The Epidemiology of Female and Child Rape Homicides in South Africa

Presented at
SVRI Forum 2011, 10–13 October 2011

Investigators: Shanaaz Mathews, Naeema Abrahams, Rachel Jewkes and Lorna Martin

South African Medical Research Council
BUILDING A HEALTHY NATION THROUGH RESEARCH
Background

- Rape Homicide combines the most extreme forms of violence against women, rape and murder (Abrahams 2008)

- The 1999 MRC Female Homicide study found that South Africa has a rape homicide rate which exceeds the US female homicide rate

- Child Rape Homicide has received very little attention, with limited data on this problem globally

- Anecdotal evidence from newspaper reports in SA suggests that this is an emerging problem
Aim

• To describe the epidemiology of female rape homicides and compare this to 1999
• To describe the epidemiology of child rape homicides
Methodology

- This study was designed as a follow-up to the 1999 Female Homicide study
- Mortuary based Study
- Data was collected from a nationally representative sample of mortuaries, so that the findings would be generalisable nationally
- Mortuaries were stratified based on size:
  - Large > 1500 bodies per annum
  - Medium 500 -1500 bodies per annum
  - Small < 500 bodies per annum
- Sample of mortuaries were drawn taking into account this stratification
- Sample - 38 mortuaries, spread over all provinces
METHODOLOGY cont…

- All child* and female homicides were identified via death registers at sampled mortuaries
- If we were uncertain whether a case was a homicide, it was included and verified with police information and pathologist report
- Cause of death and sexual assault data was extracted from post-mortem reports
- Police case numbers were the crucial link between mortuary and SAPS
- Police data was collected to obtain victim-perpetrator relationship, circumstances of the murder, legal outcomes,
- Where the IO was not available, information was obtained from the commanding officer or a record review

*Child – female and male child ≤17
What did we find?
Adult Suspected Rape Homicide

- Rape Homicide was suspected in 18.8% of Female murders compared to 16.3% of female murders for 1999 \( (p=0.01) \)
- Estimate of 444 cases of suspected rape homicides for 2009
- Decrease of 20.9% in the number of rape homicides for 2009 compared to 1999
- We expected a decrease in rape homicide as overall homicide has decreased in SA (Altbeker 2008).
- Rape homicide rate of 2.48 /100 000 women 14+ yrs for 2009 compared to a rate of 3.65/ 100 000 women 14+ yrs for 1999
- US has an overall female homicide rate of 3.2/100 000 (Hemenway 2002).
Child Suspected Rape Homicide

- Child rape homicide was suspected in 11.3% of Child Murders

- Estimate of 105 suspected child rape homicides for 2009

- 19.1% of the total suspected rape homicides was that of children
Suspected Adult Rape Homicide Race Distribution

- African: 11.09
- Coloured: 16.91
- White: 31.5
- Indian: 10.08

Comparison: 2009 vs 1999
Suspected Child Rape Homicide Race Distribution

- African: 2.92
- Coloured: 3.44
- White: 1.7
- Indian: 0
- All Children: 2.75
Suspected Adult Rape Homicide Age Distribution

- **14-29**: 14.03
- **30-39**: 16.07
- **40-49**: 17.09
- **50+**: 21.15

**Legend**:
- Suspected Rape Homicide 2009
- Suspected Rape Homicide 1999
Suspected Child Rape Homicide Age Distribution

- 0-4: 6.29
- 5-9: 32.1
- 10-14: 19.5
- 15-17: 6.92
Suspected Adult Rape Homicide
Mechanism of Death

- Gunshot: 20.41%
- Stab: 25.51%
- Bluntforce: 6.93%
- Strangled: 7.95%
- Asphyxia: 6.65%
- Multiple Injuries: 3.34%
- Undetermined: 29.14%
Suspected Child Rape Homicide
Mechanism of Death

- Gunshot: 37.94%
- Stab: 11.57%
- Bluntforce: 11.62%
- Strangled: 7.37%
- Asphyxia: 8.84%
- Multiple Injuries: 0%
- Undetermined: 0%
Suspected Rape Homicide and Pregnancy

- 3.97% of adult rape homicide victims were pregnant at the time of their murder compared to 1.7% in 1999

- No children <14 years were pregnant at the time of their murder
CONCLUSIONS

• This study has shown that even though rape homicide has decreased overall, its proportion amongst all female murders has increased over the past 10 years.

• This would suggest that although we see a decline in the overall murder rate rape homicides has not decreased at the same rate.

• SA had just over 100 child rape homicides for 2009 which is a cause for concern, thus 1 child in every 3 days are raped and murdered.

• Younger children are most vulnerable, in particular 5-9 year olds.

• Increasing children’s safety in communities is critical to prevent this form of early mortality.

• Collecting and describing this type of data is critical for us to take action to better protect women and children.