

## **South African Criminologists views on specific aspects of women abuse**

### **1. Introduction**

“The police rescued a sick woman who was allegedly locked up in a shack without food for three weeks by her husband” (a South African Weekly paper Sunday Times: City Metro, 3/09/2000). In the daily paper, The Star (15/07/2002) it was reported that an “ex-husband has beaten, throttled and locked his ex-wife and their daughter in the house before setting the house on fire”.

Women abuse is a global problem that cannot be explained by one factor but by many. There are various views with regard to women abuse. For example, psychological views, sociological views, theological views, anthropological views, criminological views and so on. Even though there are different views on specific aspects of women abuse, this paper will therefore address the views of South African criminologists on specific aspects of women abuse. The specific aspects that will be presented are socialisation process, culture and tradition, female culture, patriarchy and lack of resources.

### **2. Definition of key concepts**

In this discussion women abuse will refer to any violence committed against any woman in the form of assault, rape, emotional torture, murder and deprivation of rights.

Criminologists in this discussion will refer to all lecturers from South African universities in the fields of Criminology, Police Science Penology and Administration to Criminal Justice.

### **3. Research group**

South Africa has 21 tertiary institutions that offer higher education, 10 of these offers Criminology as a course. South African universities were utilised for empirical survey. Departments of Criminology, which encompasses disciplines such as Criminology, Police Science, Penology and Administration to Criminal Justice, were targeted. The questionnaire addressed four specific aspects (based on the literature

review) namely socialisation process, culture and tradition, female culture and patriarchy. All of the four aspects include lack of resources for abused women.

Questionnaires were distributed by making use of e-mail to ten universities that offer studies and research in these fields. Of the ten universities only three responded and other questionnaires were not returned. It must therefore be borne in mind that the results that are presented here are not representative of the wider targeted research group. As a result the views that will be presented in this discussion should not be taken as a true reflection of all criminologists in South African universities but partly of a number of individuals who responded to the distributed questionnaires. The findings with regard to the paper will be based on frequencies and pie charts

#### **4. Findings and/or Discussion**

The findings will firstly address the biographical data of the respondents. The biographical data comprised of gender, age, institution, field of study and the number of years in a specific field.

Nine males (64.3%) and five females responded (35.7%) to the distributed questionnaire. One respondent was between the ages of 26-30. Three were between the ages of 31-40. Two were between the ages of 41-50 and eight between the ages of 51-60. As previously mentioned, the questionnaires were sent to ten universities only three responded. Ten (71.4%) of the respondents were from the University of South Africa (a distance learning institution); three (21.4%) were from the University of the North (a historically black institution) and one (7.1%) from the University of Pretoria (a previously Afrikaans only institution). In the field of specialisation nine (64.3%) respondents are in Criminology. One (7.1%) is from Police Science and four (28.6%) are from Penology.

The number of years in the field of specialisation reflected that four (7.1%) of the respondents have been in these various fields between 1-15 years compared to ten (71.4%) who have been in these various fields for 16 years and over. It should be interesting to note that most respondents were men and that the questionnaires were not distributed to subjects of this discussion.

#### **4.1 Socialisation process**

The general notion is that socialisation process seems to be basically the same in all race groups. According to Russell (1984:162) women are deprived of opportunities to develop own strength, taught not to fight and discouraged throughout life from learning how to fight. What follows here is a presentation of perceptions/views on the state of violence against women in South Africa.

The findings of the research conducted revealed that seven (50.0%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that the socialisation process between men and women is the same in all race groups. Six (42.9%) of the fourteen respondents disagreed with the fact that women are taught to be respectful towards men. Eight (61.5%) agreed that women are from childhood discouraged to fight throughout life. Men use power and aggression to get what they want. For example, the use of aggression towards women is regarded as a proof of strength and manhood. Eight (58,3%) and seven (53.8%) agreed with the fact that men use aggression and power towards women to get what they want.

Russell (1984:119) argued that men are from childhood socialised to separate sexual desire from caring, respecting, liking and loving. Men also regard women as sexual objects. It was therefore found that five (38.5%) of the respondents agreed with this argument but six (46.2%) strongly disagreed with the latter.

According to Box (1979:148) femininity involves the general notion that women are passive, dependent, submissive and mindless. The dependence is characterised by economy and protection. On this matter, six (46.2%) of the respondents agreed on the general notion, eight (61.5%) agreed on the emotional dependence and seven (58.3%) agreed on the economic dependence.

Stacey (1993:16) asserted that social conditioning plays a significant role in the reproduction of women abuse. That is the subordination is learned through familial relations, media representations of masculinity or at school through books. The findings revealed that eight (61.5%) of the respondents agreed that family relations play an important role in reproducing women abuse. Ten (76.9%) agreed that media

representations are to blame for women abuse and lastly, six (46.2%) of the respondents supported the idea that the school is also responsible for the reproduction of women abuse. The socialisation process cannot be solely regarded as a contributory factor. Culture and tradition also play an essential role in the abuse of women.

#### **4.2 Culture and tradition**

It is unfortunate that culture and tradition cannot be studied in separation from the socialisation process. There are certain cultures that do not allow women to talk back at their husbands. For example in the African culture as Coward (1997:August 5) stated that one man once commented that “I am educated but beat my wife if she makes a mistake and that is a good way of running and maintaining the house well”. It was mentioned that this man was living in Europe and had to go back to his country of origin, because European legislature deprived him the opportunity to treat his wife as he wished or wanted.

Although there were no specific questions asked on various cultural views, it is still confirmed that women are regarded as passive, dependent (financially/economically and emotionally) and submissive. In the research conducted nine (69,2%) respondents supported that women are in some cultures not allowed to talk back to men. Five (46,2%) of the respondents agreed that for good house maintenance a man should beat his partner whereas five (46.2%) disagreed with this fact.

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979:24) and Box (1983:45) certain cultural prescriptions promote aggressiveness, male dominance, female subordination, strength, power, protection and independence. That is, for one to be regarded as a man one has to use power and force to get what they want and to strive for others (women). Based on the above literature seven (53.8%) of the respondents supported these cultural prescriptions. Seven (53.8%) also agreed that men have to be competitive and fight to get what they want (46.2%). In addition toughness as well plays an important role in men’s character wherein ten (76.9%) agreed that men are supposed to be tough and not cry over nothing. Ten (76.9%) of the respondents agreed that men still believe they are protectors.

Rape within marriage exists and there are men who still deny that it does. Mahoney and Williams (1998:114) indicated that the tradition fails to recognise wife rape as a problem. Cultural beliefs about men, women and sexuality as well as the societal response to wife rape seem to prevent some men to believe that rape within marriage is possible. This is supported by seven (53,8%) of the respondents who agreed that most men still believe that rape within marriage is not possible. On the basis of protection and care most women still believe that they should adhere to everything men say.

Seven (53.8%) of the respondents agreed with this fact. Six (46.2%) strongly disagreed with the fact that women are not supposed to ask about men's whereabouts. Still on monitoring five (41.7%) of the respondents agreed and five (38.5%) disagreed on accountability of time spent away by women respectively. As a result, the findings support the idea that women are abused in the name of culture and tradition. Women are most of the time blaming themselves for men's ill character.

#### **4.3 Female culture**

Women blame themselves because they are socialised to depend on men for all sorts of things. For instance, women generally believe that if they leave their abusers they will lack economic means for survival. Nevid, Rathus and Greene (1997:540) noted that many abused women believe that if they leave their abusers they would not be able to survive and they will live in poverty. Subsequently they should accept responsibility and blame for any attack against them (Mahoney and Williams 1998:127). The research conducted found that nine (69.2%) of the respondents agreed on fear of leaving their abusers and eight (61,5%) agreed on self-blame and being responsible for the attacks. Acceptance of responsibility and lack of believe in rape within marriage more often than not encourages men to exercise control over women.

#### **4.4 Patriarchal control**

“Only the man can control his own behaviour but a woman has no control over her partner's actions” (A Resource Manual on Women, Gender, Human Rights and the Law, June 1999)

The control that men exercise over women is usually exhibited by physical, sexual, psychological and economical abuse against women. Patriarchal control is based on the idea that men are heads of families and still prevails in most relationships. Radford and Stanko (1996:65) asserted that men use sexual violence to secure and maintain the relations between male dominance and female subordination. These relations are therefore central to the patriarchal social order that still exists in most cultures and societies. In support of this, nine (69,2%) responded positively to the fact that due to socialisation process men still believe that they are heads of families and that women should depend on them for everything.

Russell (1990:3) regarded patriarchy as a form of social disorganisation recognising men as heads of families. On this matter ten (83.3%) of the respondents agreed with this statement.

The socialisation process cannot therefore be regarded as the sole contributory factor to physical, psychological and sexual abuse of women. Instead most men abuse women on the basis of different roles played by men and women. For example, men are still regarded as breadwinners whereas women are still believed to be caretakers and homemakers. Eight (61,5%) agreed on this inequality regarding the division of labour between men and women.

Russell (1990:3) and Edwards (1987:24) stated that women are irrespective of their employment status abused by men. Pagelow (1984:306) argued that external and internal factors too encourage women abuse. Women still remain jack-of-all-trades whilst men still retain power. Women are in most cases being abused due to external factors such as material and physical resources. Six (46.2%) of the respondents agreed on the role external factors play in the abuse of women. Seven (58.3%) agreed on internal factors such as loyalty. In addition subservience also encourages women abuse. For instance, nine (75.0%) of the respondents agreed that by being subservient women end up in abusive relationships.

Self-sacrificing as one of the internal factors plays an important role in the abuse of women. This is supported by seven (58,3%) of the respondents. Women are generally believed to be inferior to men. For example, at school it is generally believed that

males still perform better than females. Six (46,2%) of the respondents agreed with this general belief.

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it should therefore be noted that even though 50% of respondents disagreed that the socialisation process between men and women seem to be the same in all race groups; it should be considered that childhood learning, the use of power and aggression towards women is still prevailing. In addition, economic dependence, protection, passivity, subordination and submissiveness are still promoted in various relationships between men and women.

Culture and tradition are still regarded as important in some cultures hence a great support on certain cultural prescriptions that promote aggression, male dominance and female subordination. Self-blame and acceptance of responsibility is still regarded as a barricade for women to get out of the trap (abuse). Patriarchy on the other hand still encourages men to believe that they are heads of families and as such will act as they wish. On the overall for the fact that academic males responded in large numbers to the empirical survey, therefore shows that men are gradually changing their mindsets with regard to the treatment of women.

## **6. Recommendations**

- a. It is therefore recommended that awareness campaigns and advocacy programmes on women abuse continue with the assistance of professionals and the support of the government.
- b. Women should be encouraged to break the silence.
- c. Women should be educated on violence regularly.
- d. Equality between men and women should be encouraged and addressed at all times. Men and women need to be made aware that each and every person has equal rights.
- e. Women should also be enlightened about the means of reporting the abuse. That is, various resources for abused women should be well known to all societal members. The role of each resource centre (for example, victim empowerment units, shelters, 24 hour phone-in lines, and so on) should be

clearly explicit. Where these resource centres are not available, resources will have to be put in place

- f. Counselling programs for abused women should be made available and should cater for both men and women irrespective of their general background
- g. Men need to therefore change their mindsets and attitudes with regard to culture, tradition, general socialisation processes and/or social conditioning and start treating women as human beings as much as they want to be treated as human beings.
- h. NGO's, Community based organisations, including organised social and cultural groupings should run programmes highlighting issues related to women abuse and respect for women
- i. The school, the community and the church should also play a role in educating members of the society on issues related to women abuse and abuse in general.

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