

# GANG RAPE

## A study in inner-city Johannesburg

Lisa Vetten and Sadiyya Haffejee  
Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation  
lvetten@csvr.org.za

A study of gang rape cases reported to police in inner-city Johannesburg in 1999 – although fairly dated – provides new insights into a disturbing phenomenon. The most striking thing about these rapes is their predatory nature. Typically, groups of men either lie in wait for their victims, or actively drive around looking for someone to abduct. The attacks are also brazen and violent: women are confronted in public spaces, and the use of force increases with the number of perpetrators involved in the rape.

Little is known about rape involving multiple perpetrators in South Africa. This article reports on the results of a quantitative analysis of 162 rapes (both attempted and completed) reported at six police stations in Johannesburg during 1999 and involving two or more perpetrators. It outlines a variety of features associated with such rapes and explores what differences, if any, exist between rapes involving one assailant and those with multiple assailants. Some recommendations aimed at combating gang rape are also made.

### What we know about gang rape in South Africa

Approximately one in 10 sexual assaults reported in the USA involves multiple perpetrators.<sup>1</sup> In comparison, Statistics South Africa's national Victims of Crime survey estimated that 12% of rapes reported in their study involved two or more perpetrators.<sup>2</sup> Another study of 1,401 rapes registered between 1996–1998 at Hillbrow Hospital, Lenasia South Hospital and Chris Hani Baragwaneth Hospital (CHB) found 27% of cases to have involved two or more perpetrators.<sup>3</sup>

Both sets of writers caution against generalising their findings, however. Statistics South Africa notes that not only was their sample size small, but

the study was also designed to be a general survey on crime rather than a study about rape specifically. Swart et al's study required staff at the three health facilities to complete data collection sheets for each rape survivor examined. Reluctance on the part of the staff to do so resulted in the uneven inclusion of cases at the three sites. Both studies, then, may well have underestimated the incidence of gang rape.

The proportion of gang rapes that are not reported to police is also unknown. CIETAfrica's research in the south of Johannesburg found that women were considerably less likely to report gang rape than single perpetrator rape. In their study, only 30% of women who were gang raped reported the attack to the police compared to the approximately 70% of women who reported being raped by one perpetrator.<sup>4</sup>

Information about what motivates men to rape in pairs or groups is no less scanty. Anecdotal evidence suggests gang rape may be used as a form of punishment by the friends or acquaintances of men whose girlfriends are suspected or known to have other partners.<sup>5</sup> Other writers have suggested that it may be used to put 'unattainable' women in their place.<sup>6</sup> In the

Western Cape, participation in gang rape may function as a means of initiating young men into gangs.<sup>7</sup> It has also been alleged that some young women's entry into gang-controlled prostitution follows their rape by gang members.<sup>8</sup>

These examples suggest that rape by multiple perpetrators can be categorised according to how structured the group is, as well as the group's involvement in other criminal activities. The use of gang rape as a form of punishment suggests that some attacks are committed by groups of men who are only loosely or temporarily affiliated with one another and who may engage in no other criminal activities.

The examples from the Western Cape by comparison show how rape may be one of a range of illegal activities that organised criminal gangs engage in.<sup>9</sup> Mokwena's study of the jackrollers also highlights how some gangs may have originally engaged in a range of criminal activities but changed their actions over time in order to focus solely on rape.<sup>10</sup>

A number of writers have suggested that gang rape is closely related to heightened masculinity and masculine aggression.<sup>11</sup> Benedict contends that the motivation for men who rape in groups is somewhat different from that of the man who rapes on his own.<sup>12</sup> She argues that:

Boys gang-rape for each other, in a kind of frenzied machismo, to prove themselves, to show off, to be part of a gang, or at best, out of fear of being ostracised if they don't.<sup>13</sup>

In acting together, the group develops a common sense of masculinity and power, which may reduce their inhibitions as well as diminish individual feelings of responsibility.<sup>14</sup>

### Methodology for the study

This small-scale retrospective study focused on all cases of rape and attempted rape reported by complainants 12 years old or older at six central Johannesburg police stations during 1999. These six stations were Hillbrow, Central Johannesburg, Yeoville, Brixton, Booyens and Jeppe. A total of 591 such cases were identified and data extracted from

police dockets according to a standardised, pre-tested data capture sheet. Of this number, a smaller sub-set of 162 cases involving two or more perpetrators was identified and analysed using the statistical package SPSS. Findings from these 162 cases are presented in this article.

The terms 'multiple' and 'gang' are used interchangeably below. Both terms refer to rapes involving at least two perpetrators. A distinction is also made between rapes committed by men in pairs (strictly speaking, too small a number to constitute a gang) and men in groups – the latter term describing rapes committed by three or more men.

### Findings

In only three of the 591 cases were the number of rapists unknown. Of the remaining 588, just over one in four (28%) of all rapes reported at these six police stations during 1999 involved two or more perpetrators. The majority of gang rape cases involved two perpetrators (56%) and in two cases there were as many as 12 (Figure 1). Of the 162 cases, nine were recorded as attempted rape. Nine cases also involved more than one victim.

#### *Distribution of multiple rapes by police station*

The highest number of multiple rapes was recorded at Hillbrow police station, followed by Johannesburg Central. Of the six stations covered in the study, Yeoville had the least number of recorded gang

Figure 1: Number of perpetrators in cases of gang rape, n=162

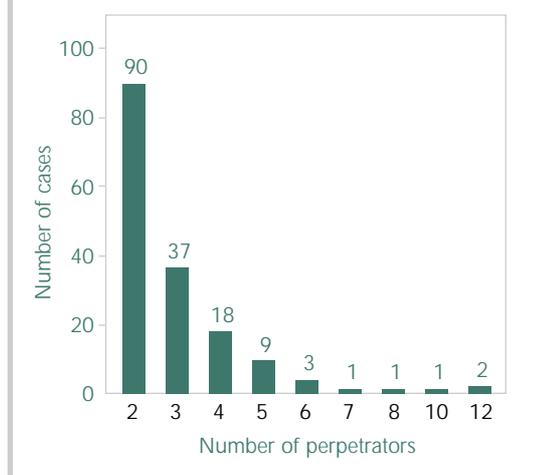


Table 1: Single and multiple rapes, by police station

| Station     | Single perpetrator rapes (n=426) |    | Multiple perpetrator rapes (n=162) |    | Total |
|-------------|----------------------------------|----|------------------------------------|----|-------|
|             | N                                | %  | N                                  | %  |       |
| Hillbrow    | 138                              | 70 | 59                                 | 30 | 197   |
| JHB Central | 99                               | 74 | 35                                 | 26 | 134   |
| Booyens     | 57                               | 70 | 25                                 | 30 | 82    |
| Jeppe       | 57                               | 84 | 11                                 | 16 | 68    |
| Brixton     | 28                               | 70 | 12                                 | 30 | 40    |
| Yeoville    | 25                               | 74 | 9                                  | 26 | 34    |
| Unknown     | 22                               | 67 | 11                                 | 33 | 33    |

rapes (Table 1). Generally the ratio of single to multiple perpetrator rapes in each police station area was the same as that for the sample as a whole (28% gang rapes, and 72% single perpetrator rapes). The one exception was Jeppe, where only 16% of all recorded rapes were committed by multiple perpetrators.

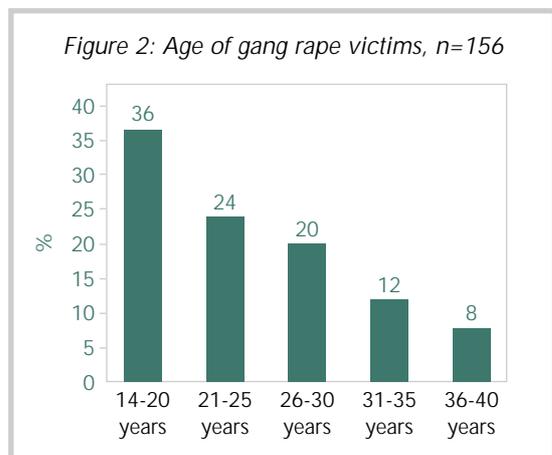
#### Age of victims

Nearly six in 10 of the multiple perpetrator rape victims were younger than 26 years (Figure 2). The youngest victim was 14 and the oldest was 60. The average age of victims was 25.

#### Victim-perpetrator relationships

Of the rapes committed by multiple perpetrators, only one in 10 involved perpetrators known to the victim. An ex-boyfriend was included among the perpetrators in one case, while in a further 8% of

Figure 2: Age of gang rape victims, n=156



cases at least one of the perpetrators was known by sight and/or was an acquaintance.

These figures stand in contrast to the figures for single perpetrator rapes, where just short of 50% of assailants were known either intimately by their victims (as either current or former partners) or by sight.

#### When rapes were most likely to occur

The greatest proportion of incidents was reported in May (12%) and October (12%), followed closely by December (11%). Incidents of multiple rape peaked during the summer months, with 37% of the total number of incidents reported during this period. Fewer cases were reported during the winter months of June, July and August – only 22% of the total number of rapes involving multiple perpetrators.

Approximately 41% of rapes involving multiple perpetrators occurred over the weekend.

Gang rape was most likely to happen at night, particularly between 7–9pm. Approximately 33% of the rapes were committed during this period. The time of 5% of the rapes was unknown.

#### Describing the rape

This section describes how multiple rapes were committed and highlights differences between single perpetrator rapes and those committed by pairs or groups of rapists.

The greatest proportion of women (41%) who were gang raped were walking at the time of the attack. A further 11% were socialising, and 10% were waiting at a transport node. In 4% of cases the victim was sleeping, and in a further 3% the victim was at home when she was attacked.

By contrast, only 21% of victims of single perpetrator rape were walking prior to being raped; 15% were socialising; 11% were sleeping; and 17% were engaged in routine household activities in their homes. The higher percentages of single perpetrator rape victims who were sleeping and at home at the time of the attack makes sense, given that many of these rapists know their victims either intimately or by sight.

Most women, regardless of the type of rape, were not raped where they first encountered their rapist(s). In nearly two-thirds of all types of rapes, victims were taken to another spot and then raped there. In one rape involving a pair of men, the victim was abducted from Durban in KwaZulu-Natal and brought to Johannesburg, where she was kept captive for a few days.

In 20% of gang rape cases the perpetrators deceived the woman into voluntarily accompanying them to the site of the rape by pretending to know a friend or family member, or offering the victim employment or transport. More frequently, the rapists simply descended upon or surrounded the woman prior to abducting and/or raping her.

#### *Location of the rapes*

Significant differences between single perpetrator rapes and multiple perpetrator rapes emerged in the analysis of where the rapes took place. The greatest proportion of gang rapes occurred in public spaces, with 31% taking place in open spaces like parks, stretches of veld and parking areas. Notably, of the 18 gang rapes that took place in parks, 11 of these were situated within a two-kilometre radius of one another within Hillbrow, Joubert Park, Berea and Yeoville.

Approximately 36% of multiple rapes occurred in a 'private' space, such as a residence or, less commonly, a workplace. In contrast, 66% of the single perpetrator rapes occurred in a private place. Further, 16% of women raped by single perpetrators were attacked in their homes as opposed to 7% of women assaulted by multiple rapists. With only one exception, victims attacked in their homes by multiple perpetrators were also the victims of housebreaking.

#### *What happened during the rapes*

In 15% of gang rape cases, the rape was preceded by one of the perpetrators demanding sex from the victim. The rape followed her refusal. The rape of a sex worker who went to a room for business with one client and was then confronted by other suspects who demanded sex, was included in this category. In a further 7% of gang rape cases, the incident occurred in the context of another crime such as housebreaking or robbery.

Scenario: Victim was walking home when seven suspects grabbed her and forced her to a park where they raped her.

Scenario: Victim was walking when a car in which three suspects were travelling stopped alongside her, forced her into the car at gun-point, then took her to the veld where they raped her.

These two scenarios were most typical of gang rape, with the use of force increasing with the number of perpetrators involved in the rape. Of the rapes involving one perpetrator, one in two (52%) victims reported the use of force. Of the 90 cases involving two perpetrators, 72% reported the use of force, while of the 72 cases involving three or more perpetrators, 83% reported the use of force.

In 40% of gang rape cases the perpetrators were armed, usually with either guns (21%) or knives (17%). While the weapon was primarily used to threaten the victim, in 14% of cases it was used both to threaten and hurt the victim. The study found that the greater the number of rapists involved, the greater the likelihood that at least one of the assailants was armed.

Approximately one in four of the lone perpetrators were armed, compared to one in three of the rapist pairs and one in two of the rapist groups. The use of guns was also most likely in cases involving group rapists. Fourteen percent of both the lone and pair rapists were armed with guns, compared to 25% of the group rapists.

The majority of victims (59%) were dragged, pushed or shoved to the site of the rape, with a further 29% taken by car. Use of cars was most common in cases involving three or more perpetrators. In 40% of such cases the victim was abducted by car, as opposed to 20% of cases involving two perpetrators, and 19% of cases involving one perpetrator.

In 6% of gang rapes not all perpetrators raped the victim, although they participated in abducting or tricking her. They either appeared to play the role of

observer during the rape or, less frequently, left once the rape had begun. Another variation on this scenario was the 3% of cases that initially involved only one or two perpetrators who were then subsequently joined by other men, as this extract from a police docket illustrates:

Victim was walking home from her boyfriend's workplace. Two males followed her and forced her to accompany them to a building where lots of people were staying. Both perpetrators raped her once. One perpetrator raped her a second time. Thereafter she was again raped by the initial two perpetrators and once by six perpetrators.

#### *Boyfriends and gang rape*

In 7% of the gang rape cases the victim's boyfriend was present at some point during the attack. In five of these cases he ran away at the outset, and in a sixth was tied up and left in another room while the rape took place. In another four cases he was made a bystander to the rape.

The facts of the remaining four cases suggest that the boyfriend may have been complicit with the rape in some way. For example, in one such case, the victim was with her boyfriend when the two suspects began arguing with her, before forcing her into a room where they raped her. The boyfriend took no steps to intervene on her behalf. In another case, involving an ex-boyfriend this time, the victim was assaulted and raped by both him and two of his friends at her home.

Scenario: Victim got into a taxi, and driver told her he needed to drop off another passenger. He then drove to a park where he and the passenger forced her out of the taxi and both raped her.

This scenario described four rapes, all of which involved only two perpetrators – the driver and a male passenger.

Finally, there was also at least one case that appeared to involve a female accomplice. This

'friend' invited the victim to her house and on her arrival, announced to the three rapists that she had brought them someone for the night.

#### *Means used to avoid detection*

Perpetrators in gang rapes rarely attempted to conceal their identities. In only nine cases the victim's eyes were covered; in four cases her clothes were removed or destroyed (though it is unclear whether this was done to avoid detection or to rob the victim); and in seven cases the perpetrators used a condom (thus ensuring that no semen was available to be analysed for DNA evidence). In nine cases the victim was gagged to prevent her from calling for help.

#### *Outcome of the case*

Fourteen of the 162 gang rape cases (9%) went to court. Only one resulted in a conviction, with the others being either withdrawn by the court or resulting in acquittals. A further 10 cases were either withdrawn by the police or by the victim. No perpetrators were ever arrested in the remainder of the cases.

#### **Predatory nature of gang rape**

As so many women were raped while walking, waiting for, or using public transport, the study highlights how gang rape significantly diminishes women's freedom of movement. It also points to the predatory nature of rape committed by men in pairs or groups, with men either lying in wait for the woman unfortunate enough to cross their path, or actively driving about seeking a victim to abduct.

The study revealed that men who raped in pairs or groups were also frequently strangers to their victims, typically attacked their victims in public spaces, and were also most likely to use force and weapons against them. Masculine entitlement also appeared evident in some instances, with some men attacking and raping their victim in response to her saying 'no' to their sexual demands.

Apart from the small number of cases that occurred during incidents of housebreaking, it was difficult to say whether or not the men in this study were part of organised criminal gang structures. While the abduction of women by groups of armed men bore

some resemblance to Mokwena's jackrollers of the late 1980s and early 1990s, it is impossible to say whether or not the particular cases recorded by our study were examples of jackrolling.

### Recommendations

While this study provides some preliminary indication of patterns present in gang rape, further research, particularly in smaller rural and peri-urban areas, is required to confirm and extend our findings. Interviews with perpetrators of gang rape would also increase our understanding of the dynamics underpinning such rapes, and what steps could be taken to prevent them.

The findings also point to the need for the introduction of innovative safety measures to better secure women's freedom of movement. These might include:

- setting up CCTV cameras at public transport nodes, as well as increasing security in these areas – particularly during the early hours of the morning as well as the evening and over weekends;
- increasing security and lighting in parks at night and over weekends; and
- carrying out targeted police patrolling, particularly at night and over weekends, in areas surrounding public transport nodes that women commonly use on their way to and from home.

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