

The development of such organisations is also important in challenging the day-to-day functioning of men and women. This is important because even though some women in South Africa have begun to occupy more senior positions in society, the powerful forces of socialisation still teach the feminine traits of acquiescence, passivity, and submissiveness. With regard to violence, there are many examples of women finding themselves in precarious situations because they did not assert themselves or were too dependent and trusting (Vogelman, 1990: 201). The link between the ideology of gender and hetero-social relationships requires greater investigation and exposure.

Social Transformation

If greater employment opportunities, better living conditions, a decrease in racism, and the implementation of a democratic political system are part of the package of a post-apartheid government, then there is likely to be a decrease in the heightened social and political frustration present in South Africa. This may result in less displacement of aggression from the political, economic, and social arenas to the domestic domain where women and children are the primary victims.

Welfare

A comprehensive welfare system is another necessity. Inevitably, South Africa is vulnerable to its economic history, and to local and international economic pressures. These factors make provision of employment and the creation of wealth more difficult. A welfare system that takes care of the unemployed and the less privileged would help to offset the frustration, desperation, and powerlessness that comes with economic impoverishment (Vogelman and Simpson, 1990). As we have noted, one means men use to overcome their sense of powerlessness is to engage in violence against women. Such a welfare system requires enormous financial resources. The building of such a system is therefore a vital task of those planning the post-apartheid economy.

Grass-Roots Organisation

One of the most important ways to reduce violence is to attempt to rebuild local-level organisations such as the street committees and civics that were largely crushed by the National Party government in 1987. Only respected local leadership figures who are concerned with the problem of violence against women and who share the same townships with the local residents will be able to win their confidence, assert a disciplined approach to social action (Ibid.), and encourage a culture of social non-acceptance for those who abuse women. The re-establishment of street committees and civics has the potential to contribute to this process. At present, popular political organisations such as the ANC are struggling to develop grass-roots structures and to assert their vision of the world and of appropriate social conduct over many of their supporters.

Education

Men are less likely to commit violence against women when they perceive them as human beings equal to them rather than as their property. Just as racism increases the potential for violence against black people in South Africa, sexism has a similar effect on those who fall victim to it. Thus, education that challenges sexism and violence against women is needed not just in the schools but in all spheres of society, for example, in business, trade unions, the police, and professional associations. Since a culture of violence permeates virtually all spheres of South African society, programs that educate individuals around finding nonviolent solutions to problems that evoke stress and anxiety are also essential.

Legal Action

Men would also be less likely to aggress against women if the legal consequences of their actions were more severe. The latter would mean the future would have to be given greater consideration. As indicated earlier, at present, violence against women

goes largely unpunished. Regarding wife batterers, for example, Lerman makes a strong case for the benefits of prosecuting them:

First, the failure of the criminal justice system to enforce the law against abusers contributes to the perpetuation of violence within the families. Battering can no longer be regarded as merely an individual problem or a "relationship" problem but must be viewed as perpetuated, at least in part, by inadequate or inappropriate responses by the institutions from which violent families seek help.

Police who refuse to make an arrest – and prosecutors who refuse to file charges – give batterers tacit permission to continue their violent behaviour. Efforts to improve prosecutorial policy on family violence may help to reverse those messages.(Lerman in Lystrand, 1986: 256)

Legal Reform

Legal reform is another essential aspect in the move toward a less sexist and violent society. As indicated, some current legislation, e.g., the fact that a husband cannot be charged with raping his wife, reflects the perception of women as the property of men. It is necessary for laws that discriminate against women to be transformed, and further for the legal and judicial system to be changed to encourage reporting of violence and crime. The secondary victimisation of women after reporting rape is all too frequent (Vogelman, 1990).

Law Enforcement

Even these reforms will not be sufficient unless there is effective, just, and unbiased policing. As suggested previously, for most South Africans, the "security forces," be they the South African Defence Force (SADF), the South African Police (SAP), or the municipal police forces, have been associated with the legacy of apartheid repression. Thus, the conduct of the security forces has done little to inspire the confidence of the people in law enforcement. (Vogelman and Simpson, 1990)

The loss of confidence in the forces of "law and order" makes people more inclined to take the law into their own hands. Informal retribution and revenge replace formal policing and the judicial system with the inevitable consequence of excessive brutality (Ibid.) There have been reports, for example, of Soweto women taking the law into their own hands and killing a man who was alleged to have participated in numerous individual and gang rapes. A primary solution to this phenomenon is the development of a police force and judicial system that inspires confidence of the people rather than alienating them. Channels for conflict resolution through institutional mechanisms need to be opened up rather than closed down. (Ibid.)

Anticrime Programs

Despite the high incidence of crime,³ and generalised violence against women in South Africa, there is no substantial anticrime program as distinct from "an operation" in South Africa. The government doesn't have one, and the African National Congress until August 1990 had not developed any comprehensive policy on the subject either. An anticrime program would require coordination and policymaking between all groups involved in the area of violence, such as the police, the prison department, and the organisations in the industrial, welfare, research, community, and professional domain. As yet there has been no attempt to do this.

Anticrime programs require not only long-term planning but also short-term solutions. A few such solutions have already been alluded to, but others are also worthy of mention. The first is better policing. This requires more and better-trained police. The training of police personnel has significant implications for victims of crime. The police are often seen first after an offence. This makes their intervention central in determining the victim's degree of stress and her potential for recovery (Gottfredson, 1984).

In cases of wife battery, for example, police intervention requires even more specialised skills and training. This is because the police are required to prevent any further violence, deal with the victim, and simultaneously protect themselves from danger. The latter is significant if one considers the statistic given by Ketterman and Kravitz (1978) that 22% of all police fatalities in the United States in the late 1970s occurred while making interventions in domestic violence. While these figures are outdated and no such statistics were available for South Africa, they nevertheless do point to the immense dangers implicit in this type of police work.

A prime difficulty experienced by police in wife battery is when to arrest the offender. Guidelines adopted by the Chicago police may be of use in the South African context. The guidelines were as follows: (a) serious intense conflict exists; (b) weapons are used; there is a history of injury; (d) there has been a previous court appearance; (e) a previous attempt to sever the relationship has been made; (f) a second call to the police has been made;⁴ (g) children or intoxicated persons are involved (Loving and Quirk, 1982). One advantage of such guidelines is that they reduce ambiguity among police personnel about appropriate conduct in such cases (Gottfredson et al., 1984).

The lack of adequate police treatment of victims is a contributing factor to the underreporting of violence against women. Underreporting is significant in increasing the incidence of crime since there is less possibility that offenders will be apprehended. The non-arrest and conviction of offenders heightens their confidence. The result is a tendency for them to repeat their offences. In Vogelman's study (1990), some rapists interviewed admitted to raping over 10 times.

Aid to Victims

One way of encouraging reporting is to make therapeutic assistance available to victims of violent crime. Being a victim of crime has significant short- and long-term effects. Regarding the latter, there is often chronic stress in the form of post-traumatic stress disorder. Some features of this disorder include: re-experiencing the trauma via memories or dreams; sleep disturbance; memory and concentration impairment; and avoidance of activities associated with the event. The treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder demands specialisation, and to this end it is necessary that the various experts within this field come together and share their knowledge.

Women who are victims of violent crime are frequently relegated to the forgotten in the outrage and condemnation that sometimes greets the actions of the offender. In a paper entitled "Psychological Help for Victims of Crime and Violence" by Gottfredson, Reiser, and Tsegaye-Spates (1984), several important recommendations regarding psychological assistance for victims are outlined. These recommendations would apply equally well to women victims. Social support is outlined as one of the important ingredients in any process of recovery. This type of support should be obtainable both within and outside the family. Appropriate social support requires sensitivity, containment, and the non-imposition of judgments regarding the victim's conduct during and after the offence.

Another danger that may occur when mental health professionals intervene is the overpathologising of the victim. This approach tends to negate the victim's capacity to deal with her situation and recover from the traumatic experience (Ibid.).

Material aid to women who have been victimised is glaringly absent in South Africa. The absence of sufficient hospitals and difficulties in obtaining transport to health services that do exist sometimes results in women relying on home-made medical remedies to deal with their wounds. For those who have been severely physically damaged, occupational rehabilitation is almost non-existent.

The necessity of adequate medical treatment becomes more urgent in relation to women victims because of the consequent physical sequelae. Pregnancy and venereal disease are all too common after rape. The 1980s have introduced a new danger for rape victims, i.e., Auto-Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The absence of medical examinations is not only life endangering to the victim but also to her potential sexual partners. The high risk of AIDS necessitates the consideration of certain precautions, for instance, ensuring access to a condom in the hope that the victim can persuade the rapist to wear one before he proceeds to rape her.⁵

Another area of deficiency is financial compensation for women who are victims of police violence. Women who allege to have been beaten or raped by the police often do not pursue these allegations not only because they believe the court will be unsympathetic but also because they are unfamiliar with legal procedures or are unable to afford the high cost of legal fees. Jackie Cock (1989), in her study on spinal-cord injuries in Soweto, gives a good example of this. She writes of a 23-year-old black woman who was shot by the police. The woman said of the incident: "It happened in the railway station. The police was chasing a thief and I was hit by a stray bullet." According to Cock (Ibid.: 1148), this woman sustained a complete T8-level lesion. A doctor at Baragwanath Hospital contacted a lawyer who obtained a compensation payment.

Rehabilitation for Offenders

What of the offenders? As has been suggested, most will not be arrested or convicted for their offence. However, if imprisoned, they are likely to leave prison with similar attitudes toward women as when they entered. This is because of absent or ineffectual prison rehabilitation. According to estimates of NICRO, 72% of our prisoners have been in jail before, compared to the 11% in the Netherlands (Star, July 25, 1990). Certainly, with regard to rape, recidivism is rampant.

In fact, such is the nature of our prisons that it may even be contributing to the incidence of crime. We are desperate for prison reform in South Africa, and again, this is a matter that the major political actors have not placed high on the political agenda. It will probably have to take a massive explosion of violence in the prisons, as has occurred in England recently, for serious attention to be given to the problem.

Conclusion

Violence against women is not instinctual. It is the result of inequalities in social structures and relationships in South African society. Unequal gender relationships are maintained by social restrictions on women and institutional sanctions in South African society that serve to protect those who perpetrate violence against women. As long as societal political and economic inequality, sexism, and a culture of violence remain, women will continue to be extremely vulnerable to attack. There is, however, no solution that will stop all violence against women. However, there are solutions that can make a substantial contribution to reducing the problem. The cycle of violence can be broken by making a concerted effort to create not only a non-sexist society, but also one that is free of racism and exploitation.

Notes:

¹ "What is represented in ideology is not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (Althusser, 1971: 165).

² "It is gauged that more than seven million people are not "formally employed." The Development Bank estimates that 41.5% of the potential work force has been without formal employment since 1989 (*Weekly Mail*, September 14-20, 1990).

³ The incidence of murder increased 10.5% from 1988 to 1989 (*Star*, July 12, 1990). In 1989, an average of 29 murders per day occurred (*Sunday Star*, October 1, 1989). By the middle of 1990, the figure had increased to 32 per day (*Star*, May 12, 1990).

⁴ Since most of the population lacks access to a telephone in their homes, this would only apply to a specific population grouping.

⁵ In a recent rape incident in Cape Town, a rape victim managed to persuade the rapist to wear a condom before the rape.

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