

**The Underreporting of Sexual Violence Against Women in the  
Camdeboo**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the underreporting of sexual violence against women in the Camdeboo. It is based on a survey of 971 women living in the Camdeboo aged fifteen and older. The thesis considers, with reference to relevant secondary literature, methodological issues pertinent to conducting survey research into violence against women. While many survey researchers into violence against women argue that behaviourally specific questions lead to higher rates of disclosure, the survey on which this thesis is based employed complex and open-ended questions to allow respondents to record their own definitions of physical and sexual abuse. 31,2 percent of the women surveyed disclosed having experienced sexual abuse, but 76,7 percent did not report this abuse to the police. The thesis explores the patterns of sexual abuse of women in the Camdeboo and the factors influencing the underreporting of such abuse. While it was possible to establish correlations between certain socio-demographic variables and the underreporting of sexual abuse, such correlations should be treated with caution. The survey found that women were far more likely to report (and disclose) sexual assaults by strangers than by people known to them, particularly intimate partners. Sexual abuse in intimate relations was found to be strongly associated with physical abuse, and women who had experienced sexual and physical abuse within intimate relationships were more likely to report their physical abuse to the police than their sexual abuse. However, the majority of women, particularly poor and economically dependent women, believed that reporting their intimate partner abuse to the police would not end it, and might even place them at greater risk. The evidence suggests that these perceptions are accurate. Under current circumstances, reporting sexual abuse to the police may not be the best help-seeking strategy available to many sexually abused women, and alternative sources of help may be more appropriate. Consideration should be given to directing more resources into such alternatives.

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## **Introduction**

The Camdeboo Victim Empowerment Centre in Graaff-Reinet has a forensic nurse based at the detective Branch of the South African Police Services (SAPS) and a network of trained community-based support workers. It serves the three towns in the Camdeboo municipal district (Graaff-Reinet, Aberdeen and Nieu-Bethesda) and surrounding farms, but is also increasingly serving the towns of Jansenville and Klipplaat. The Centre offers a range of services to victims of interpersonal violence, conducts violence awareness programmes, provides victim empowerment training and is piloting work with offenders. The Centre deals almost exclusively with female victims of interpersonal violence, primarily victims of sexual and physical abuse.

The forensic nurse and community-based support workers at the Centre have become increasingly aware of the extent of underreporting of violence against women in the Camdeboo. In a survey carried out in Nieu-Bethesda in 2002, for example, it was found that 69 percent of women who claimed to have been physically or sexually abused had not disclosed their abuse to anyone, let alone the police. The forensic nurse also monitors casualty records at the Midlands Hospital: in 2004 she found 131 cases of women treated for injuries sustained during assaults by intimate partners, none of which were reported to the police. Nor did health workers take any further action in these cases beyond immediate injury treatment. While the Centre's support workers have begun following up such cases, at least one of these women was subsequently killed by her partner.

Underreporting of sexual violence against women is recognised, in South Africa and internationally, as a major concern: researchers and service providers agree that underreporting conceals the real extent of sexual violence against women hidden behind official police statistics which capture only crimes reported to the police. Some have argued, especially with reference to rape, that the rates of reported incidents are high enough to make statistical bickering unnecessary. But, as DeKeseredy and Schwartz note, 'accurate statistics are essential to motivate government agencies to devote more resources to the development of prevention and control strategies' (DeKeseredy and

Schwartz, 1998:1). It is therefore important, for reasons of policy and resource allocation, to establish the prevalence of sexual violence in any particular locality and part of doing so requires establishing the prevalence and nature of underreporting. However, it is necessary to approach estimates of underreporting with caution. Vetten, referring to unsubstantiated estimates of underreporting commonly cited in South Africa during the 1990's, notes that reliable statistics on rape 'are an essential component of any rape prevention strategy...without this information we run the risk of wasting money and time by focusing on the wrong problems, or making ineffective and inappropriate policy or legislative decisions' (Vetten, 2000). As an example, Vetten cites the 1998 CIET Africa Study which found that 80 percent of women raped in the Johannesburg Southern Metropolitan area *did* report the incident to the police, but police refused to accept 93 percent of the charges. 'If this finding is correct,' notes Vetten, 'then the strategy is clearly not one encouraging women to "break the silence"' (Vetten, *ibid*).

In 2004 President Thabo Mbeki attacked Charlene Smith for claiming that South Africa had the highest rates of rape in the world. Smith apparently based her claim on the unsubstantiated figures noted above (one of which, claiming that only one in thirty six rapes are reported to the police, emanated from the South African Police Services (SAPS) themselves). Mbeki accused Smith of racism and said the police were succeeding in reducing rape. There is no reliable evidence to support the claims of either Mbeki or Smith, but, as Vetten said, 'it is inexcusable that we are still guessing about the incidence of rape in South Africa' (Vetten, 2005).

Police responses to South Africa's fluctuating annual reported rape statistics indicate the futility (and politics) of unsubstantiated guesswork. In 2001 the SAPS Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) stated that the increase in reported rape in South Africa was 'believed' to be due to 'a higher level of reporting...because of (a) special awareness campaigns and (b) the establishment of specialized units and individuals at station level to deal with rape cases' (CIAC: 12). No credible explanation has been advanced for subsequent fluctuations in annual reported rape statistics (and the specialized units have since been disbanded).

The release of the SAPS crime statistics in September of 2005 generated similar guesswork. While violent crime generally showed a decrease, violence against women showed an increase. Rape during 2004/05 rose by four percent and indecent assault by eight percent. Police analyst Chris de Kock suggested that these increases could be partially attributed to the fact that reporting levels of these crimes were higher. 'This is largely reflected by a greater confidence in the police service from members of the public,' said de Kock (BuaNews, 23/09/2005). Safety and Security Minister Charles Ngqakula said that 'as the reporting of both rape and indecent assault improves, the statistics are going to indicate a rise and not a decline in that category of crime.' Ngqakula attributed the allegedly increased reporting levels in part to the 16 Days of No Violence Against Women and Child Abuse campaign waged by government and NGOs. No mention was made, this time round, of the success or otherwise of specialized units and individuals in reducing the incidence of rape and indecent assault.

As Vetten noted at the time, 'last year, when the rape statistics went down, this was offered as proof of the police's success in preventing rape. This year, when the statistics went up, the increase was explained as proof of greater public confidence in the police, thus encouraging women to report the crime' (Vetten, 2005). The truth is that no-one knows whether rates of sexual assault and the underreporting of sexual assault to the SAPS are going up, down or remaining static. This matters, because accurate statistics are needed to evaluate policies and programmes designed to reduce sexual violence against women and to offer effective support to those who become victims of such abuse.

The most recent SAPS crime statistics reveal that 2 309 (or 4.2 percent) fewer women reported being raped to the police during 2006/07 than during 2005/06. However, out of the 1 113 police stations providing crime statistics in South Africa during 2006/07, the number of reported rapes went up at 507 stations, down at 540, and remained the same at 66. In other words, the number of reported rapes went down at slightly fewer than half the police stations in South Africa. The biggest declines in reported rapes were in the Mthatha policing area which recorded 1 501 (49.1 percent) fewer rapes in 2006/07 than in 2005/06. The situation in Mthatha emphasizes the need to take account of longer term

tendencies in the rape statistics, and not simply to compare year-on-year figures. Between 2001/02 and 2004/05, the average number of rapes reported annually to the Mthatha station was 161. In 2005/06 the number shot up to 601, 273 percent higher than the average for the previous three years. In 2006/07 the number dropped back to 187, closer to but still slightly higher than the pre-2005/06 spike. What explains this spike? And what does it tell us about the incidence and reporting of rape in Mthatha before, during and after 2005/06? It was subsequently revealed that the 2005/06 and 2006/07 SAPS rape statistics were contaminated by “mistakes” in data capture in the Mthatha area. This has called into question the accuracy of the national SAPS rape statistics for at least the past two years.

Quite how much the official statistics underestimate the true incidence of rape in South Africa remains open to debate, however, and the best way to move the debate forward would be to conduct a national survey on rape and rape (under)reporting in the country. Although a national survey would provide better answers to some of the critical questions about rape and rape reporting in South Africa, national statistics are aggregates which conceal what is happening at individual precincts throughout the country. Thus it is also necessary to conduct local, community-based research into rape reporting tendencies. In the Camdeboo, for example, a lack of understanding of underreporting means that we do not really know the true nature and extent of violence against women, or how effective interventions in the area of gender violence are. For this reason, research into underreporting will have wide-reaching implications for the design and implementation of gender violence interventions in the Camdeboo, beyond attempting to meet the needs of those who currently suffer their abuse in silence.

Some, including Vogelmann and Eagle, suggest that underreporting is ‘significant in increasing the incidence of crime since there is less possibility that offenders will be apprehended’ (Vogelmann and Eagle 1991: 223). Lievore argues similarly that ‘underreporting of sexual assault to police impacts negatively on the potential of the criminal justice system to apprehend, convict, sentence and treat sex offenders’ (Lievore, 2003: 25). Clearly, the criminal justice system is unlikely to apprehend, convict and

sentence an offender whose (alleged) crime has not been reported to it, but the argument that underreporting increases the incidence of sexual violence against women is not convincing, at least in the South African context. With regard to rape, for example, fewer than ten percent of cases reported to the police lead to conviction and sentencing. Hirschowitz et al estimate that 19.8 percent of reported rapes are withdrawn before reaching court: ‘this usually happens in those cases where the victim is actually known to the offender’ (Hirschowitz et al: 22). They further estimate that 45.6 percent of cases are withdrawn after being referred to court. CIAC noted in 2001 that 40 percent of rape cases were withdrawn ‘at the request of the victim...after the parties involved had reconciled or sorted the matter out amongst themselves’ (CIAC: 15). CIAC made no attempt to discuss what such “reconciliation” and “sorting matters out” entailed.

There are a number of reasons why the criminal justice system secures such low rates of conviction in cases of rape. Lack of skills and capacity in the medico-legal examination of rape victims is one major reason. Statistically, reporting rape is highly unlikely to lead to conviction and sentencing of the perpetrator, and there is no evidence to suggest that reporting rape decreases incidence of the crime. The most common form of rape in South Africa is intimate partner rape, and it is precisely intimate partner rape that the criminal justice system is least likely to prosecute successfully.

Many women who experience physical and sexual violence at the hands of intimate partners resort to obtaining a protection order under the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act (Act 116 of 1998). This, in theory, offers women a simpler and more effective means of preventing further sexual victimization than laying a charge of rape or indecent assault against their partners. But, as Parenzee et al note, ‘while complainants may sit with a protection order, they are not protected from violence’ because ‘the new legislation has not – perhaps because it cannot – changed the reality that a protection order may make a complainant more vulnerable to further violence’ (Parenzee et al: 107 - 111).

Even when the criminal justice system manages to secure conviction and sentencing of perpetrators of sexual violence against women, there remains the problem of recidivism. Internationally, programmes aimed at the rehabilitation of sexual violence against women offenders have met with, at best, mixed success. There are few such programmes in South Africa, and the country's prisons are not noted for their success in rehabilitating perpetrators of sexual violence against women. Hence, recidivism rates remain high (although there is little research in this area in South Africa), and most service providers – and many women - have had unhappy experiences with recidivists. As one victim of multiple physical and sexual abuses in the Camdeboo put it:

*The police were very helpful, but when my husband comes out of jail he is worse than before.*

The criminal justice system is severely limited in its ability to reduce violence against women in South Africa. Given the current nature of South African society, a woman reporting her abuse to the criminal justice system may well increase her risk of violence, and there is no evidence to suggest that increased reporting reduces violence against women. Contrary to the claim that underreporting significantly increases violence against women, it may reduce it.

Further, underreporting cannot be viewed simply as a criminal justice problem. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the already overburdened criminal justice system would cope if all those women who experienced sexual violence did report it. This is not to suggest that attempts to improve the functioning of the criminal justice system are futile. A better resourced and functioning criminal justice system obtaining improved conviction rates of sexual offenders may well act as a deterrent to sexual abuse in the longer term. But the criminal justice system will not achieve these goals without substantial interventions from other social agents. The preamble to the amended Sexual Offences Bill of 2006 states that 'the prevalence of the commission of sexual offences in our society is primarily a social phenomenon, which is reflective of deep-seated, systemic dysfunctionality in our society', and notes further that services to victims of sexual violence, 'in too many instances', fail to provide 'adequate and effective protection to the victims of sexual

offences...often exacerbating their plight'. It is not just the criminal justice system which is failing victims of sexual violence, but the entire range of formal government and non-government agencies incorporated into the Victim Empowerment Programme. This is in no way to denigrate the efforts of individual service providers, although many would be the first to acknowledge that not all service providers are performing adequately and that there is a need for improved, better resourced and more efficient services. But it is to suggest that under current South African circumstances, many women will choose not to report their sexual abuse to these services and that they may well have good reasons for this choice. As Fugate et al remark, 'women's assessments that certain formal interventions would not be useful may be accurate and should be respected by those within the various helping systems' (Fugate et al: 307).

In this research I have attempted to estimate how many women in the Camdeboo do not report their sexual abuse to the police, and why they do not. In Chapter One I consider some important methodological issues in researching violence against women, and discuss the methods employed in this research. I suggest that quantitative and qualitative methods are complementary and that both are needed when researching violence against women. I also suggest that while many survey researchers seek, for reasons of comparability, to develop objective measures of violence against women, it is necessary to bear in mind women's own perceptions of their sexual abuse. Further, while many researchers argue that "objective" behaviourally specific questions elicit higher rates of disclosure of sexual abuse in surveys, I suggest that "subjective" complex questions need not necessarily lead to lower rates of disclosure.

In Chapter Two I outline the extent and nature of the sexual abuse of women in the Camdeboo as revealed in the survey. I examine this sexual abuse, firstly, within its socio-economic context, with reference, secondly, to the relational distance between the victim and her abuser(s) and, thirdly, in terms of the overlap between sexual and physical abuse, especially within intimate relationships. Nearly three quarters of the reported sexual abuse took place within the context of intimate and frequently physically violent relationships, and this clearly impacted on underreporting. Poor and economically

dependent women were especially liable to experience multiple intimate partner abuse, and this also impacted upon underreporting.

In Chapter Three I examine the factors contributing to the underreporting of the sexual abuse of women in the Camdeboo. The strongest correlation revealed by the survey was between relational distance and underreporting: 80 percent of women sexually abused by a stranger reported the abuse to the police, while only 12 percent reported sexual abuse by an intimate partner. While it is possible to interpret this pattern of underreporting in terms of rape myths and/or economic dependence, I argue that women's perceptions of the police also need to be considered as an important contributing factor to underreporting. Many women believe that reporting their sexual abuse to the police will not end their intimate partner abuse, and may even place them at greater risk. Such beliefs should not be dismissed, nor ignored by calling on all sexually abused women to report their abuse to the police. For many women, reporting their sexual abuse to the police is not necessarily their best help-seeking strategy, and it is necessary for service providers to consider avenues of assistance other than the criminal justice option for victims of sexual abuse.

## **Chapter One. Methodology and Methods of Research**

Feminists have played, and continue to play, a leading role in researching violence against women. Certainly, feminists differ amongst themselves over many aspects of research methodology and methods: Fonow and Cook argue that the spectrum of methodological positions among feminists is a 'healthy sign of the vitality of feminist studies' (Fonow and Cook: 2213. They list thirty seven different research methods employed by feminist researchers). For Fonow and Cook, feminist methodology involves the 'description, explanation and justification of techniques used in feminist research', but they note that while there is an 'overarching concept of feminist methodology in its epistemological assumptions', this becomes, in research practice, 'differentially articulated in different disciplines' (see Fonow and Cook: 2213). In particular, they argue, 'some features of feminist methodology are specific to the discipline in which it is practiced, while other features are more general and apply across fields' (Fonow and Cook: 2213 – 2214). This point is important, because research into violence against women is increasingly undertaken by researchers from a variety of disciplines and employing disciplinary-specific concepts and methods. While this multi-disciplinary concern with violence against women can strengthen and enrich research in the area, it can also be a source of confusion and (sometimes confused) debate.

### **1. Researching Violence Against Women: Quantitative and Qualitative Methods**

Rasool et al suggest that research into violence against women in South Africa can be broadly grouped into two types of approaches: those using quantitative methods which draw on a range of statistical sources including surveys and government and non-government records (or service-based data), and those using qualitative methods such as case histories, in-depth interviews, participant observation and focus groups (see Rasool et al: 8). They argue that the 'more common sources of information' on violence against women in South Africa are qualitative, and that these are 'often the preferred method of researching violence against women' (ibid: 8). 'Researchers in the sector', they state, 'are

of the view that violence against women is about the experience of the survivor – something which quantitative surveys are unable to capture’ (ibid: 8).

But while Rasool et al are right to point out that feminist researchers question the objectivity of statistical research claimed by some, this does not mean that feminist researchers must necessarily reject quantitative methods in researching violence against women. In the first place, feminist (and other) researchers question the notion of objectivity itself, and not just in its quantitative research manifestations. Not all quantitative research is premised upon positivist notions of objectivity, nor are such notions necessarily confined to quantitative methodologies.

Secondly, it is not the case that all feminist researchers reject quantitative methods. On the contrary, feminist researchers have put considerable effort over the past decade into developing quantitative research methods into violence against women. While Mooney notes that radical feminists especially have tended towards a preference for qualitative methods because they are ‘more likely to capture the reality of women’s experiences’ (Mooney: 101) and Gelsthorpe adds that some feminists believe that quantitative methods are ‘inconsistent with feminist values, have an objective appearance and, therefore, have no place in feminist methodologies’ (Gelsthorpe, quoted in Mooney: 101), many feminists argue that quantitative research has a definite place in feminist methodology (see, for example, Jayaratne in Hammersley, Chapter 10).

In her discussion of the qualitative/quantitative debate in feminism, Letherby warns that qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, may themselves be exploitative and that the ‘generation of data through appealing to sisterhood is a simplistic view of feminist research’ (see Letherby: 85). Kelly points out that the data produced from small-scale studies may not be able to be extrapolated to ‘women in general and/or applied to those women suffering abuse but who have not voiced their experiences’ (see ibid: 86). Jayaratne suggests that it is important to have quantitative data to counter the ‘pervasive and influential quantitative sexist research which has and continues to be generated in the social sciences’, and argues that the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods can

‘help the feminist community in achieving its goals more effectively than the use of either qualitative or quantitative methods alone’ (see Jayaratne in Hammersley: 109).

The point is that quantitative methods, particularly when used in conjunction with qualitative methods, can be made more responsive to the problems involved in producing data on sensitive issues, and Mooney notes that quantitative methods, especially surveys, have come to be more widely accepted amongst feminist researchers. Kelly, for example, writes that ‘certain research questions, important to feminists, can only be answered where relatively large numbers, and a cross-section of the population, participate in the study’ (quoted in Mooney: 101), and Mooney notes that a number of radical feminist surveys in the area of violence conducted in England have been ‘characterized by an extremely sensitive approach’, including referrals to support groups, setting up self-help groups and organising community meetings (see *ibid*: 101). As Gelsthorpe points out, ‘the problem is perhaps not quantification itself but insensitive quantification’ (quoted in *ibid*: 101), a point emphasised by Fonow and Cook, who argue that amongst feminist quantitative researchers there is an ‘emphasis on quantification that is sensitive to women’s experience’ (Fonow and Cook: 2227).

I believe that there are good reasons for employing quantitative methods in researching violence against women. As DeKeseredy and Schwartz note, those who call for continued quantitative research do so largely because ‘accurate statistics are essential to motivate government agencies to devote more resources to the development of prevention and control strategies’ (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998:1). While they agree that statistics alone are not enough to achieve this end, feminists Bart, Miller, Moran and Stanko have pointed out that ‘the principal questions that organize policy efforts are ultimately quantitative – how many are there, who are they, where are they, how bad are the consequences, how much will it cost?’ (Bart, Miller, Moran and Stanko in *ibid*: 1). Fonow and Cook argue that feminists have sought to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative research methods, recognising that ‘large-scale surveys have the power to alter public opinion in ways that a smaller number of in-depth interviews do not’ (Fonow and Cook: 2226 – 2227). Despite their reservations about using quantitative methods in

researching violence against women, Rasool et al essentially accept these kinds of argument. Their own research ‘attempted to combine aspects of both quantitative and qualitative research methods’ by employing statistical methods to ‘generalise about survivor’s experiences of violence’ and qualitative approaches to ‘understand the issue from the survivor’s perspective’ (Rasool et al: 9).

Internationally, quantitative research and statistics on violence against women have improved greatly over the last decade, and the United Nation’s report, “The World’s Women 2005: Progress in statistics” listed 41 countries in which at least one national survey on violence against women had been conducted and 71 countries in which (non-national) surveys on violence against women had been conducted. Despite this, the United Nations states that there is still ‘an urgent need to strengthen the knowledge base on all forms of violence against women to inform policy and strategy development’ (United Nations, 2006: 56). Further, ‘more and better quality data are needed to guide national policies and programmes and monitor States’ progress in addressing violence’ (ibid: 57). Statistics are needed not just to motivate resource allocation, but also to evaluate changes over time, and for this data needs to be collected on a regular basis. ‘Little information is available to assess the measures taken to combat violence against women and to evaluate their impact’ (ibid: 57). As Hagemann-White writes, quantitative research is ‘valuable for strategies of benchmarking, enabling governments and nongovernmental organizations to assess progress or change’ (Hagemann-White: 741).

If policies and their resultant resource allocations are generally based on the incidence of violence reported to the police, it remains important to establish the prevalence of violence against women in South Africa, and to do so requires establishing the prevalence and nature of underreporting. Only quantitative data can give a reasonably accurate estimate of the prevalence of violence against women, and also of the nature and extent of underreporting. Such information is necessary for policy implementation and evaluation.

Referring to violence against women in South Africa, Rasool et al argue that too many resources and too much energy have been ‘wasted on debates about the extent of the problem’ and state that ‘international literature and victim surveys have illustrated that attempting to quantify the problem is not helpful’ (Rasool et al: 4). Yet they hope that the survey data presented in their study will ‘provide the hard facts sought by policy makers’ (ibid: 4). I would agree that ‘hard facts’ are necessary for policy makers, and it is largely because of this that, contra Rasool et al, international research into violence against women has been motivated by the belief that quantifying the problem is both necessary and helpful. Clearly, quantitative research is vital in aiding programmatic attempts to reduce violence against women. The United Nations asserts that ‘ensuring an adequate knowledge base through data collection is part of every State’s obligation to address violence against women’ (United Nations: 57).

On the other hand, statistics alone cannot provide a compelling understanding of violence against women. Mooney points out that ‘an approach which mainly focuses on the collection of quantitative data cannot fully explore the nature of women’s experiences...one must comprehend the meanings and decisions of the actors involved’ (Mooney, p 133). While comprehending the ‘meanings and decisions’ of the actors involved is not so straightforward, attempts to do so can at least sensitize survey researchers to the issue. Young and Mathews, for example, point out that ‘although questionnaire schedules appear objective, they display the subjective values of the social scientist and are differently interpreted’ by respondents (Young and Mathews, quoted in Mooney, p 124). Further, qualitative methods can play an important role in guiding quantitative, and particularly survey, research. As the United Nations puts it, qualitative methods are ‘particularly appropriate for exploratory research or when an issue is being studied for the first time’ (ibid: 65). Hagemann-White, in her analysis of European research into violence against women, makes essentially the same point when suggesting that quantitative methods can ‘best help chart patterns of dominance and markers of social change, identify risks and resources, when they build on qualitative explorations of the phenomena’ (Hagemann-White, 2001: 755). And DeKeseredy, citing MacLean, argues that ‘surveys that adequately address the complexities of violence against women

in a variety of contexts and social settings should include a “preparatory component of qualitative investigation” (DeKeseredy: 742).

Although my research is based largely on the archetypal quantitative method of survey, the survey questionnaire included many open-ended and inductively coded questions quite different from the “objective” type employed by researchers using the Conflict Tactics Scale or variants of this questionnaire method. Many feminists have rejected the positivist and behaviourist approach of Conflict Tactics Scale research, and I will discuss this issue further in Chapter Two when examining the issue of how objective and subjective definitions of violence against women impact upon research in this field. In addition, the survey itself was conducted within an environment saturated with qualitative information on and experiences with violence against women in the Camdeboo. Underlying the survey were years of intimate experience involving violence against women. Many of the women involved in the Camdeboo Victim Empowerment Centre have themselves been victims of violence, and numerous focus group sessions have been brought to bear on this research. Further, our awareness programme (which reached more than 4 000 people in the Camdeboo) has allowed us to interact personally with many women (and children) who have been survivors/victims of violence. I have also had access to all case records of the Centre’s Forensic Nurse and lay counselors. This research is thus based on an approach which considers both quantitative and qualitative methods to be necessary and complementary in researching violence against women. Although the research draws heavily on the survey conducted in the Camdeboo, it attempts to include a measure of triangulation through drawing, not only on various sources of quantitative data, but on qualitative information too.

## **2. Survey Research into Violence Against Women**

Statistical data on violence against women can be divided into two main types: service-based data and survey-based data. Service-based data includes criminal justice, health and other government and non-government services records. Service-based data cannot provide accurate measures of the prevalence or incidence of violence against women

since it only includes information on women who have reported or disclosed their abuse to the service provider(s). Much has been said about the limitations of service-based data, especially of police statistics (see, for example, United Nations and Garcia-Moreno et al). However, service-based data is essential for, inter-alia, monitoring and evaluation purposes. It may also provide a wealth of information for qualitative researchers and service providers. For example, the Forensic Nurse at the Camdeboo Centre identified numerous incidents of unreported domestic violence amongst hospital records at the Midlands Hospital. Not only did we follow up many of these cases, but the records also provided a rich source of information on non-reporting victims of violence.

Survey-based data can provide more accurate estimates of the prevalence or incidence of violence against women than service-based data, although this will depend on the nature of the survey. There are three main sources of survey-based data on violence against women: generic crime victimisation surveys (aimed at both men and women), surveys of women including modules on violence and dedicated violence against women surveys. Walby and Myhill note that dedicated surveys may focus specifically on domestic violence (often referred to as intimate partner violence), or more broadly on a range of violence against women. Dedicated or “bespoke” surveys tend to yield higher disclosure rates of violence against women than crime victimisation surveys, and are, according to Lievore, the ‘preferred tool for investigating the sexual victimisation of women and usually yield higher estimates of sexual violence than general victimisation surveys’ (Lievore, 2003: 15. See also Walby and Myhill, 505 - 508). Tjaden and Thoennes, however, argue that researching intimate partner violence through generic crime victimisation surveys may not affect disclosure rates as much as previously believed: more significant, they suggest, may be the use of behaviourally specific screening questions (see Tjaden and Thoennes in Holmes and Holmes: 214 – 215). I discuss this issue in section 4 below.

Nevertheless, dedicated surveys remain the best, and possibly even the only, method for estimating the extent of underreporting of violence against women. However, in order to estimate underreporting (and to give an accurate estimate of the extent of violence against

women), such surveys must be population-based: they need to ‘include the experiences of women regardless of whether they have reported the violence to the authorities or not’ (United Nations: 57).

There have been a number of surveys which have produced data on violence against women in South Africa. Some have been national surveys, more have been localised (see Hirschowitz et al: Chapters Two and Four and Dawes et al: 226 - 227). Of the national surveys, the Victims of Crime Survey conducted in 1998 by Statistics South Africa and the South African Demographic and Health survey conducted in 1998 by the Medical Research Council and the Department of Health were not dedicated surveys. The dedicated *Violence against women in three provinces* survey, conducted by the Medical Research Council in 1998, was not a national survey and only sampled women between the ages of 18 and 49. The national survey outlined in Rasool et al interviewed 1 000 South African women, 266 from the metropolitan areas of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (see Bollen et al) and 734 from the rest of the country. Although a dedicated survey, it was not population-based, and, as Rasool et al note, ‘since only women who had experienced abuse were interviewed, the findings cannot be used to indicate the extent of violence against women in the population’ (Rasool et al: 16). The survey sample was also stratified to include women who had experienced domestic and non-domestic abuse. This means that the results of the survey ‘do not indicate the varying risk that women face of becoming victims of domestic and non-domestic violence’ (Rasool et al: 16).

Dawes et al state that the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) is the ‘first national study of domestic violence in which the behaviour of both men and women is measured’ (Dawes et al: 225). However, the SASAS is not a dedicated partner violence survey, and questions relating to partner violence ‘constituted one small module of an extensive interview schedule’ (ibid: 241). As a result, as Dawes et al note, the SASAS was unable to examine a range of ‘important variables’ relevant to partner violence (see ibid: 241).

Despite the fact that violence against women in South Africa has been identified as a major social problem, receives considerable attention from government and non-government agencies and generates intense and often heated public debate, it is sobering to note, as Rasool et al do, that ‘currently there is no national random sample survey in South Africa that is aimed specifically at determining the incidence and/or prevalence of violence against women’ (Rasool et al: 8). While, as I will discuss below, there is considerable debate over what exactly violence against women is, the fact remains that there are, in South Africa, no adequate national statistics on violence against women, however defined.

Survey research certainly has its limitations (see, for example, Babbie and Mouton, Chapter Nine; Marsh; and de Vaus: 1990, Chapters 1 and 19). Nevertheless, survey research into violence against women has developed rapidly over the past decade, and, as Walby and Myhill note, ‘surveys have proved an indispensable tool for the analysis of violence against women...despite the hesitation of some. There has been wave after wave of new survey designs in recent years. There have been many methodological improvements’ (Walby and Myhill: 519).

While the development of research into violence against women (and other forms of interpersonal violence) remains dominated by academics from developed nations, the establishment of the International Research Network on Violence Against Women (IRNVAW) in the early 1990’s introduced an international, comparative depth to research and a greater appreciation of, *inter alia*, international (and intra-national) variations in rates of violence against women. This, as Garcia-Morena et al note, ‘raised the question of what combination of factors could best explain this variation’ (Garcia-Morena et al: 5).

### **3. Defining and Measuring Violence Against Women**

Garcia-Morena et al suggest that one of the main challenges facing violence against women researchers is to ‘develop clear operational definitions of different types of

violence and tools for measuring violence that permit meaningful comparisons among diverse settings' (Garcia-Morena et al: 13). The United Nations study points out that it is not possible to make comparisons between many prevalence estimates of violence against women because of differences in the ways that the studies on which the estimates were based defined and measured violence against women.

One common way in which researchers have defined violence against women is to classify it in terms of the act: for example, physical violence (such as hitting, kicking or burning), sexual violence (including various forms of coerced sexual acts), and emotional or economic abuse. Another method of defining violence against women is to classify it in terms of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator: for example, intimate partner (or domestic) violence, violence committed by a family member (other than an intimate partner), acquaintance or stranger. Many studies focus on one type of violence only, very often intimate partner violence or sexual violence. The World Health Organisation study, for example, focussed on intimate partner violence of a physical, sexual and emotional nature, but it did also consider, to a lesser extent, physical and sexual violence against women by non-intimates.

Intimate partner violence is recognised as the 'most common form of violence against women globally' (United Nations: 37), and has been relatively well researched. By contrast, emotional violence against women has received far less attention from researchers. According to the United Nations, this is because 'measuring such forms of violence is more difficult as specific behaviours vary significantly across different settings. There is no common understanding of which acts or combination of acts, and with what frequency, constitute emotional violence' (ibid: 38). This is certainly true, but it is also true that not all agree that the emotional abuse of women should be defined as violence against women in the same way as physical or sexual abuse. As DeKeseredy notes, there is 'sharp disagreement over what constitutes violence against women' (DeKeseredy, 2000: 741), and Fincham suggests that drawing attention to these definitional disputes does not simply entail choosing the best definition, but rather serves 'to emphasize the variety of phenomena referred to by this single term' (Fincham, in

Klein 1998:197). Fincham also adds that the variety of phenomena which can be labelled violent ‘increases the potential for confusion’ (ibid: 197).

The definitional issue is not just a question of semantics: it reflects also underlying theoretical and methodological approaches to researching violence against women. Two issues are of central importance to researchers in this regard. The first concerns the distinction between broad and narrow definitions of violence against women. The second has to do with objective and subjective definitions of violence against women.

With reference to violence against women, Gordon points out that ‘some researchers may adopt a broad definition including many types of abusive, coercive, and controlling behaviours and others can restrict the term violence to physical aggression or to serious physical aggression in relationships’ (Gordon, 2000: 750 ). According to Gordon, these debates over the definition of violence against women are significant because they ‘have implications for describing the nature of violence against women, formulating explanatory conceptualizations for violence against women, and prescribing what type of data indicative of violence against women should be collected...and how it should be collected’ (ibid: 750).

While most researchers agree that violence against women is widespread, Fincham points out that disputes over quite how widespread it is often revolve around what is actually defined as “violence”. Some argue that the term should be narrowly restricted to acts of overt physical aggression or threats of such aggression, while others argue that non-physical aggression should be included in the definition. The “narrow” definition has been criticised for failing to pay sufficient attention to the emotional dimensions of the abuse of women, while, on the other hand, some argue that the “broad” definition runs the risk of trivialising violence against women. Gelles and Cornell, for example, argue that ‘lumping all forms of malevolence and harm-doing together may muddy the waters so much that it might be impossible to determine what causes abuse’ (Gelles and Cornell,1985: 23-24).

Feminist researchers, emphasizing the gendered nature of violence against women, tend to conceptualise overt physical and sexual violence against women as lying on a continuum of controlling behaviour of men towards women. Fedler and Tanzer, for example, define violence against women as ‘any act of abuse, intended or unintended, of verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual or physical form which results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or deprivation of liberty’ (Fedler and Tanzer, in Park et al: 23).

The notion of a continuum of violence against women is based on the underlying belief that patriarchal control is at the core of violence against women. Vetten, for example, argues that violence against women ‘should be conceptualised as existing on a continuum’, and she claims that the notion of a continuum is helpful because, firstly, it ‘identifies the common thread running through these various forms of violence, namely men’s use of threats, force, intimidation and abuse to control women’ and, secondly, that the range of abuses cannot be ‘isolated into defined, discrete analytic categories; many overlap and shade into each other’ (Vetten, in Park et al: 49).

Some theorists question the broader, inclusive definition based upon the notion of a continuum of violence. While many believe that psychological and emotional abuse may be perceived by women as in some respects more damaging than physical or sexual abuse, Pickup argues that using a broad definition of violence is problematic ‘if the term “violence” is used to describe practices or norms for which other words already exist...This may result in the power of the term “violence against women” being diluted. A narrower definition...can provide greater clarity about the nature and specific contexts of the violence at issue’ (Pickup: 13). On the other hand, Pickup points out that there are advantages to using a broader definition, especially in linking violence against women to ‘broader economic, social and political contexts’ (ibid: 13).

A compromise between those favouring narrow definitions and those preferring broad definitions may lie in using the term “violence and abuse against women”. Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, and Shelley suggest that the definition of violence against women

(VAW) should be ‘restricted to physical violence, sexual violence, and threats of physical or sexual violence’ while the broader term *violence and abuse against women* (VAAW) should be defined as including the three types of violence in the VAW definition as well as stalking and psychological and emotional abuse (see Saltzman: 2004a). For Kilpatrick, this approach has ‘considerable merit because it distinguishes between violent acts and non-violent acts but also permits assessment of actual violence as well as stalking and psychological abuse’ (Kilpatrick: 1217. For more on this debate, see also Saltzman: 2004a and 2004b and Tjaden: 2004). It also implies that neither narrow nor broad definitions of violence against women are inherently wrong for research purposes, and Pickup suggests that ‘whichever definition they adopt, researchers and policy-makers should state which they are using. Lack of clarity on definition leads to confused dialogue about the issue, and results in prevalence statistics that cannot be compared and contrasted’ (ibid: 14). As Hamby says, ‘there is no simple answer to the question about whether it is better to use broad definitions that minimize the tolerance for any level of aggression, or narrow definitions that avoid trivializing these constructs and blurring the lines between victims and non-victims...at a minimum, we need to be much clearer about the definitions of violence that are used in any particular study and why those definitions were chosen’ (Hamby: 737).

In my opinion, the term “abuse” can include both overt physical and sexual violence and psychological abuse, and is thus more compatible with broader definitions of violence against women than the term “violence”. But using the term “abuse” still does not answer the question of whether researchers should employ a broad or narrow operationalisation of violence against women in their research because it leaves unanswered the more fundamental question of the analytic integrity of the concept of a continuum of violence against women. Nor does using the term “violence and abuse against women” really provide any guidelines as to which operational definition is preferable for researchers. It is a way around the definitional impasse rather than a solution to it. Still, it indicates that those preferring a narrow definition for research purposes do not necessarily do so because they fundamentally disagree with the broader definition based on a gendered conception of a continuum of violence against women.

In fact, it is quite possible to accept a broad definition of violence against women and yet adopt a narrow definition for research purposes. Many researchers do so for quite pragmatic reasons. Dutton, for example, notes that while physical violence may exist within a 'continuum of coercive control', his explanation of domestic violence against women is 'related to social intervention', and he is thus 'primarily interested in focussing on those behaviours that society agrees are unacceptable and that require the intervention of agents from outside the family' – overtly violent physical and/or sexual abuse (Dutton, 1995: 6). In other words, Dutton's approach to defining domestic violence is primarily pragmatic.

While, for research purposes, the choice of a broad or narrow definition may be decided on pragmatic grounds, it remains an issue of theoretical debate in explaining violence against women. Theoretically, those preferring a broad definition tend to do so from a feminist perspective which views violence against women as strongly influenced by patriarchal gender relations. It is these patriarchal relations of inequality and domination which link together the various types and forms of violence against women into a continuum of coercive control.

Green argues that 'at the individual, interpersonal and institutional levels gender violence works to entrench control over females' and that the family plays a 'unique role' in the patriarchal 'web of public and private structures, ideology and mechanisms for the control of women' since it 'provide the foundation for the social construction of sexuality' (Green: 15). Yllö suggests that the notion of "coercive control" is central to feminist understandings of violence against women, and that it 'identifies violence as a tactic of entitlement and power that is deeply gendered, rather than as a symptom of a disorder or as a conflict tactic that is individual and gender neutral' (Yllö, in Gelles, 1997: 24). By contrast, Michalski believes that domestic violence 'can be conceptualised as only one possible strategy among many for handling grievances' (Michalski, 2004: 661). But violence against women is not simply, or even primarily, about 'handling grievances'. As Loseke points out, much violence against women is 'one-way violence, where women are victims and men are offenders using violence to control women'

(Loseke, in Loseke et al: 41). My own view is that there is strong evidence to support the inclusion of sexual violence within a continuum of violence against women, although this does not imply that all sexual violence can be understood simply as a “normal” aspect of patriarchal relations. Research indicates a substantial overlap between various forms of physical and sexual violence against women in intimate relations and emotional and economic abuse (see, for example, Garcia-Morena: 32 and Ludsin and Vetten: Chapter Two). This overlap of different forms of abuse is captured by the notion of a continuum, and, I suggest, has implications for understanding the underreporting of violence against women.

In sum, it is quite possible, for research purposes, to employ a narrow operationalisation of violence against women while still holding to a broad definition of violence against women. Most sexual abuse of women would be included in both narrow and broad definitions of violence against women, but would be differently explained by the theoretical approaches which tend to underlie those adopting either broad or narrow interpretations of violence against women.

#### **4. What Is Sexual Abuse? Objective and Subjective Definitions**

*‘Just because a woman doesn’t call it rape doesn’t mean she doesn’t feel violated.’ - Nahid Toubia*

Even if researchers are clear about the theoretical differences and pragmatic considerations underlying their choice of definitions of violence against women, they still need to bear in mind what the subjects of research themselves hold violence to be. They need, in other words, to consider what Hagemann-White refers to as ‘the match between researchers’ concept of violence and respondents’ subjective experience’ (Hagemann-White: 740). Failure to do so can lead to considerable confusion in measuring violence against women.

Surveys, notes Hagemann-White, ‘typically define the categories of *victim* and *violence* before the interviews, as if these were simple events that only need to be asked about to

be recorded. Moreover, they rarely gather information on which acts were experienced as hurtful, threatening, or wrong.’ (ibid: 740). Mooney notes that researchers and respondents may vary in their perceptions of what constitutes violence: ‘the values held by the respondent are likely to be affected by their gender, age, ethnicity, class and education’ (Mooney, in Hanmer et al: 27). The same, of course, may be said of researchers. DeKeseredy points out that ‘for many women, especially those who are battered, psychologically abused, or sexually assaulted, a key point to consider...is whether researchers’ definitions are sensitive to their subjective experiences’, and he argues that a researcher’s definitions of violence need to be ‘sensitive’ to the ‘subjective experiences’ of respondents (see DeKeseredy: 742). Referring specifically to rape, Jewkes and Abrahams point out that ‘a given incident of non-consensual sex will be interpreted differently depending on the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator, the ages of those involved, prevalent social notions of gender roles in decision making around sexual matters (and) the circumstances in which it occurred’ (Jewkes and Abrahams: 1232).

Yet, as Saltzman suggests, ‘comparability of findings seems to argue for objectivity in definitions’ (Saltzman, 2004: 1238). But this raises a problem for researchers. On the one hand, attempts to standardise objective definitions of violence against women in order to develop a uniformity capable of promoting comparability of research findings may obviate attempts to capture the subjective experiences of research subjects. As Saltzman notes, ‘as we strive for that uniformity and seek ways to formalize it, another relevant issue...is whether victims’ perceptions are included when the definitions of violence or abuse are developed’ in designing the questionnaire (see ibid: 1238). Saltzman points out that ‘to the extent that our definitions rely on the perceptions of the people on whom the acts are perpetrated and to the extent that our measurements are based on the definitions, there will be variability in those measurements’ (ibid: 1239).

In many respects the issue of objective and subjective definitions of sexual violence reflects broader methodological debates in the social sciences, in particular those concerning criticisms of positivist and behaviourist methods commonly advanced by

feminists employing a more interpretive or constructionist approach. But the debates are not simply between feminism and positivism: there are many feminists who support a more positivist, behaviourist, ostensibly objective approach – albeit a “sensitive” one - to defining and measuring violence against women. While a “preparatory component of qualitative investigation” may go a long way towards helping develop an operationalisation of terms for survey research which is sensitive to the experiences of respondents, survey researchers still have to decide whether to rely chiefly on “objective” or “subjective” questions. The issue is also linked to the choice of whether to use behaviourally specific or complex questions.

Researchers employing an “objective” approach to defining and measuring violence against women generally rely on some form of the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) originally developed by Straus, while those preferring a “subjective” approach employ less formalised checklists and more embracing but complex terms like “maltreatment”, “violence”, “rape” or “abuse”.

There is a growing belief that survey researchers should avoid complex terms like “rape” or “abuse”. Hamby notes that ‘emotionally laden’ terms like “rape” and “abuse” are known to depress disclosure (Hamby: 730) and that ‘behaviourally-specific questions are increasingly preferred over more general references to broad categories such as “assault” or “violence” ’ (ibid: 730). The argument made in favour of using behaviourally specific questions is essentially this: if a respondent is asked a question entailing a complex and loaded concept such as “Have you ever experienced rape?” she may reply in the negative even if she has experienced what would objectively or legally be defined as rape. Hence Jewkes and Abrahams, for example, argue that surveys should avoid complex notions such as “rape” and “abuse” in their questions and rather ask about ‘specific forms of coercion in multiple ways’ (see Jewkes and Abrahams, 2002: 1241. See also Fisher et al in Holmes and Holmes: 296. For a comprehensive collection of behaviourally-specific intimate partner violence victimization and perpetration assessment tools, see Thompson et al).

However, behaviourally specific CTS-type checklists may also produce response bias. One source of such bias is “report load”, which refers to attempts by respondents to shorten an interview by “minimising”. Minimising is the tendency of respondents to omit revealing incidents of abuse (where they have been subjected to multiple incidents) or to omit aspects of an incident or incidents. Thus, for example, a woman who has been subjected to multiple incidents of physical and sexual abuse may omit revealing her sexual abuse. Minimising is frequently associated with problems of recall, but not always. It can just as easily result from report overload as from personal choice to conceal the abuse or from “memory decay” (For a discussion of minimising, see Dunham and Senn, 2000). Hamby warns that reporting load ‘cautions against simply lengthening an interview to increase disclosures’ (Hamby: 731). Some researchers therefore attempt to strike a balance between exhaustive behaviourally specific checklists and single, complex questions. For example, although Garcia-Morena et al operationalised their definitions of violence ‘using a range of behaviour-specific questions’, they point out that their study ‘did not attempt to document an exhaustive list of acts of violence, but instead asked a limited number of questions about specific acts that commonly occur in violent partnerships’ (Garcia-Morena et al: 14 -15). They argue that this approach has been shown to ‘encourage greater disclosure of violence than approaches that require respondents to identify themselves as abused or battered’ (ibid: 15). But restricting a checklist, while it may ostensibly reduce report overload and improve uniformity and comparability, can also reduce the range of abusive experiences captured in the research and Hamby points out that under-disclosure can be triggered by too few questions as well as too many (see ibid: 731). Further, no matter how exhaustive a standardised checklist may be, it will never be able to capture the full range of abuse experienced by women, and Hamby notes that ‘rarer forms of assault or incidents that don’t closely correspond to included behaviours may be omitted from closed-ended checklists’ (Hamby: 731). Some of the abuse reported by respondents in the Camdeboo survey would never been included in an abuse checklist and an objective, CTS-type approach would not have recorded these.

I am not convinced that complex questions necessarily increase underdisclosure. It would probably depend on the term used. Questions involving the complex and ambiguous term “rape” are known to depress disclosure. As one respondent in the Camdeboo survey said:

*We were fighting and my boyfriend broke my arm. While we were fighting the paraffin stove fell and my dress caught fire and my arm was badly burned. After this my boyfriend started forcing me to have sex. I didn't talk about it because I didn't know it was rape.*

Asking this respondent if she had ever experienced “rape” would have elicited a negative response. But asking her if she had ever experienced “sexual abuse” elicited the response quoted above. Responses such as this allowed us to identify many women who could be termed what Koss refers to as “unacknowledged rape victims” (Koss: 195). However, it should be noted that this response also reflects the open-ended nature of certain questions in the questionnaire which elicited what Hamby refers to as ‘narrative incident data’.

I believe that the problem may not lie in using complex terms *per se*, but rather in the type of complex term used - and the overall approach of the questionnaire. The use of open-ended questions recording narrative incident data, for example, may well mitigate underdisclosure. Hamby suggests that the ‘optimal method for helping respondents accurately search their memory for violent incidents and promoting willingness to disclose has not yet been identified, but incident data could help develop these techniques’ (ibid: 738). We asked women to describe their first incidents of physical and sexual abuse, and, if physically or sexually abused more than once, to describe the worst incidents. This resulted in a rich array of narrative incident data. In some cases, women who had reported incidents of abuse to the police, described their worst abuse incident to the interviewer but had not reported it to the police. Virtually every woman appeared to recall quite clearly their first incidents of abuse, especially of sexual abuse.

Comparing the results of research employing behaviourally specific terms with the results of research employing complex terms and capturing incident data may shed more light on the matter. In my research I opted for a subjective approach using the complex term “abuse”, but I also used open-ended questions capturing incident data. What I tried to

measure was the perception of physical and sexual “abuse” held by respondents. In the event, the disclosure rates for sexual abuse in the Camdeboo survey were comparable with other surveys conducted in South Africa. Further, virtually all the incidents of sexual abuse reported by respondents in this research could be defined as rape (or, in some cases, compelled rape) in terms of the provisions of the Sexual Offences Bill (because they involved penetration), and virtually every incident of sexual abuse involved violence or the threat of violence. Every incident disclosed would certainly be classified as a crime under the provisions of the Sexual Offences Bill. And yet quite a few of these would not have been captured by behaviourally specific questions. The use of complex terms, in conjunction with open-ended questions eliciting incident data, may well yield incidence and prevalence rates equal to, or even exceeding, research based on behaviourally specific questions.

As far as the complex term “abuse” is concerned, Malley-Morrison and Hines, following Emery and Laumann-Billings, argue that it makes sense to distinguish between two forms of abuse: maltreatment (minimal and moderate abuse) and violence (more overt physical and sexual abuse). This seems to suggest that Malley-Morrison and Hines consider maltreatment as a subset of abuse. However, they prefer the term maltreatment because, they claim, it is the ‘more inclusive term’ (Malley-Morrison and Hines: 5). On the contrary, it seems to me that the term abuse is equally inclusive, spanning the range from minimal to severe violence. Indeed, as I understand it, the term “abuse” does not necessarily entail even minimal physical violence, but may include emotional and economic abuse as well. Malley-Morrison and Hines, on the other hand, believe that the term “abuse” is ‘so emotionally loaded in its negative connotations that for many, it calls up images of the most extreme forms of violence’ (ibid: 4). “Violence”, according to Walby and Myhill, is a ‘stigmatised word that some respondents may not wish to embrace’ (Walby and Myhill: 512). The term “abuse” is surely less stigmatised. It also carries no necessary legal or criminal connotations and does not have to embrace overt physical or sexual violence. On the other hand, the term “violence” surely connotes, at least in popular use, overt violence. For this reason, I do not agree with Jewkes et al’s use of the terms “violence” and “abuse” interchangeably (see Jewkes et al, 2002: 1604).

Many respondents to the Camdeboo survey reported incidents of sexual abuse which did not involve overt physical violence (even if they could be legally defined as crimes).

Perhaps employing an “objective” definition of violence against women and behaviourally specific questions in my research may have been more in line with current thinking about the need for comparability of disclosure rates. However, I believe that employing a more “subjective” definition and a complex term (“abuse”) had one advantage of fundamental importance to this research: by allowing women to define their own abuse, it shed more light on the subjective nature of underreporting. In other words, it allowed for a consideration of the perceptions behind abuse and reporting behaviour.

## **5. The Camdeboo Survey**

The survey conducted during this research is an example of a localised community survey and, as such, cannot be used to make broader inferences. Nevertheless, the results of the survey, in terms of estimates of rates of the physical and sexual abuse of women, were essentially in accord with other survey research conducted in South Africa. This suggests that the findings related to underreporting may have relevance beyond the local context, bearing in mind that differences are to be expected when comparing the results of localised community surveys. In this section I will briefly outline the main aspects of the survey, in particular questionnaire construction, sampling, survey implementation and data analysis. I have included a copy of the survey questionnaire in Appendix 3.

### **5.1. Questionnaire Construction**

Probably the most important decision regarding the construction of the questionnaire was the decision to use the operationally complex term “abuse” instead of behaviourally specific terms. While many researchers in the field of violence against women believe that the use of complex terms like “abuse” results in lower rates of disclosure of violence against women, my decision to use the complex term was based largely upon my belief in the importance of adopting a “subjective” approach, an approach which begins with the subjects own definition and understanding of interpersonal violence. I am not convinced

that the use of complex terms necessarily leads to underestimates of violence against women. More important, I believe, is the term used and the inclusion of open-ended questions eliciting narrative data. I will discuss this issue further in Chapter Two.

The questionnaire included closed and open-ended questions divided into four sections. The first section captured basic socio-demographic information often considered by certain researchers as independent variables in examining either risk of experiencing violence or influencing reporting behaviour. It is necessary to treat such data with caution, however. In the first place, it is never possible to consider any such list exhaustive, and responses are, in many cases, subject to inaccurate recall or outright distortions. Further, while independent variables cannot be considered in isolation from one another or from their socio-historic contexts, neither can they be accepted as unproblematic in and of themselves. In many cases, the manner in which a variable is constituted may render an apparent correlation between it and the dependent variable more or less meaningless. Felson and Paré, for example, assert that a victim's income status is unrelated to reporting (see Felson and Paré: 25). However, in their research, Felson and Paré measured not the income of the victim herself, but rather her household income. Poorer women undoubtedly face numerous barriers to reporting sexual violence to the police, but these are not necessarily related in unmediated manner to household income. Using household income as a measure of a woman's income status says nothing about her economic dependency (often on her abuser) and, as Walby and Myhill note, it is necessary to disaggregate socio-economic data so that 'woman is not hidden in the household' (Walby and Myhill: 520). The source of a woman's income also needs to be considered, since the conditions attached to different sources of income may well affect a woman's reporting choices. The second section considered women's experiences of physical abuse and the third section considered their experiences of sexual abuse. The fourth and final section gathered information on women's reporting experiences, as well as, in the form of an open-ended question, their reasons for not reporting their abuse to the police.

## **5.2. Sampling**

While probability sampling is the only sure method of obtaining a representative survey sample, it requires an adequate sampling frame. In practice, however, it is not always possible to establish a sampling frame, and non-probability sampling methods need to be employed. Non-probability sampling can be used when there is no adequate sampling frame, where there are time and/or financial constraints, or where the research will rely more upon qualitative methods. In this research it was not possible to carry out a probability sample since the research population – females aged fifteen and above living in the Camdeboo – could not yield an adequate sampling frame. It is not possible to establish with any accuracy (except perhaps at exorbitant cost) the place of residence of many women in the district. Some women list a permanent address in the Camdeboo but actually live and work elsewhere, while others do not register a permanent residence. And, as Walby and Myhill note, a sampling frame based only on women in permanent dwellings may well be skewed, since many women leave their putative residential households as a result of violence. Household surveys, therefore, and despite current beliefs in their probabilistic nature, may not be the most appropriate form of survey into violence against women.

## **5.3. Representativeness**

A representative sample should have approximately the same proportions of the variables under consideration as the population. While random sampling offers the best chance of representativeness, in practice it is not always possible to use random sampling. As noted above, random sampling was not possible in this research, and a quota sample was used instead to ensure as representative a sample as possible. Quotas for race, ward, residence (urban or rural) and age were established, based on estimates of the 2001 census. Fieldworkers sampled their quotas to completion. One indication of the representativeness of the sample was the number of sexual assaults which respondents had reported to police during 2004/05. Police statistics put these at 75 rapes and 10 indecent assaults. Although the statistics do not make this clear, we know that approximately three of the indecent assaults involved males. This means that the number

of women who reported sexual assaults (rapes and indecent assaults) to the police in 2004/05 was 82 (or very close to 82). In the survey, 5 women said that they had reported a sexual assault to the police. Given that the survey was based on a 6,2 percent sample, the number of sexual assaults predicted by the survey to be reported to the police in 2004/05 was 81. That the figures of predicted reported sexual assaults from the survey sample and the number of actual police reports is so close is cause for a fair degree of confidence in the representativeness of the survey, at least in terms of measuring the reporting of sexual assault.

#### **5.4. Sample Size**

In general, while larger samples allow for more representivity and accurate inferences about the population, it is also the case that the larger the population, the smaller the percentage of the population that has to be sampled in order to reach the same levels of accuracy. There is no precise agreement over sampling sizes, and different researchers give varying estimates of adequate sample size. Stoker suggests a 4,5% sampling percentage for a population of 10 000 (see Strydom and Venter in De Vos et al: 200 - 201). van Vuuren and Maree state that “as a rule of thumb” a sampling ratio of about 10% is needed for a population of approximately 10 000 (in Terreblanche and Durrheim, p 277). The survey questionnaire upon which this research was based was administered to a sample of 971 women over the age of fifteen. This equates to a sample size of 6,2 percent of the 15 738 women over the age of fifteen estimated to be living in the Camdeboo by the 2001 Census.

#### **5.5. Survey implementation**

Face-to-face interviews, the method of interviewing adopted in this research, are generally the preferred method of gathering information on sensitive topics such as violence against women, provided that the information could not be obtained from other sources and also provided that survey fieldworkers are adequately trained. Walby and Myhill suggest that several aspects of interviewing affect responses to survey – privacy, sensitive interviewing and the gender of the interviewer (Walby and Myhill: 509).

Feminist researchers have paid considerable attention to such issues. Interviewers were selected from the group of support workers from the three towns within the Camdeboo and underwent training, testing and final selection during two one-day workshops. The interviewers were trained in interviewing techniques and issues such as privacy, confidentiality, sensitivity to respondents and recording responses to the questionnaire. Interviewers, as frontline support workers (and many being themselves victims of interpersonal violence), were also involved in discussions concerning the structure and wording of the questionnaire and the implementation of the survey. Anticipating problems with interviewers either leaving the research for one reason or another or failing to conduct their research adequately, a few more interviewers were trained than needed to conduct the research. After the training and final selection of interviewers was completed, a pilot was conducted in which each interviewer completed five questionnaires. A feedback session was held after all interviewers had conducted their five interviews. Although no serious problems were encountered by the interviewers, one interviewer was asked to leave the research as her recorded responses, especially to questions on sexual abuse, were clearly way out of line with all the other interviewers. Thereafter, I held frequent and regular debriefing sessions with interviewers, and also carefully monitored their returned questionnaires to ensure compliance with quotas and adequate recording of data and responses.

## **5.6. Analysis of data**

The statistical data obtained during the survey was analysed using Statistica and Eviews 5. Logit analysis was performed on the data with reporting of sexual violence to the police as the dependent variable. Not all the data was captured in a form amenable to more advanced quantitative statistical analysis; some of it was nominal or ordinal data. Furthermore, and, I would argue, in keeping with my emphasis on a “subjective” approach to the research, some of the open-ended questions were not assigned to predetermined categories. Rather, they were grouped using inductive coding. Following Fugate et al, and with regard particularly to the issue of the reasons for not reporting sexual violence to the police, ‘coding schemes were developed based on similarity in

women's responses rather than coding the responses into predetermined categories. In other words, inductive coding was used, allowing the women's responses to form into groupings, identified as coding schemes' (see Fugate et al: 294)

## **6. Research Ethics**

Ethical considerations are – or should be – a fundamental methodological component in researching victims of violence and other vulnerable groups. Ethical considerations did not simply provide checks and balances to the more pragmatic decisions regarding this research: they played a major role in its design and implementation. Oleson argues that feminists have 'foregrounded ethical issues' particularly because of their 'concern for and even involvement with participating individuals' (Oleson: 233), and I think that it is important to bear in mind that ethical considerations do not just pop up in the course of conducting research. They are part and parcel of the most fundamental research questions – what to research and how to research it - and I can only agree with May that 'simply "knowing about" the issues of values and ethics is not a sufficient basis upon which to conduct research; they also need to form part of research practice' (May, 1993: 48).

The nature of interpersonal violence especially requires researchers to reflect carefully on the relationship between research ethics and techniques since there is always the risk of causing harm to research subjects. As Seedat et al suggest, 'many trauma survivors are grateful for the opportunity to share their experiences with a researcher', but the danger always exists that research interviews may lead to secondary victimization (see Seedat et al, p 262). Further, as Seedat et al note, 'under certain circumstances...it is important to maximize disclosure of trauma/violence in participants, especially when there is ongoing childhood sexual violence or violence by an intimate partner. Under-reporting may yield inaccurate data about the extent and severity of trauma and may also skew the relationship with mental and physical health outcomes' (Seedat et al, p 265). In short, failure to probe under-reporting during the research process itself may compromise the safety of participants. On the other hand, researchers (and service providers) are legally obliged to report certain forms of interpersonal violence to the police. This legal

obligation may conflict with the expressed interests of victims. Researchers need to be aware of such potential conflicts when designing and conducting their research. In other words, it is possible to be proactive about ethics in research. Anticipating ethical dilemmas can lead to modifications of research design or even a decision not to undertake research in the first place. This is surely preferable to ending up in a situation where ethical considerations may compromise the research, jeopardize respondents (and researchers) or lead to its abandonment.

My research has been guided by the ethical considerations outlined by Themba Lesizwe, a national network of trauma service providers (see Themba Lesizwe, 2005). Themba Lesizwe's code of ethics is based upon the code of ethics developed for the purposes of researching violence against women by Lillian Artz, who drew on and modified the guidelines and principles contained in the University of Cape Town research ethics guidelines, the Canadian Psychological Association and the American Sociological Association (see Parenzee, Artz and Moulton, 2001: Appendix D, 133 – 139). Taking the ethical considerations outlined in these codes of research ethics had a significant impact on the design of my research and contributed in no small measure to the relatively smooth implementation of the survey. I have included a discussion of the Themba Lesizwe code of research ethics and the ways in which it guided my research in Appendix 2.

## **7. Definitions of Research Terms**

I have briefly outlined my definitions of some of the important concepts and terms used in this research below.

### **7.1. Reporting, Disclosing and Concealing**

In this research I will use the term “non-reporting” to refer to incidents of violence against women which have not been reported (or disclosed) to the police, and “non-disclosure” to incidents that have not been reported (or disclosed) to other agents. I will use the term “underreporting” to refer to rates of non-reporting, and “under-disclosure” to refer to rates of non-disclosure. I will use the term “concealed” to refer to violence

against women which is neither reported (to the police) nor disclosed (to any other agent). Violence against women which is concealed will, by definition, remain hidden from researchers and probably impossible to estimate.

## **7.2. Minimising**

“Minimising”, another term pertinent to examining the underreporting of violence against women, refers to the tendency of survivors of violence against women to omit revealing incidents of abuse (where they have been subjected to multiple incidents) or to omit aspects of an incident or incidents. Thus, for example, a woman who has been subjected to multiple incidents of physical and sexual abuse may omit revealing her sexual abuse. Minimising is frequently associated with problems of recall, but not always. For a discussion of minimising, see Dunham and Senn, 2000). My research suggests that minimising is extremely common and tends to mask the underreporting of sexual violence: many women who are victims of both physical and sexual interpersonal violence report the former to the police but not the latter, and they report their abuse to the police more commonly than do victims of physical abuse alone. In this sense, it could be suggested that they do not underreport as much as they minimise.

## **7.3. Victim, Survivor, Victim/Survivor**

There is much discussion and debate over the use of the terms “victim” and “survivor” in the field of sexual assault. For some, the term “victim” implies a passive status, lack of agency and an inability to cope with the trauma of sexual assault. Victims are helped from without, not within. The term “survivor”, on the other hand, suggests a more active, agential status, and an ability to utilize inner strength. But some argue that the term “survivor” can deny perceptions of victimization held by women subjected to violence and frequently requiring assistance from others to cope with their trauma. Hence some prefer the term “victim/survivor”, while the authors of the United Nations ‘In-depth study on all forms of violence against women’ use the term “victim” within the criminal justice context and the term “survivor” within the advocacy context: in other contexts they use the term “victim/survivor”. I have retained the term “victim” in this research.

## **Chapter Two. Sexual Violence Against Women in the Camdeboo**

Many authors have emphasized the impact that general levels of violence in a society have on gender relations. Jewkes and Abrahams, for example, note that in South Africa, ‘rape and sexual coercion form one part of the broader problem of gender-based violence, which in turn is heavily influenced by a general culture of violence which pervades society...in a violent society, the use of sexual force to acquire desired relations becomes unremarkable’ (Jewkes and Abrahams: 1239). Vogelmann suggests that ‘violence is an integral part of South African culture’ and that, at a community level, ‘violence functions as a means of control of one’s environment and provides an outlet for aggression’: in some communities, depending on various factors, interpersonal violence and violence against women will be much higher than in others (see Vogelmann: 118 - 127). But as Jewkes et al point out with reference to the ecological model of violence, however, it is not easy to define, or distinguish between, the social and community levels (see Jewkes et al, 2002: 1614). The concept of “community” is particularly slippery. The Camdeboo municipal area, for example, exists as a politically defined spatial entity, but can hardly be defined as a community in any other social sense. It is made up of three separate towns and their surrounding farming areas, and both these urban and rural areas contain multiple socio-economic, cultural and other divisions. Municipal wards within Graaff-Reinet tend to reflect racially established patterns of residence. On the other hand, Ward One includes the entire town of Aberdeen and surrounding farms, while Ward Two is even more socially complex: it includes the whole of Nieu-Bethesda (itself divided residentially almost completely by race), part (an almost exclusively white part) of Graaff-Reinet and a large area of (white-owned) farms.

Nevertheless, services, particularly state services, for victims of violence are primarily accessed within the municipal boundaries of the Camdeboo, and the extent and quality of these services colour the perceptions of women considering their help-seeking strategies for abuse. Further, socio-economic conditions in the Camdeboo clearly impact upon interpersonal relations within the municipal area. Just over two thirds of the households in the Camdeboo have a monthly income of less than R1 600 a month, and each member

of these households must survive on an income of around R10 a day. Many, of course, must make do with less than this: 40 percent of households have a monthly income of less than R800. Unemployment in the Camdeboo is conservatively estimated at 38,1 percent. Excluding the wealthier Ward Two (where unemployment is estimated at 10,6 percent) and Ward Four (where unemployment is estimated at 33 percent), unemployment in the four poorest wards is conservatively estimated at just over 46 percent. Such poverty places enormous stresses on interpersonal and community relations. So too does the legacy of interpersonal and socio-political violence. The rate of assault with the intent to inflict grievous bodily harm in the Camdeboo, for example, is 3,7 times the national rate, and 3,3 times the rate for the Eastern Cape. Violence and poverty exacerbate relations of patriarchal domination, infusing them with physical and sexual aggression, and the rate of reported rape in the Camdeboo is about 1,7 times the national rate, and 1,6 times that of the Eastern Cape. Thus, although it may not be possible to define the Camdeboo as a community, or even a collection of communities, social conditions within its municipal boundaries do need to be taken into account when considering the incidence and underreporting of sexual violence in the area.

### **1. Patterns of Sexual Abuse of Women in the Camdeboo**

Of the 971 women who completed the Camdeboo survey, 37 (3.8 percent) chose not to respond to questions concerning sexual abuse. Of the 934 who did respond to questions about sexual abuse, 292 (31.2 percent) recorded having experiencing sexual abuse during the course of their lifetimes as summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Frequency of Sexual Abuse (Lifetime Incidence)**

<b>Frequency of Abuse</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1 Never	642	68.7
2 Once	113	12.1
3 Twice	35	3.7
4 Twice plus	105	11.2
5 Continuing	39	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>100</b>

However, closer analysis of this data revealed some significant patterns of the sexual abuse of women in the Camdeboo, which I outline below.

## 2. Sexual Abuse by Relational Distance

The most significant pattern of sexual abuse to emerge from the Camdeboo survey, and one which is found in most other research, is that it takes place largely within the context of intimate relationships. That is, most women who are sexually abused are abused by a husband, spouse or boyfriend. Of the 292 women who recorded sexual abuse, 216 (73.9 percent) said that their first incident of sexual abuse had been committed by an intimate partner (see Table 2), while 219 (75 percent) said that their worst incident of sexual abuse had been committed by an intimate partner (see Table 3).

**Table 2. First Incident of Sexual Abuse by Relationship to Perpetrator**

Frequency of Sexual Abuse	First Incident of Sexual Abuse by Relational Distance						Total
	Boyfriend	Husband/Spouse	Father	Other Family	Other Known	Stranger	
2 Once	45	18	1	15	15	19	113
3 Twice	16	10	1	3	3	2	35
4 Twice+	46	46	1	7	3	2	105
5 Cont.	11	24	0	4	0	0	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>292</b>

**Table 3. Worst Incident of Sexual Abuse by Relationship to Perpetrator**

Frequency of Sexual Abuse	Worst Incident of Sexual Abuse by Relational Distance						Total
	Boyfriend	Husband/Spouse	Father	Other Family	Other Known	Stranger	
2 Once	45	18	1	15	15	19	113
3 Twice	15	11	1	2	3	3	35
4 Twice+	48	44	1	7	3	2	105
5 Cont.	12	26	0	1	0	0	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>292</b>

Of the 113 women who recorded one incident of sexual abuse, 63 (55.7 percent) said that the abuse had been committed by an intimate partner, while 19 (16.8 percent) said that the abuse had been committed by a stranger, 15 (13.3 percent) by a family member other

than a father, 15 (13.3 percent) by someone known to them, and 1 (0.9 percent) by a father. Of the 35 women who recorded two incidents of sexual abuse, 26 (74.3 percent) said that the first (and worst) abuse had been committed by an intimate partner, while 2 (5.7 percent) said that their first abuse had been committed by a stranger. However, one woman who was sexually abused both by her boyfriend and raped by a stranger considered the latter to be her worst incident of sexual abuse: without exception, women recorded sexual abuse by a stranger to be their worst experience of sexual abuse. Of the 144 women who recorded multiple incidents of sexual abuse (categories 4 and 5 in Tables 1 and 2), 127 (88.2 percent) recorded the first incident as having been committed by an intimate partner, while 130 (90.3 percent) recorded the worst incident as having been committed by an intimate partner. 32 women were sexually assaulted for the first time by family members other than an intimate partner, with 28 of them believing this to be their worst experience of sexual abuse.

Altogether, 256 women recorded having been sexually assaulted by intimate partners and family members: intimate partners and family members were responsible for 87.6 percent of the lifelong incidence of the sexual abuse of women in the Camdeboo survey. 21 (7.2 percent) of the women recorded sexual assaults by other men known to them, while 24 (8.2 percent) recorded sexual assaults by strangers (five of them were also sexually abused by intimate partners). In short, the great majority of sexually abused women in the Camdeboo – 277, or 94.8 percent - were sexually abused by people they knew, and 224 (76.7 percent) of them by intimate partners.

Of the 24 women who recorded being raped by a stranger, 19 (89.2 percent) recorded this as their only experience of sexual abuse. Only one of these 19 women said that the rape had not involved violence: but she only discovered that she had been raped when she woke up after passing out from drunkenness. Five women who recorded being raped by a stranger also recorded being sexually abused by intimate partners, but all five considered the rape by the stranger to be their worst experience of sexual abuse.

Two points should be made here. Firstly, as Myhill and Allen note, ‘the experiences of women raped by their partners are liable to be different to those of women raped by strangers and...the sexual victimisation of these women could often be within the context of wider physical and emotional abuse’ (cited in Lievore: 32). Although some women do experience sexual assault by both strangers and non-strangers (usually intimate partners), Myhill and Allen’s point is essentially valid: women’s experiences of a single incident of stranger rape differ from those of women who experience multiple sexual assault within the context of a violent and abusive intimate relationship. One would expect these different experiences to impact upon reporting behaviour, and they do. Secondly, as Lievore points out, many surveys ‘attempt to capture violence as isolated, discrete events, whereas in most cases violence is an ongoing process...As surveys often ask victims to list the main reasons that they did not report the last incident to police, responses may fail to reflect the broader spectrum of contingencies that enter into the decisions of repeat victims not to report’ (Lievore: 32). In the Camdeboo survey, we did not ask women if they had reported their last incident of sexual abuse, for precisely the reason noted by Lievore. For women in abusive intimate relations, underreporting is not simply a response to a discrete event. But the same may be said of women who experience only one incident of stranger rape. Whether subjected to a single incident of stranger rape or multiple sexual and physical abuse within an intimate relationship, a sexually abused woman’s experiences are never just “events” or “incidents” framed by her relationship to the abuser.

### **3. Multiple Sexual and Physical Abuse**

The second significant pattern of sexual abuse to emerge from the Camdeboo survey, and one which is also found in most other research into violence against women, is the overlapping of sexual and physical abuse, particularly within intimate relationships.

**Table 4. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Physical Abuse (Lifelong Incidence)**

Frequency of Sexual Abuse	Frequency of Physical Abuse					
	1 (Never)	2 (Once)	3 (Twice)	4 (Twice +)	5 (Cont.)	Total
2 Once	15	26	24	37	11	113
3 Twice	2	6	4	19	4	35
4 Twice+	6	3	10	55	31	105
5 Cont.	2	0	3	3	31	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>292</b>

Table 4 indicates that only 25 (8.6 percent) of the women who recorded sexual abuse said they had never been physically abused. Of these 25, 15 experienced one incident of sexual abuse: 7 by intimate partners (6 when teenagers), 4 by other family members (all when teenagers), 2 by men known to them (both when teenagers), and 3 by strangers (all when teenagers). Of these 15, 12 reported that the sexual abuse entailed physical violence. Of the 25 who recorded sexual abuse but no physical abuse, 2 experienced two incidents of sexual abuse. One was sexually abused twice by a family friend when she was 5 years old. The other said that when she was in her mid-30's, her boyfriend:

*forced me into having sex without my consent. He tied me to the bed and had all sorts of sex with me.*

13 women recorded multiple (“multiple” is here defined as more than twice or continuing) sexual abuse and two incidents of physical abuse: of these 13, ten were abused by intimate partners, one recorded physical and sexual abuse by her uncle when she was ten years old, one recorded physical and sexual abuse by her step-father when she was 12 years old and one was raped by her cousin when she was 17. When she was 23, her husband (who was her boyfriend at the time) physically assaulted her twice:

*I was beaten and stabbed by him simply because he saw me talking to my ex-boyfriend. Now he sexually abuses me all the time when he is drunk. He normally forces me to have sex with him even in the early hours when he arrives home.*

Of the 144 women who had experienced multiple sexual abuse, 120 (83.3 percent) did so within the context of multiple physical abuse perpetrated by their intimate partners.

Only eight women recorded multiple sexual abuse but no physical abuse. Of these, four were sexually abused by a family member other than an intimate partner: one was abused by her foster-father when she was five years old, one by her uncle when she was eight years old, one by her uncle when she was sixteen, and one by her grandfather when she was eight. Of the other four women reporting multiple sexual abuse but no physical abuse, all were abused by intimate partners: two by their boyfriends and two by their husbands. But in these cases it was not really clear that there was no overt violence surrounding the sexual abuse. As one of the women said:

*I was sexually abused without knowing it. My husband used to force me to sleep with him whether I liked it or not.*

All these cases reveal the fine line between overt physical violence, the threat of such violence and patriarchal authority. Clearly, the young girls abused by their uncles, a foster-father and a grandfather were in a weak position in relation to their abusers: overt violence was not necessary to abuse them sexually. However, one of the four women recording multiple sexual abuse by an intimate partner but no physical abuse said:

*He often had sex with me without my consent. I didn't know it was rape. Sometimes I was drunk.*

This highlights a contentious issue in the field of sexual violence – the role of alcohol in sexual abuse. According to Testa, ‘a limited number of survey studies provide weak evidence of an association between men’s use of substances and perpetration of sexual aggression toward women (but) there is somewhat stronger evidence supporting a link between women’s substance use and their experiences of sexual victimization through a variety of potential mechanisms’ (Testa, 2004: 1496 - 1497). Such “potential mechanisms” include the inability to consent to sex. The Sexual Offences Bill provides that anyone ‘in an altered state of consciousness, including under the influence of any medicine, drug, alcohol or other substance, to the extent that (their) consciousness or judgement is adversely affected’ is deemed incapable of consenting to sex, and, should this provision pass in to law (as seems likely), it remains to be seen how both the reporting of sexual abuse and the criminal justice system will be affected.

While the Camdeboo survey did not ask questions about alcohol and sexual abuse, fifty women nevertheless raised the matter. Twenty eight said that their perpetrator was drunk when they were abused; twelve said they were drunk when they were abused, and ten said that both they and their abusers were drunk during the sexual abuse. Service providers constantly deal, in one way or another, with the problem of alcohol and (sexual) violence against women. The role of alcohol as a “trigger” factor for perpetrators of sexual abuse is not clearly understood, but many service providers are familiar with the following kinds of stories related to interviewers during the Camdeboo survey:

*When my husband is drunk and I am tired and he wants sex then he forces me to have sex. I did not know this is abuse.*

*My husband assaulted me and raped me in front of the children. He was drunk.*

*My boyfriend was drinking with my brothers, and when he was drunk he demanded sex. When I refused he started hitting me and I let him rape me. Because of that I lost our baby.*

Service providers (particularly the police) often point to the risks of alcohol abuse in contributing to women becoming victims of sexual assault. They are also familiar with the following kinds of stories related to interviewers during the Camdeboo survey:

*I got raped by a stranger while I was drunk. He beat me and dragged me to a nearby toilet and raped me.*

*I was raped in the street while I was drunk by an unknown man. The police are still looking for the rapist.*

*My boyfriend raped me while I was pregnant and drunk on the farm.*

*Often when I am drunk my boyfriend has sex with me without my permission, but I didn't know it was rape.*

And service providers also frequently deal with sexual abuse arising in the context of both parties being drunk, such as the following stories related to interviewers during the Camdeboo survey:

*I am being sexually abused every time when I am drunk by my boyfriend. It usually happens when he is drunk.*

*My husband was a heavy drinker. When I fell pregnant with my fourth child he became worse. One weekend while we were drunk, he cut my stomach open and tried to take out the baby, but I was saved by the neighbours. He would force me to have sex in front of the children. Because he didn't want to stop, my daughter's boyfriend stabbed him and he died.*

Other researchers have considered the role of alcohol abuse in sexual assault (for example, Lievore: 112 – 113) and domestic violence (for example, Jewkes et al, 2002: 1613). I believe that more research is needed in this area, but certainly many service providers deal constantly with sexual and domestic violence cases involving alcohol abuse. In some cases alcohol may be used as an indirect means to sexual assault. A number of women recalled experiences similar to that of the woman who said that when she was sixteen years old:

*A family friend raped me after making my parents drunk.*

However, she did not report or disclose this rape because her assailant threatened to report her mother to the authorities for having physically abused her (the victim) two years previously. There were many records of women who had such pressures brought to bear on them, either to perform sex or not to disclose or report a sexual assault. One woman, raped by her brother when she was thirteen, said:

*He said that if I told anyone he would say that I told him he must do it.*

This woman did not report her sexual abuse to the police, but she did disclose it to an aunt. Another woman, raped by her uncle when she was eight, said:

*My uncle blamed me and said I was the one who looked for it. He said he would tell other people I asked him for it.*

She did not report or disclose the abuse. Another woman, raped repeatedly by her stepfather from the age of twelve, said:

*Every time he slept with me he said he would tell other people and my friends that I told him to sleep with me.*

She also did not report or disclose this multiple abuse. And one woman said that when she was seventeen:

*My boyfriend wanted to spread lies about me because I did not want to agree to have sex with him. Eventually I agreed in order to protect my name.*

Not surprisingly, this woman also did not report or disclose her abuse, because she “consented” to it.

#### **4. Socio-Demographic Patterns of Sexual Abuse**

While multiple sexual and physical abuse within intimate relationships was the most commonly recorded type of sexual abuse in the Camdeboo survey, the research also found correlations between socio-demographic variables, particularly race, income and economic dependency, and sexual abuse. Such correlations need to be treated with caution, however, as I will discuss below.

The relationship between educational level and sexual abuse in the Camdeboo illustrates the need to treat statistical correlations between socio-demographic variables and sexual abuse with caution. Table 5 indicates that women with higher levels of education are less likely to experience multiple sexual abuse than women with lower levels of education (although women with tertiary education were most likely to experience one incident of sexual abuse). However, the educational level of women in the Camdeboo is also closely related to their race, income and economic dependence. Thus it cannot be assumed that there is a direct and unmediated causal relationship between educational level and frequency of sexual abuse in the Camdeboo.

**Table 5. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Education**

Frequency of Sexual Abuse	Education										
	None		Primary		Some Secondary		Matric		Tertiary		Total
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Never	49	76.5	199	65.2	233	65.4	122	78.2	39	73.6	642
Once	6	9.4	28	9.2	51	14.3	20	12.8	9	17.0	114
Twice	1	1.6	11	3.6	17	4.8	5	3.2	2	3.8	36
Twice+	5	7.8	46	15.1	42	11.8	8	5.1	2	3.8	103
Cont.	3	4.7	21	6.9	13	3.7	1	0.6	1	1.9	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>356</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>934</b>

The research also indicated a clear correlation between race and frequency of sexual abuse, as Table 6 indicates.

**Table 6. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Race**

Frequency of Abuse	African		Coloured		White		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	106	57.3	466	70.4	70	80.5	642	68.7
2 Once	29	15.7	75	11.3	9	10.3	113	12.1
3 Twice	13	7.0	20	3.0	2	2.3	35	3.7
4 Twice +	26	14.1	74	11.2	5	5.7	105	11.2
5 Cont.	11	5.9	27	4.1	1	1.1	39	4.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>934</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 6 indicates higher rates of sexual abuse amongst African women in the Camdeboo. 57.3 of African women said they had never been sexually abused, while 70.4 percent of Coloured women said they had never been sexually abused. 80.5 percent of White women said they had never experienced sexual abuse. 20 percent of African women recorded multiple sexual abuse, 15.3 percent of Coloured women recorded multiple sexual abuse, and 6.8 percent of White women recorded multiple sexual abuse. However, the variable “race” is at best a dubious one, and at the very least needs to be interpreted with reference to broader cultural, social and economic factors: race is a crude variable which is never perfectly congruent with these factors. Even when used as a crude variable, race is mediated by other socio-demographic variables, such as income, and it should be noted that the sample of African women contained a higher percentage of

women with low income and higher levels of economic dependency (amongst which group the highest rates of intimate partner sexual abuse are found, irrespective of race) than the samples of Coloured or White women. This reflects the racial distribution of income amongst women in the Camdeboo. In the Camdeboo survey I recorded the respondent's own income and the household income, thus allowing a rough measurement of economic dependency. When income and economic dependency are taken into consideration, the correlation between race and sexual abuse becomes less marked, as the following tables illustrate.

**Table 7. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Race (African) and Own Income**

Frequency of Abuse	Own Income												Total	
	R 0		R 1- R 400		R 401 - R 800		R 801 – R 1600		R1 601 - R 3200		R 3201- R 6400			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1 Never	45	49.5	23	67.6	23	62.2	10	66.6	3	60	2	66.6	106	57.3
2 Once	14	15.4	4	11.8	6	16.2	3	20.0	2	40	-	-	29	15.7
3 Twice	7	7.7	2	9.5	1	2.7	2	13.3	-	-	1	33.3	13	7.0
4 Twice+	17	18.7	4	11.8	5	13.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	26	14.1
5 Cont.	8	8.8	1	2.9	2	5.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 8. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Race (Coloured) and Own Income**

Frequency of Abuse	Own Income												Total	
	R 0		R 1- R 400		R 401 - R 800		R 801 – R 1600		R 1 601- R 3200		R 3201- R 6400			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1 Never	211	69.2	110	67.1	101	72.1	21	72.4	20	95.2	3	100	466	70.4
2 Once	37	12.2	24	14.6	9	6.4	4	13.8	1	4.8	-	-	75	11.3
3 Twice	4	1.3	6	3.7	9	6.4	1	3.4	-	-	-	-	20	3.0
4 Twice+	40	13.1	16	9.8	16	11.4	2	6.9	-	-	-	-	74	11.2
5 Cont.	13	4.3	8	4.9	5	3.6	1	3.4	-	-	-	-	27	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 9. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Race (White) and Own Income**

Frequency of Abuse	Own Income												Total	
	R 0		R 1- R 400		R 401 - R 800		R 801 – R 1600		R 1 601 – R 3200		R 3201- R 6400			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1 Never	15	88.2	-	-	5	71.4	3	100	27	81.8	20	74.1	70	80.5
2 Once	-	-	-	-	1	14.3	-	-	4	12.1	4	14.8	9	10.3
3 Twice	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	3.0	1	3.7	2	2.3
4 Twice+	1	5.9	-	-	1	14.3	-	-	1	3.0	2	7.4	5	5.7
5 Cont.	1	5.9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>100</b>

For all race groups, rates of multiple sexual abuse were highest amongst those who had lower income. 100 percent of African women experiencing multiple sexual abuse had an income of less than R800.00 per month, while 97 percent of Coloured women experiencing multiple sexual abuse had an income of less than R800.00 per month. Only six White women experienced multiple sexual abuse, and three (50 percent) of them had an income of less than R 800.00 per month. Two (33.3 percent) had incomes of between R 3 201.00 and R 6 400.00 (Income level six), but only one also experienced multiple physical abuse: she was sexually (and physically) abused twenty five years ago by her deceased husband. ‘He used to come home drunk and force himself on me,’ she said. The other white woman who experienced multiple sexual abuse was abused when she was ten years old by a family friend and again by a friend when she was twenty five. She did not report or disclose any of her abuses.

Out of the 144 women who reported multiple sexual abuse, 138 (95.8 percent) had an income of less than R 800.00 per month. Low income clearly puts women at high risk of multiple sexual abuse, irrespective of race, and this risk is exacerbated by economic dependence, as the following tables indicate. As a rough measure of economic dependence, I subtracted the woman’s own income level from the household income level. Thus, a woman who had no income (Own Income level 1) living in a household which had an income of between R401.00 and R800.00 (Household Income level 3) was considered to have an economic dependency of 2.

**Table 10. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Race (African) and Economic Dependence**

Frequency of Abuse	Dependence										Total	
	0		1		2		3		4			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	27	52.9	34	69.4	21	43.8	17	58.6	7	87.5	106	57.3
2 Once	9	17.6	9	18.4	7	14.5	4	13.8	-	-	29	15.7
3 Twice	4	7.8	3	6.1	2	4.2	4	13.8	-	-	13	7
4 Twice+	8	15.7	1	2	13	27.1	3	10.3	1	-	26	14.1
5 Cont.	3	5.9	2	4	5	10.4	1	3.4	-	-	11	5.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>185</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 11. Frequency of Sexual Abuse by Race (Coloured) and Economic Dependence**

Frequency of Abuse	Dependence										Total	
	0		1		2		3		4			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	175	77.4	108	69.7	120	66.7	44	62.9	15	65.2	466	70.4
2 Once	19	8.4	17	11	24	13.3	11	15.7	4	17.4	75	11.3
3 Twice	9	4	4	2.6	6	3.3	1	1.4	-	-	20	3
4 Twice+	16	7.1	19	12.3	23	12.8	10	14.3	3	13	74	11.2
5 Cont.	7	3.1	7	4.5	7	3.9	4	5.7	1	4.4	27	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>100</b>

While not all poor women are economically dependent on abusive partners, the highest rates of multiple sexual abuse were found amongst women with low income and who were economically dependent on the household income. The highest rates of multiple sexual abuse (and sexual abuse overall) were found amongst African women who had no personal income (Own Income level 1) and whose dependency level was 2 (that is, the Household Income level was between R401.00 and R800.00): 42.9 percent of these women reported multiple sexual abuse, significantly higher than the 15.4 percent of women who reported multiple sexual abuse in the survey overall. Amongst Coloured women the highest rates of multiple sexual abuse (25 percent) were also found amongst those who had an Own Income level 1 and a dependency level of 2. As Jewkes and Abrahams note, ‘in relationships of dependency, women find it very difficult to protect themselves from sexual exploitation and very often have to tolerate abuse’ (Jewkes and Abrahams: 1239).

Taken as a crude variable, there appears to be a correlation between race and sexual abuse in the Camdeboo, with African women suffering higher rates of sexual abuse than Coloured or White women. However, the highest rates of sexual (and physical) abuse were found in Ward Six, where 63 percent of women recorded having experienced sexual abuse (as compared to 31.3 percent for the survey as a whole), and 30 percent multiple sexual abuse (as compared to 15.4 percent for the survey as a whole). 86 percent of the population living in this Ward is classified African and 14 percent Coloured. It is also the most densely populated Ward in the Camdeboo and has the highest concentration of poor African women. In the survey, 46 percent of the African women living in Ward Six recorded no personal income, and 85.3 percent less than R800 per month. Only in Ward Six were the recorded rates of sexual (and physical) abuse of African women higher than for Coloured women in the other wards of the Camdeboo, and it is precisely in Ward Six that the greatest concentration of poor and economically dependent African women is to be found. Further, in Ward Six, the rates of sexual (and physical) abuse of Coloured women were substantially higher than in the other wards of the Camdeboo. 54.2 percent of Coloured women living in Ward Six recorded having experienced sexual abuse (compared to 29.6 percent for Coloured women in the survey as a whole), and 25 percent multiple sexual abuse (compared to 15.3 percent for Coloured women in the survey as a whole). 40 percent of Coloured women in Ward Six recorded no personal income, and 92 percent less than R800 per month.

The high rates of sexual abuse recorded by African women in the survey were related to the concentration of poor African women in Ward Six. While only 93 (or 9.6 percent) of the 971 women surveyed were from Ward Six, 58 (or 36 percent) of the total number with an income of less than R800 per month were found in Ward Six, and it was amongst this income category that the highest rates of sexual abuse were found.

In Ward Five, 26.2 percent of African women recorded sexual abuse compared to 29 percent of Coloured women and 21.9 percent of White women. In Ward Four, where there were small cell sizes of African and White women (11 and 3 respectively, compared to 209 Coloured women), 36.4 percent of African women recorded sexual abuse

compared to 28.7 percent of Coloured women and 33.3 percent of White women. Ward Three also had a small cell size of only two African women, neither of whom recorded sexual abuse, compared to the 24 percent of Coloured women who recorded sexual abuse. In Ward Two, 26.2 percent of African women recorded sexual abuse, compared to 28.2 percent of Coloured women and 21.9 percent of White women. And in Ward One, 28 percent of African women recorded sexual abuse, compared to 27.5 percent of Coloured women and 10 percent of White women.

In short, the survey found no significant variation in the correlation between race and sexual abuse, but it did find a significant correlation between personal income (mediated by economic dependence) and sexual abuse. Women with an income of less than R800 a month were 3.5 times more likely to experience multiple sexual abuse than women whose personal income was over R800 a month, yet women with a personal income of less than R800 a month were marginally less likely to experience one or two incidents of sexual abuse than women whose personal income was over R800 a month.

More specifically, the most significant socio-demographic correlation was between personal income (mediated by economic dependence) and intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse. Women with a personal income of less than R800 a month were 3.6 times more likely to experience intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse than women whose income was more than R800 a month. Clearly, this is important for understanding the underreporting of sexual abuse in the Camdeboo.

## **Chapter Three. The Underreporting of Sexual Violence Against Women in the Camdeboo**

Numerous studies have confirmed high rates of underreporting of sexual violence against women, yet there remains considerable disagreement over its nature and extent. Much of this disagreement stems from the kind of problems relating to researching violence against women discussed in Chapter One. On the one hand, different definitions of sexual violence employed in research can lead to differing estimates of underreporting. As Lievore notes, ‘as surveys differ in relation to the nature of what is counted as a sexual offence, the proportion of incidents that respondents say they have reported to police can vary, as can the relative weight given to different reasons for not reporting’ (Lievore: 27). On the other hand, factors pertaining to the implementation of survey research, such as the nature of the survey (whether generic or dedicated), the method of questioning involved, sampling procedures and interviewer bias can all affect estimates of underreporting (see, for example, Ruch et al: 14).

Lievore also points out that ‘theorization of post-sexual assault reporting behaviours is inadequate, as relatively few studies have focused on variables that influence victims’ decisions to report’ (Lievore: 26). Theorizing underreporting, however, is not simply a matter of focusing on variables impacting on reporting decisions: the selection of variables themselves indicates something about the theoretical approach to researching underreporting. Ruch et al also note that ‘relatively little theoretical or empirical research has focused on factors influencing reporting of sexual assault to the police’ (Ruch et al: 10). Referring to those studies which have, they suggest that there are ‘strikingly conflicting results as to precisely which variables most influence a woman’s decision to report a sexual assault to the police’ and argue that this ‘may reflect numerous factors, such as differences in samples, examination of only completed sexual assault or both completed and attempted sexual assault, instruments used to measure trauma, the time period, and type of statistical analysis’ (Ruch et al: 14). However, the different interpretations of the factors influencing underreporting are not simply reflections of differing methods of sampling, measurement, variable selection or analysis. Explanations

of underreporting need to take into account both the societal context within which the abuse occurs and the subjective perceptions of sexually abused women themselves. Because of this, it is necessary to understand that reporting sexual violence to the police is only one amongst a range of coping or help-seeking strategies that women who have been sexually abused may follow.

Of the 292 women who recorded sexual abuse in the Camdeboo survey, 68 (23.3 percent) had reported it to the police, while 224 (76.7 percent) had not. 126 (43.2 percent) had disclosed their sexual abuse, while 166 (56.8 percent) had never disclosed it to anyone else (until they did so to the survey interviewer). This means that, in the Camdeboo, about one in four women reported their sexual abuse to the police, while about one in two disclosed it to someone else. Only four women (5.8 percent) who reported sexual abuse to the police did not disclose the abuse. This supports Kaukinen's evidence for the "nesting" of help-seeking strategies. (I will discuss the reasons why these four women reported but did not disclose their sexual abuses are below). In addition to these broad statistics, the survey also revealed a number of significant patterns of reporting and disclosure.

Firstly, while it was possible to establish correlations between certain socio-demographic variables, particularly race, income and economic dependence, and the underreporting of sexual abuse, such correlations should be treated with caution. I will discuss some of these correlations below.

Secondly, and in accordance with research into the effects of relational distance on underreporting, women were far more likely to report (and disclose) sexual assaults by strangers than by people known to them, particularly an intimate partner.

Thirdly, sexual abuse in intimate relations was strongly associated with physical abuse, and 83.3 percent of the women who had experienced multiple sexual abuse did so within the context of multiple physical abuse by their intimate partners. This supports research pointing to the overlap of different forms of abuse. This overlap of physical and sexual

abuse in intimate relationships also had important effects on the underreporting of sexual abuse. Women who had experienced sexual and physical abuse within intimate relationships were more likely to report their physical abuse to the police than their sexual abuse. It could thus be suggested that many women were not underreporting their sexual abuse so much as minimising it.

Finally, nearly 60 percent cited dissatisfaction with the criminal justice system as their primary reason for not reporting their sexual abuse to the police, while nearly 20 percent said that fear of reprisal was their primary reason for not reporting their abuse. However, the reasons women gave for not reporting their sexual abuse to the police need to be interpreted with caution, and I will discuss this further below.

### **1. Socio-Demographic Patterns of Reporting and Disclosure**

Kaukinen argues that ‘decisions to seek help vary along a number of social dimensions, including gender, race, and the victim-offender relationship’ and suggests that ‘an examination of how these factors shape and determine help-seeking strategies is an important academic pursuit that may offer directions for social policy and the expansion of victim services to appropriately attend to the victims of all types of crime’ (Kaukinen, 2004: 968). Other researchers, in positivist vein, have also paid special attention to the relationship between “objective” socio-demographic, relational or sexual incident-related variables and the underreporting of sexual violence. Fisher et al, for example, state that ‘research has revealed that demographic characteristics of victims were related to reporting sexual victimization to the police’ (Fisher et al: 12). In particular, they note the effects of race, age, income and education on reporting to the police. But the results of research linking such variables to reporting behaviour are frequently contradictory. Some put this down to methodological disparities and/or inadequate statistical analysis. I believe that the contradictory findings of such research have more to do with the approach itself, one consequence of which is an endless stream of empirical correlations of varying significance – and little substantive explanation. The relationship between education and underreporting is a case in point. According to Fisher et al, Lizotte found

that the higher a woman’s education, the ‘less likely she was to report being raped to the police’ (see Fisher et al: 12). Clay-Warner and Burt, on the other hand, cite Lizotte as finding that ‘highly educated victims were more likely to report’ (Clay-Warner and Burt: 157-158), whereas Felson and Paré argue that education is ‘unrelated to reporting’ (Felson and Paré: 25). Tables 12 and 13 below suggest that women in the Camdeboo with no education or with tertiary education are less likely to report or disclose their sexual abuse. However, the cell sizes of women with no or tertiary education recording sexual abuse in the Camdeboo survey are too small to make valid statistical inferences.

**Table 12. Reporting of Sexual Abuse by Education**

Education Level	Report Sex				Total
	Yes		No		
	No.	%	No.	%	
None	2	13.3	13	86.6	15
Primary	23	21.7	83	78.3	106
Some Secondary	29	23.6	94	76.4	123
Matric	13	38.2	21	61.8	34
Tertiary	1	7.1	13	92.9	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>292</b>

**Table 13. Disclosure of Sexual Abuse by Education**

Education Level	Disclose Sex				Total
	Yes		No		
	No.	%	No.	%	
None	5	33.3	10	66.6	15
Primary	46	43.4	60	56.6	106
Some Secondary	54	43.9	69	56.1	123
Matric	18	52.9	16	47.1	34
Tertiary	3	21.4	11	78.6	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>292</b>

Whether educational status is related to reporting or not may well be of interest to researchers, but the statistical correlation on its own cannot explain the relationship. In fact, even a strong statistical correlation between any single independent variable and the dependent variable (underreporting) needs to be treated with caution, for the simple reason that no single variable is truly “independent”. All variables exist within a complex

socio-historical web. As Levine puts it, ‘no social science variable has a Platonic existence, separate from the flow of events’ (Levine: 157). Educational levels on their own cannot explain differential rates of reporting and disclosing.

Race is another variable frequently linked to underreporting of sexual assault, and Fisher et al write that race appears to affect the reporting of sexual violence (see Fisher et al: 12). But the relationship between race and underreporting is unclear. Mahoney, for example, states that in America ‘race is...important in that African American women are less likely than White women to seek help’ from the police (Mahoney: 997). Other researchers hold that black women are more likely than white women to use the police for dealing with interpersonal violence, including sexual abuse (see Kaukinen, 2004: 971). Wolf et al note that Native American women were more reluctant to report sexual abuse to the police because they feared biased responses from both the police and the criminal justice system more generally (see Wolf et al: 125). Wolf et al’s findings clearly demonstrate the problem of isolating a variable from its socio-historical context: as Kaukinen warns, the relationship between race and police reporting is ‘complex’, and research suggests the need to ‘examine the conditional effects of race and the victim-offender relationship on decisions to call the police’ (ibid: 971). For any single independent variable there are always a multitude of “conditional effects” including other socio-demographic factors but, and perhaps more importantly, broader socio-cultural conditions and the victim’s own perceptions of these. Hence, as Kaukinen notes, citing Wyatt, while ‘race differences in the stigma associated with victimization’ may ‘affect victims’ decisions to seek help...the effects of sexual victimization can be influenced by perceptions of the experience, attributions of blame, and expectations of how victims will be judged by those around them’ and these ‘vary by culture and national origin’ (see ibid: 971).

Tables 14 and 15 indicate that White women in the Camdeboo were less likely to report or disclose sexual abuse than African or Coloured women. However, the two tables indicate reporting and disclosure rates for all forms of sexual abuse, and White women were less likely to experience multiple sexual abuse than African or Coloured women.

**Table 14. Reporting of Sexual Abuse by Race**

Race	Report Sex				Total
	Yes		No		
	No	%	No	%	
African	17	21.5	62	78.5	79
Coloured	50	25.5	146	74.5	196
White	1	5.9	16	94.1	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>76.7</b>	<b>292</b>

**Table 15. Disclosure of Sexual Abuse by Race**

Race	Disclose Sex				Total
	Yes		No		
	No	%	No	%	
African	35	44.3	44	55.7	79
Coloured	87	44.4	108	55.6	196
White	4	23.5	13	76.5	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>43.2</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>292</b>

Tables 16 and 17 indicate that African women were less likely to report intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse to the police than Coloured women, but more likely to do so than White women (however, the cell size for White women was very small). African women were also less likely to disclose intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse than either Coloured or White women, although the difference in disclosure rates between African and Coloured women was not particularly significant.

**Table 16. Reporting and Disclosure of Intimate Multiple Physical and Sexual Abuse by Race**

Report/ Disclose	African				Coloured				White			
	Report		Disclose		Report		Disclose		Report		Disclose	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	21	70	8	26.6	45	52.9	20	23.5	4	80	3	60
2 Once	5	16.7	7	23.3	16	18.8	18	21.2	1	20	-	-
3 Twice	1	3.3	3	10	8	9.4	7	8.2	-	-	-	-
4 Twice +	3	10	12	40	16	18.8	40	47.1	-	-	2	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 17. Reporting and Disclosure of Sexual Abuse in Intimate Multiple Physical and Sexual Relationships by Race**

Report/ Disclose	African				Coloured				White			
	Report		Disclose		Report		Disclose		Report		Disclose	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	27	90	17	56.6	73	86	55	64.7	5	100	5	100
2 Once	0	0	5	16.7	1	1.2	6	7.1	-	-	-	-
3 Twice	1	3.3	3	10	2	2.4	2	2.4	-	-	-	-
4 Twice +	2	6.6	5	16.7	9	10.4	22	25.9	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 17, when compared with Table 16, indicates that African women were particularly likely to minimise their sexual abuse when reporting to the police, but they were less likely than either Coloured or White women to minimise their sexual abuse when disclosing.

However, as discussed above, even when using race as a crude variable, it is important to consider its intersection with other socio-demographic variables. The patterns of reporting and disclosure indicated that for all races, rates of underreporting of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse were highest amongst women with low personal income: the highest rates of underreporting were found amongst women with no personal income and an economic dependency level of two or three. 100 percent of Coloured woman with no personal income and a dependency level of three did not report their sexual abuse, while only 16 percent of these women reported any of their physical abuse to the police. Similarly, 100 percent of African women with no income and a dependency level of three did not report their sexual abuse, and none of this group reported any of their abuse to the police.

Tables 18 to 21 below indicate the patterns of reporting and disclosure of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse by race and personal income.

**Table 18. Reporting of Multiple Sexual and Physical By Race and Own Income (African)**

Report	Own Income						Total	
	1		2		3			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	16	72.7	2	66.6	3	60	21	70
2 Once	4	18.2	-	-	1	20	5	16.7
3 Twice	-	-	-	-	1	20	1	3.3
4 Twice +	2	9.1	1	33.3	-	-	3	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 19. Disclosure of Multiple Sexual and Physical By Race and Own Income (African)**

Disclose	Own Income						Total	
	1		2		3			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	6	27.3	1	33.3	1	20	8	26.7
2 Once	6	27.3	-	-	1	20	7	23.3
3 Twice	3	13.6	-	-	-	-	3	10
4 Twice +	7	31.8	2	66.6	3	60	12	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 20. Reporting of Multiple Sexual and Physical By Race and Own Income (Coloured)**

Report	Own Income								Total	
	1		2		3		4			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	30	63.8	9	47.4	5	31.3	1	33.3	45	52.9
2 Once	9	19.1	4	21.1	3	18.8	-	-	16	18.8
3 Twice	3	6.4	1	5.3	4	25	-	-	8	9.4
4 Twice +	5	10.6	5	26.3	4	25	2	66.6	16	18.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 21. Disclosure of Multiple Sexual and Physical By Race and Own Income (Coloured)**

Disclose	Own Income								Total	
	1		2		3		4			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Never	14	29.8	4	21.1	2	12.5	-	-	20	23.5
2 Once	11	23.4	4	21.1	3	18.8	-	-	18	21.2
3 Twice	4	8.5	3	15.8	-	-	-	-	7	8.2
4 Twice +	18	38.3	8	42.1	11	68.8	3	100	40	47.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>100</b>

Of the five White women who experienced intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse, only one reported her abuse to the police while two disclosed. It is impossible from this small cell to draw any conclusions about the relationship between personal income, dependency and the reporting of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse by White women.

Similarly, the clustering of African women who recorded intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse into the zero personal income group makes it difficult to draw any conclusions about the relationship between their income and dependency levels and their reporting and disclosure of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse. Nevertheless, it seems likely that African women, irrespective of personal income and dependency, do report intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse to the police at lower rates than Coloured women, whilst disclosing it at slightly higher rates than Coloured women. It may well be that, at least until recently, African women in the Camdeboo have felt less comfortable in reporting their abuse to the police and have relied more on informal sources for help.

In the Camdeboo survey, it was found that white women were less likely to report sexual abuse to the police than African or Coloured women, but this was not necessarily because they were white: in fact, wealthier women generally were less likely to report sexual assault to the police, but they were also less likely to experience ongoing and increasingly violent sexual assaults from their intimate partners, since they had more resources to leave abusive relationships. However, there were no significant racial differences in the reporting of sexual assault by strangers. This indicates that while there is, in the Camdeboo, a statistical correlation between race and underreporting, it is conditional upon other factors, including, but not restricted to, income and relational distance.

Further, while independent variables cannot be considered in isolation from one another or from their socio-historic contexts, neither can they be accepted as unproblematic in and of themselves. In many cases, the manner in which a variable is constituted may render an apparent correlation between it and the dependent variable more or less

meaningless. Felson and Paré, for example, assert that a victim’s income status is unrelated to reporting (see Felson and Paré: 25). However, in their research, Felson and Paré measured not the income of the victim herself, but rather her household income. Poorer women undoubtedly face numerous barriers to reporting sexual violence to the police, but these are not necessarily related in unmediated manner to household income. Using household income as a measure of a woman’s income status says nothing about her economic dependency (often on her abuser) and, as Walby and Myhill note, it is necessary to disaggregate socio-economic data so that ‘woman is not hidden in the household’ (Walby and Myhill: 520). The source of a woman’s income also needs to be considered, since the conditions attached to different sources of income may well affect a woman’s reporting choices.

## 2. Reporting and Disclosure by Relational Distance

Many researchers have found that reporting of sexual assault is strongly influenced by the relational distance between the victim and the offender, and Lievore states that ‘one of the most robust findings in sexual assault research is that the odds of a victim reporting to police decreases when the victim is known to the offender’ (Lievore: 28). Tables 22 and 23 indicate the reporting and disclosure of sexual abuse of women in the Camdeboo by relational distance.

**Table 22. Reporting of Sexual Abuse by Relational Distance**

Perpetrator	Report to Police				Total
	Yes		No		
	N	%	N	%	
1 Boyfriend	19	15.8	101	84.2	120
2 Husband/Spouse	8	8.1	91	91.9	99
3 Father	1	33.3	2	66.7	3
4 Other Family	8	32	17	68.0	25
5 Other Known	13	61.9	8	38.1	21
6 Stranger	19	79.2	5	20.8	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>23.3</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>76.7</b>	<b>292</b>

**Table 23. Disclosure of Sexual Abuse by Relational Distance**

Perpetrator	Disclose				Total
	Yes		No		
	N	%	N	%	
1 Boyfriend	50	41.7	70	58.3	120
2 Husband/Spouse	25	25.3	74	74.8	99
3 Father	2	66.6	1	33.3	3
4 Other Family	14	56	11	44	25
5 Other Known	15	71.4	6	28.6	21
6 Stranger	19	79.2	5	20.8	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>42.8</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>292</b>

Tables 22 and 23 show that 79.2 percent of women reported sexual abuse by a stranger to the police, while only 8.1 percent reported sexual abuse by their husbands or spouses to the police and 15.8 percent reported sexual abuse by their boyfriends to the police. In all, only 12.3 percent of women reported sexual abuse by an intimate partner to the police. The rate of disclosure of sexual abuse by intimate partners was 34.2 percent, with just over one quarter of women sexually abused by their husbands disclosing the abuse.

Of the 24 women raped by strangers, all three African women reported (but one did not disclose – she said she was drunk at the time of the rape), one white woman did not report or disclose (she was raped when 6 years old, 40 years ago). Of the 19 Coloured women raped by a stranger, 4 did not report (and three of these did not disclose – all three were drunk at the time of the rape). One was raped when 16 years old: she did disclose the assault but did not report it, and said she did not believe the police could do anything to help her. The only women who said that she had experienced a non-violent stranger rape did in fact report it (but she did not disclose it). In her words:

*I woke up somewhere in the street and realised I had been raped. I was drunk. The police said: “If you don’t know who raped you, how must we know?”*

Gender activists and advocacy workers in South Africa frequently proclaim that few women report their rapes to the police (one in nine, for example). However, it seems to be the case, and certainly was in the Camdeboo, that different types of sexual assault elicit

different help-seeking strategies and police reporting. The most significant pattern of underreporting found in the Camdeboo was along lines of relational distance. Women were far more likely to report sexual assaults by a stranger than by intimate partners as Tables 22 and 23 show. In the Camdeboo, eight out of ten women raped by strangers reported the abuse to the police, but only slightly more than one in ten sexually abused by an intimate partner reported the abuse to the police. Disclosure by relational distance followed the same pattern as reporting, but at a higher rate. Women were least likely to disclose sexual abuse by their husbands and most likely to disclose sexual abuse by a stranger. It could be suggested that patriarchal notions of spousal loyalty preclude many women from disclosing their intimate partner sexual abuse.

While the impact of relational distance on underreporting is certainly a “robust finding” in research on underreporting, including the Camdeboo survey, Lievore is right to point out that the relationship of the victim to the perpetrator also ‘mediates reporting through a complex interaction with variables such as gender, race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, fear of and dependency on the offender, personal and cultural values around family and gender roles, and other social and psychological factors, such as rape myths’ (Lievore: 116). Women are far more likely to report a sexual assault carried out by a stranger to the police than one by an intimate partner, but this also needs to be explained, and such an explanation will not be produced simply by measuring relational distance in more refined ways. One type of explanation for the impact of relational distance on the underreporting of sexual abuse, frequently invoked by feminist researchers, is based on the notion of “rape myths”.

Mahoney argues that there is ‘considerable evidence that women sexually assaulted by persons they know are less likely to seek formal help than women sexually assaulted by strangers...research indicates that as the victim/offender relationship becomes more intimate, attribution of blame to the victim increases, and level of perceived harm to the victim decreases...It is thus not surprising that survivors of intimate sexual assault may not know if they deserve protection or help and may be uncertain if they would receive support from the police or other service providers’ (Mahoney: 996 – 997). Such findings

indicate the pervasive nature of rape myths. As Jewkes et al point out, ‘many women will only try to report to the police incidents which fall within popular notions of “rape”’ (Jewkes et al, 2002: 1232). Mahoney adds that ‘to date, most analyses that include victim/offender relationship compare assaults by strangers to assaults by known offenders, or group wife rape survivors with women assaulted by other family members’ and that because of this ‘there has been little exploration of the differences within the group of known offender rape survivors by level of acquaintance. Available evidence indicates that there is considerable variability within this group’ (Mahoney: 994). Hence Mahoney quite rightly argues that future research ‘must refine the measurement of level of acquaintanceship to better explore the impact of victim/offender relationship in sexual assault. For example, information, such as the length of time known, length of time dating/married/cohabiting, and perceived level of commitment could be used to construct a more accurate measure’ (Mahoney: 1011).

Many women respondents to the Camdeboo survey could be classified as what Koss refers to as “unacknowledged rape victim”: ‘a woman who has experienced a sexual assault that would legally qualify as rape but who does not conceptualise herself as a rape victim’ (Koss: 195), and much research has revealed high numbers of “unacknowledged rape victims” (see Peterson and Muelenhard: 129 - 130). For Peterson and Muelenhard, one reason for this is that such victims are ‘influenced by rape myths that define rape narrowly or that blame the victim for rape’ (ibid: 130). Burt defines rape myths as ‘prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists’ (quoted in ibid: 130), including those which hold that “only bad girls get raped”, “women ask for it”, and “rapists are sex-starved, insane, or both” (quoted in ibid: 130). Other rape myths include beliefs that “real rape” is only perpetrated by strangers and involves physical and violent coercion such that if a woman is not badly injured during the incident she “proved” her consent by not resisting. Clay-Warner and Burt point out that rape myths distinguishing “aggravated” rape (carried out by strangers using considerable violence resulting in visible injury, often inflicted by weapons) from “simple” rapes (carried out by men known to their victims and involving no obvious signs of injury) contribute to the different reporting rates of simple and aggravated rapes (see Clay-Warner and Burt: 151).

Peterson and Muelenhard argue that rape myths are ‘prevalent in our culture’ and it is likely ‘that many rape victims have been exposed to these ideas and that these ideas affect how rape victims conceptualise their own experiences’ and hence their help-seeking strategies (ibid: 130). Not only do women internalise rape myths so as to preclude them from labelling their sexual assaults as rape, but the widespread existence of such myths may prevent them from reporting even those experiences which they themselves would – usually with legal agreement – define as rape. As Lievore puts it, ‘rape myths impose a silence on victims’ experiences of abuse and impact on the way that others respond to them (see Lievore: 29). But, as Peterson and Muelenhard note, even if, ‘despite these myths, victims still label their experiences as rape, these myths might prevent them from telling others because others might blame them or deny that their experiences were rape. In either case, these myths work against the imperative for social change’ (Peterson and Muelenhard: 142. See also Frese et al).

There is much evidence to support the conclusion that many women have internalised at least certain aspects of such rape myths, and that this affects their help-seeking choices (see, for example DuMont et al). DuMont et al’s research into the relationship between rape myths and the police reporting practices of sexually assaulted women is a finely nuanced analysis of the issue. They argue that ‘although aspects of the classic rape portrayal continue to predominate as the legitimating lens through which women may view their right to report...our results suggest that women may be selectively rejecting major components of rape mythology. We found that women who did not resemble the mythologized “real victim” were as likely as women who did to report the assault to the police. There are several explanations for the lack of salience of “real victim” characteristics. It may be that women who have traditionally been viewed as hesitant to seek police protection, and most likely to bear the brunt of police bias, feel increasingly entitled to turn to law enforcement authorities for redress. This could indicate a positive response by women to enhanced police sensitivity and to legal efforts to ease the reporting process’ (DuMont et al: 471). Such findings indicate that legal and cultural reforms can affect the reporting of sexual assault. But DuMont et al also noted that ‘reporting was more likely to occur when the victim was injured. Women who sustained

bruises, lacerations, abrasions, bumps, internal injuries, and/or fractures were approximately three and one half times more likely to contact the police than those who were not clinically injured' (ibid: 478). Similarly, Clay-Warner and Burt found that, even long after rape reform laws were introduced in the United States, 'aggravated rapes continue to be more likely to be reported than simple rapes', evidence that legal reforms in the absence of broader cultural reforms may have little effect on the underreporting of at least some forms of sexual violence against women (see Clay-Warner and Burt: 171). In South Africa, too, simple rapes are far less likely to be reported and, when reported, far less likely to result in conviction than aggravated rapes. Obtaining a conviction in cases where the accused claims consent, and in the absence of visible injury to the complainant, can be extremely difficult, particularly when the accused is an intimate partner of the complainant.

Rape myths are components of broader cultural notions of patriarchal gender relations shaping women's responses to sexual abuse – and men's sexual attitudes towards and relationships with women. These broader ideologies of gender relations may be fluid and contested and may vary with time, but, for many feminists, they are central to understanding the underreporting of sexual violence against women. Jewkes and her colleagues at the South African Medical Research Council have pioneered research into gender attitudes and violence against women (see, for example, Jewkes et al: 1999). In their survey of the prevalence of rape and attempted rape in three provinces in South Africa, Jewkes et al note that it is 'likely that sexual coercion by boyfriends or husbands is underreported, particularly as many women believe that a husband has a right to sex whenever he wants it and research has repeatedly shown that many people in the community restrict the term 'rape' to mean sexual coercion by a stranger or a gang (which may include a boyfriend)' (ibid: 11). They also noted that, amongst respondents to the survey, 'considerable personal agreement or acceptance was expressed with patriarchal gender relations. The responses clearly indicate that this includes subservience of women to their husband, punishment of her by him in some situations, male ownership of women, notions of male sexual entitlement and an interpretation of beating as a sign of

love' (ibid: 8). In the Camdeboo, too, many women expressed compliance with patriarchal gender relations. As one woman said:

*If my husband is drunk and I refuse to have sex with him, then all hell breaks loose. According to our tradition, we women must accept everything because the man is the head of the house.*

This woman, while she disclosed repeated physical abuse and had even been treated in hospital a number of times for injuries, did not consider that she had been sexually abused. She has not reported any of her abuse to the police.

However, with regard to prevailing attitudes towards patriarchal gender relations in the Eastern Cape, Jewkes et al argue that 'the fact that so many women indicate that they hold views which differ from their perceptions of the 'norm' in their culture is a sign that a process of questioning and re-examination is underway among women at a community level' (ibid: 8). Peterson and Muelenhard note that patriarchal gender relations do not only impact upon women's perceptions of their abuse and hence their help-seeking strategies. They also permeate social institutions dealing with victims of sexual abuse. Patriarchal attitudes, practices and behaviours are rife in the South African criminal justice system, and particularly the police, despite attempts at gender transformation. This also affects underreporting, and many women in the Camdeboo alluded to this, as the following quotes, in different ways, illustrate:

*They should change their attitudes. They say they can't interfere with the lives of married people. They should be trained to work with abused women.*

*They must listen to the woman's side of the story.*

*They should learn not to put words into our mouths and lead us to make statements which will make us want to cancel the case or feel guilty.*

*They must employ more women police officers because they will understand the victim's problems.*

The role of patriarchal gender relations and rape myths in shaping responses to sexual violence illustrates the point that understanding underreporting is not simply an exercise in refining variable selection, measurement and statistical analysis. Ruch et al's belief that improved variable selection and measurement, together with multivariate analysis, can overcome the limitations of bivariate analyses which isolate individual independent variables (see Ruch et al: 2 and 18) misses the point: victims of sexual assault are not simply assemblages of discrete variables. Further, the independent variables selected by researchers say something about their underlying theories of underreporting. Ruch et al, for example, consider variables influencing police reporting along three dimensions: those relating to the type of sexual assault, those relating to the victim's demographic characteristics and those relating to victim's levels of post-assault trauma (see Ruch et al: 1). They point out that 'relatively little attention has been paid to victim variables other than her demographic characteristics...and certain assault variables, such as whether the victim resisted the assailant and type of resistance, which may impact on reporting' (ibid: 14). Above all, they argue that 'trauma symptoms which may affect reporting decision-making (such as fear and self-blame) have generally not been measured with validated assessment instruments' (ibid: 14). For them, 'the complexity of decision-making about reporting a sexual assault to the police calls for the systematic measurement of a number of independent variables relating both to the assault and the victim, such as the degree of trauma symptoms and social-demographic variables, and a multivariate statistical analysis' (ibid: 14-15). And, they note, in their study the 'primary basis for selection of independent variables was based on theoretical grounds and the findings of previous research' (ibid: 33). Yet they ignore the wealth of research employing such socio-cultural concepts as patriarchy, rape myths and relational factors such as those emphasized by Piispa. They ignore, in other words, research which employs the full spectrum of an ecological or social psychological approach. Nor do they consider how the victim's own perceptions of her social environment may affect her help-seeking strategies. They remain within a positivist paradigm, seeking ever more sophisticated measurements of the variables supposedly determining reporting behaviour: they note, for example, that the complexity of victim's trauma symptoms required measuring with the 'Sexual Assault Symptom Scale (SASS), a 32-item instrument measuring psychological distress

associated with specific trauma symptoms on a five-point Likert scale' (Ruch et al: 18). It is this kind of myopic empiricism, I believe, that the ecological approach to violence against women challenges. Jewkes et al (1999; 2002a and 2002b), Vogelman (1990) and Peltzer et al provide interesting examples of research into sexual violence in South Africa which considers, in various ways, aspects of an ecological approach, and in particular examine the role of broader social and ideological factors in shaping such violence and responses to it. More generally, Ward (1995) and Gavey (2005) offer compelling insights into the social psychology of rape, examining both victim perceptions and social and institutional responses to rape.

### **3. Reporting and Disclosure of Multiple Abuse: Minimising Sexual Abuse**

While the notion of rape myths provides important insights into the role of relational distance in the underreporting of sexual violence, insofar as they may be internalised by victims and insofar as they may permeate the criminal justice system and other social institutions and structures, Piispa also suggests the need to consider more proximal, interpersonal factors in explaining the underreporting of sexual abuse by intimate partners. Piispa argues that it is important to recognise the 'distinctions between the types of violence, characteristics of the partners, and the cultural contexts in which the violence occurs' and that 'research on violence against women should explore differences in women's experiences and between victims and perpetrators, and study how these connect with various ways of coping with men's violence' (Piispa: 874). In particular, Piispa emphasises the differences between the experiences of women who have experienced a short history of violence and those who experience "partnership terrorism" (see *ibid*: 889 – 890). The former are usually 'startled and shocked after the first episode of violence and usually define it as a unique event that will never be repeated...Early on when the women first seek to comprehend the violence, some look to their own actions for an explanation' (*ibid*: 889). Long-lasting violence, on the other hand, 'often affects the victims' perceptions of themselves by making it difficult for them to define their limits. Their sense of reality disappears and their self-esteem crumbles' (*ibid*: 890). Despite this, most women subjected to partnership terrorism do not remain 'completely passive and

helpless (and) contact others to discuss the violence and its meaning to seek various forms of assistance in attempting to change the man's behaviour. If they are forced to stay in the relationship, they do not stop trying to change the situation' (ibid: 890).

Piispa suggests that there is a 'great deal of variation in help-seeking by type of violence and by its implications to the sufferer, but only a few women remain totally passive in a violent partnership. It is often thought that a woman who is subjected to violence has two options: either to stay in the relationship and succumb to the battering or leave the partnership and get rid of the violence. However, the number of her options does, in fact, seem to be greater than this' (ibid: 897). Especially, women living in partnership terrorism are more likely to seek help through formal channels and to report their abuse to the police than those who have experienced a short history of violence (see ibid: 890). In the Camdeboo survey, 9.5 percent of women who had experienced one incident of sexual abuse by an intimate partner reported their abuse to the police, whereas 23.7 percent of women who experienced continuing multiple sexual abuse by an intimate partner reported their abuse. 26.9 percent of the women who had experienced one incident of sexual abuse by an intimate partner disclosed their abuse, whereas 39.5 percent of women who experienced continuing multiple sexual abuse by an intimate partner disclosed their abuse. This suggests that, as Piispa argues, women who experience multiple sexual abuse are more likely to both report and disclose their abuse than women who have experienced only one incident of sexual abuse. Nevertheless, nearly eighty percent of women who experienced multiple sexual abuse by an intimate partner did not report any of their sexual abuses to the police, and sixty percent did not disclose any of their sexual abuses. (Similarly, only 27 percent of women who experienced one incident of physical abuse by an intimate partner reported the abuse, whereas 43 percent who experienced continuing multiple physical abuse by an intimate partner reported it). In the Camdeboo survey it was found that 130 (90.3 percent) of the 144 women who recorded multiple sexual abuse said that they were abused by their intimate partners. 120 (92.3 percent) of these women experienced multiple physical and sexual abuse within their intimate relationships, but they were far more likely to report their physical abuse to the police than their sexual abuse.

**Table 24. Reporting and Disclosure of Intimate Multiple Physical and Sexual Abuse (Physical Abuse Only)**

Report/Disclose	Report		Disclose	
	Total	%	Total	%
1 Never	70	58.3	33	27.5
2 Once	22	18.3	23	19.2
3 Twice	9	7.5	10	8.3
4 Twice +	19	15.8	54	45.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 25. Reporting and Disclosure of Intimate Multiple Physical and Sexual Abuse (Sexual Abuse Only)**

Report/Disclose	Report		Disclose	
	Total	%	Total	%
1 Never	105	87.5	77	64.2
2 Once	1	0.8	11	9.2
3 Twice	3	2.5	5	4.2
4 Twice +	11	9.2	27	22.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100</b>

From Tables 24 and 25 it can be seen that 50 (41.7 percent) of the women who experienced multiple sexual and physical abuse reported their physical abuse to the police, but only 15 (12.5 percent) reported their sexual abuse. It could be said, therefore, that in the Camdeboo survey, 70 percent of women who experienced multiple sexual and physical abuse minimised their sexual abuse when reporting to the police. Women who had experienced multiple physical abuse but no sexual abuse in an intimate relationship were also more likely to report their abuse to the police than those who had experienced intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse. Of the 125 women who experienced multiple physical but no sexual abuse in an intimate relationship, 62 (49.6 percent) reported their abuse to the police. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from this, however, since the difference is not particularly significant. What is significant, though, is the high rate of minimising of sexual abuse amongst women reporting intimate physical and sexual abuse to the police. This minimising is also apparent in women's disclosure of sexual abuse by intimate partners: while 72.5 percent disclosed physical abuse in their intimate relationships, only 35.8 percent disclosed their sexual abuse. This suggests that patriarchal notions of spousal loyalty apply more strongly to intimate sexual

abuse than to intimate physical abuse, or that there is greater stigma attached to revealing sexual abuse than physical abuse in intimate relationships. More prosaically, it is also the case that it is easier to prove, in legal terms, physical abuse by an intimate partner than sexual abuse, since the latter does not necessarily entail physical injury, making it difficult to prove that the sex was non-consensual. In other words, if a woman is both physically and sexually abused by her partner, why report the sexual abuse?

#### **4. Barriers to Reporting: Women's Perceptions of the Police**

Wolf et al note that much research on underreporting has 'focused on characteristics of victims who call the police or other agencies for help' and that researchers have reached 'contradictory findings regarding which factors (such as marital factors or ethnicity) increase the likelihood of interpersonal violence victims calling the police and which factors apparently have no bearing on this decision' (Wolf et al: 121). They argue that comparisons between studies are limited by methodological differences and the type and source of data. However, they also point out that, in the 1980s and 1990s, 'only the National Crime Survey...has specifically asked abused women why they did *not* call the police, thus shifting the focus from demographic characteristics to women's perceptions and reasoning' (ibid: 121). This represents an important development into survey research on the underreporting of violence against women. Further, as Kaukinen adds, 'aside from asking respondents whether they sought help, victimization surveys need to ask respondents why they sought particular types of help. Taking this approach to an examination of victim decision making suggests the need to continue to integrate social psychological frameworks into theory and research on victim help seeking' (Kaukinen, 2004: 986). Qualitative researchers and service providers have known for a long time that a woman's perceptions of her sexual abuse and societal responses to it are crucial to her help-seeking strategies. While many women do not report sexual violence to the police, they may well either seek help elsewhere, from informal sources (for example, family or friends) or formal sources (for example, medical personnel or social workers), or attempt to cope with it themselves. In other words, reporting sexual violence to the police is just one possible choice of action amongst a wide range of coping or help-seeking strategies

available to women who have experienced sexual violence. Kaukinen identifies three help-seeking strategies commonly used by female victims of violence. Firstly, minimal or no help-seeking; secondly, family and friend help-seeking; and thirdly, substantial help-seeking, including seeking help from family, friends, psychiatrists, social service providers, and the police (see Kaukinen: 967). Although the strategies identified by Kaukinen are not confined to female victims of sexual violence, they do include such victims. Here I simply restrict my discussion of these strategies to sexual violence against women.

Kaukinen argues that ‘conceptualising help-seeking as a three-category variable helps to capture and highlight the qualitative differences between help-seeking and police-reporting strategies and provides for a more accurate examination of the factors affecting these help-seeking decisions’ and that this calls into question the ‘primacy given to the criminal justice system in attending to the needs of victims’ (Kaukinen, 2002: 451). This, I believe, is an important point to bear in mind for those concerned with service provision to victims of sexual assault. Kaukinen also argues that these help-seeking strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive: in fact, they may well be ‘nested or grouped behaviours’ (Kaukinen, 2004: 977). This “nesting” of help-seeking was also found in the Camdeboo survey: only four women reported their sexual abuse to the police without disclosing it. For three of the four, the abuse reported to the police was their only incident of sexual abuse (two of them were drunk at the time of the assault, while the third was raped by her son when she was 55 years old). The fourth woman, now 44 years old, said that when she was 25 she experienced her first incident of sexual abuse when:

*My boyfriend cut my arm open with a fishing hook because I didn't want to have sex with him. Then he forced me to have sex.*

She reported this incident to the police but did not disclose it. Her boyfriend continued to sexually and physically abuse her. When she was 30, she said:

*He hit and stabbed me so many times that I got a mental problem. I tried to overdose with Dazzle, Dettol, asthma tablets and paraffin.*

She has twice reported to the police (including the incident of sexual abuse) and disclosed much of her physical abuse to family members, but she never discussed her boyfriend's sexual assaults with her family. While, within physically and sexually abusive intimate relations, the reporting of physical abuse only to the police is common, it is unusual for a woman to report sexual abuse without disclosing it. One woman had her abuse reported to the police by a third party and was recorded as a non-reporter. She was repeatedly raped by her father between the ages of 12 and 16. She never voluntarily disclosed or reported her abuse. In her words:

*When I was fourteen years old my father assaulted me because I refused to have sex with him. I screamed and begged him to stop hurting me, but he wouldn't listen. Then he locked me in the farmer's storeroom. I never spoke about it, but my mother found out when I became pregnant, although the baby later died. My father was arrested, but I was not prepared to go to court. I have tried to forget, but I don't know if I will ever forget.*

For Kaukinen, underreporting needs to be examined within the context of 'alternative help-seeking behavior', including minimal help-seeking (ibid: 967). Significantly, as far as reporting sexual violence to the police is concerned, Kaukinen claims that 'decisions to report rape may depend on a woman's use of informal help-seeking strategies' (ibid: 970). Citing a study of rape victim crisis centre users by Ruback and Ivie, Kaukinen notes that 67 percent of the women had talked to someone before reporting their abuse to the police. However, such findings should be treated with care. It is service-based data, not population-based, and it is in any case quite probable that women counseled at a crisis centre may be more inclined to contact the police than women who seek help from informal sources. Nor am I sure why Kaukinen seems to classify a crisis centre as an informal rather than a formal source of help. Nevertheless, it is certainly possible that support from informal and formal non-police sources may encourage women to report sexual abuse to the police. Yet, as Lievore points out, 'the expectation that women will promptly report sexual assaults to police is based on the notion of how a rational person would act following criminal victimisation' (Lievore: 31), and Kaukinen notes that 'research...suggests that many victims who are severely traumatized by violence do not seek social support' (Kaukinen, 2004: 972). For Kaukinen, 'rational choice perspectives

assume victims are rational and thoughtful decision makers. Victims act on the basis of what appear to be reasonable assumptions about their crimes...a victim's decision to notify the police of a crime is based on...her calculation of the benefits derived from reporting and the costs incurred' (Kaukinen, 2002: 434). By contrast, Kaukinen argues that feminists situate the reporting of sexual and other violence against women within the broader context of patriarchal social relations. As she writes, 'feminist frameworks take the stance that violence between intimates is less likely to be brought to the attention of formal agents of social control. The underreporting of intimate partner violence to the police is argued to reflect the wider system of patriarchal social relations. This system allows the systematic battery of women and encourages violence between intimates to be defined as less serious, while subsequently shaping women's perceptions of the law's potential reactions to their reports of violence' (ibid: 434). For feminists, then, underreporting is shaped and constrained both by patriarchal social relations and the psychological trauma of the abuse.

Sexually abused women generally suffer from some form of trauma, and this impacts upon their reporting and help-seeking choices. Women's sexual abuse trauma has been diagnosed in a number of different ways, including the Battered Women's Syndrome, coercive control and traumatic bonding, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) and Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS). As in most other areas in the field of violence against women, there is much debate over the use of these diagnoses, particularly as they are applied to single and multiple incidents of abuse. As a clinical diagnosis developed by the American Psychiatric Association, PTSD, for example, has been the subject of much disagreement and has been repeatedly adjusted and refined (see, for example, Brier and Jordan and Mechanic). Ludsin and Vetten provide a useful summary of the psychological impacts of domestic and sexual violence, which is often of a long-term nature, and these certainly are important to an understanding of underreporting (see Ludsin and Vetten: 60 - 78). Such psychological constructs are often invoked to explain why many women remain in abusive relationships, but it should be pointed out that many women also lack the resources necessary to leave their abuser. Nor, in South Africa, are such resources – places of safety

or independent employment opportunities, for example – readily available. Further, women who do leave an abusive relationship often put themselves at even greater risk of violence from their former partners. Women frequently remain trapped in abusive relationships as much for socio-economic as for psychological reasons. Davis points out that ‘through the course of many years of abuse, women develop a repertoire of inner resources that helps them cope with some of the most hellish situations a human being can encounter’ (Davis: 1260). But even this repertoire is not always enough, and abused women frequently require external help, including psychological help. The police in South Africa offer little support in this regard, and, while many abused women turn to friends and family members for help, there is no reason, as Ward notes, ‘to expect that close friends or family members are necessarily equipped to deliver the supportive services required by victims of sexual services’ (Ward: 130. See also the chapter by Ahrens and Campbell in Holmes and Holmes). Sadly, as Ullman and Filipas point out, although sexual assault is ‘associated with significant mental health problems, including increased risk of mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, substance use disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder’ few women seek the help of mental health services (see Ullman and Filipas: 1028). In South Africa it may, in any case, be an unproductive search: mental health services for victims of violence against women are hopelessly inadequate. Because of this, the debate over the legal responsibility of the state for such services within the ambit of the Sexual Offences Bill is particularly significant.

Piispa has noted that ‘when women seek help, they often do so in a tentative and ambivalent manner, filtered through shame, self-blame, sense of failure, worry about exposing the private problems of their families, fearing men’s threats, and concern about the nature of the response they might receive...The social network and its support play an important role in a woman’s response to violence and in help-seeking. When the social network condemns the violence and is supportive of the woman, she has better opportunities for responding to it’ (Piispa: 897 – 898). Again, this emphasizes the point that broader social factors impact upon an individuals help seeking strategies, including reporting to the police. When social conditions impose barriers to reporting sexual abuse,

it is hardly surprising that many women will not report such abuse, a sympathetic legal framework notwithstanding.

A number of researchers have examined what they refer to as “barriers” to reporting, that is, factors either influencing women not to report sexual assault to the police or preventing them from doing so (see, for example, Fugate et al; Lievore; Wolf et al; Zweig et al). While Zweig et al examine the ‘multiple barriers’ preventing special groups of women (women who have substance abuse issues, mental health problems, cognitive disabilities, are incarcerated or who are involved in prostitution) from reporting their abuse to various service providers (see Zweig et al: 162 – 163), most researchers are more concerned with the barriers to reporting affecting “ordinary” women.

Based on interviews with a number of non-reporting women, as well as her statement and counseling records with women disclosing sexual violence to her, the forensic nurse at the Camdeboo Victim Empowerment Centre has identified the following reasons for underreporting in the Camdeboo:

- 1) Attitudes of SAPS personnel when a complaint is made, including derogatory remarks and disbelief of complainant;
- 2) Intimacy of social relationships in small towns. Where the accused is either a member of the SAPS or a friend of SAPS personnel, there may be hostility towards the complainant and/or disappearance of evidence;
- 3) Attitudes of health workers, especially if the complainant is under the influence of alcohol;
- 4) Loss of evidence because of long waiting periods for examination;
- 5) No after-care for victims, including counselling;
- 6) Financial dependence on the perpetrator;
- 7) Harassment to withdraw a complaint, often by the alleged perpetrator;
- 8) Payment for silence;
- 9) Poor conviction rates lead many complainants to conclude that there is no point in reporting abuse to the SAPS. Reporting may in fact worsen the situation of the victim.

This list is typical of the explanations for underreporting gathered by service providers, and should be taken seriously. Significantly, it reveals little or no acknowledgement of socio-demographic influences on underreporting, but strongly reflects the importance of women's perceptions of service providers. It also reveals no explicit concern for broader social and ideological factors impacting on underreporting, such as gender ideologies and rape myths: very often, service providers simply take such factors for granted, making them prone to – in my opinion – unwarranted criticism from some quarters.

Lievore suggests that there are 'many commonalities across surveys in relation to reasons for not going to the police', arguing that 'survey results have shown that there are two broad categories of barriers to reporting: personal barriers and barriers related to the criminal justice system' (Lievore: 27). She summarises these barriers to reporting as follows (see Lievore: 28, Table 4):

**Personal barriers:**

- 1) Too trivial or inappropriate to report to police;
- 2) Not a "real" crime;
- 3) Not clear that harm was intended;
- 4) Dealt with it themselves;
- 5) Regard it as a private matter;
- 6) Shame, embarrassment;
- 7) Did not want family or others to know;
- 8) Fear of reprisal by assailant;
- 9) Self-blame or blamed by others for the attack;
- 10) Desire to protect offender, relationship, or children.

**Justice system:**

- 1) Police would not or could not do anything;
- 2) Police would not think it was serious enough, or would not want to be bothered with the incident;

- 3) Fear of not being believed by police;
- 4) Fear of being treated hostilely by police or other parts of justice system;
- 5) Fear/dislike of police;
- 6) Fear of the legal process;
- 7) Lack of proof that the incident happened;
- 8) Did not know how to report.

Three points can be made regarding Lievore's list of barriers to reporting. First, Lievore relates her barriers to an 'incident' of sexual assault, but many women are victims of multiple or repeat sexual assaults, as Lievore herself notes (see Lievore: 22 - 23). It is necessary to know whether the particular incident is an isolated incident or forms part of a history of sexual and/or physical abuse when considering underreporting. This is particularly the case for women whose sexual abuse takes place within an abusive intimate relationship. Second, Lievore points out that the first three personal barriers 'relate to victims' perceptions of the incident' and she argues that 'one of the most influential determinants of reporting behaviour may be the victim's assessment of the seriousness of an incident' (Lievore: 28). But in fact virtually all the barriers listed by Lievore can be viewed as victim perceptions, either of the nature of their abuse and the consequences of reporting it, or of the criminal justice system itself. Third, it includes no socio-demographic variables. Lievore's understanding of underreporting is shaped more by the perceptions of women – including how they perceive of the differences between consensual and criminal sex, how they interpret the severity of the assault, how they believe others may react to their reporting sexual abuse to the police and how they perceive the criminal justice system.

Perceptions make for slippery variables, yet they stand at the interface of social and psychological being, and many of the "personal barriers" to reporting outlined by Lievore can be viewed as having social origins. Lievore, for example, pays much attention to the role of the socially constructed but internalised "mythology of rape" as a barrier to reporting, as noted above. And she also examines the interpersonal level in her consideration of relational distance. Lievore's emphasis on victim perceptions and rape

myths provides a useful contrast to research into underreporting that is more narrowly concerned with socio-demographic, psychological, interpersonal and incident-related variables. Especially significant is her focus on the criminal justice system and secondary victimisation, and she notes that ‘the level of under-reporting of sexual assault indicates that some women have little confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to provide redress’ (Lievore:117). However, Lievore also argues that while survey findings ‘indicate that fear or mistrust of the criminal justice system are not major deterrents to reporting, other areas of the literature indicate that negative perceptions of and experiences with the legal system are important barriers for at least some women...Much has been done in recent years to tackle the revictimisation of sexual assault complainants and it is noteworthy that many victims who report to police are satisfied with the way they are treated. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the extent to which negative perceptions are attributable to actual insensitivity on the part of individual police officers or to media representations of the experiences of sexual assault victims in the criminal justice system’ (ibid: 117). By contrast, DuMont et al argue that ‘women’s views of the criminal justice system also inhibit their reporting of sexual assault.

Several studies have linked reluctance to report to concerns regarding police biases against women and officers’ ineffectiveness and unwillingness to get involved...In a recent report from Justice Canada, the most common reason that victims cited for not reporting was negative beliefs about or experiences with the criminal justice system’s response to sexual assault. Furthermore, almost 9 out of 10 survivors of sexual assault in Calgary, Canada, felt that reporting to the police would mean that a [woman’s] personal life would be dragged through the mud, and 70 percent stated that her actions and decisions would be judged as inappropriate’ (Du Mont et al: 469).

The results of the Camdeboo survey indicate that women’s perceptions of the police played a highly significant role in underreporting. Most women did report single incidents of stranger rape to the police, and of the five that did not, three were drunk at the time of the incident. Two of the five said they do not know why they did not report the rape, two said they did not believe the police could do anything to help them and one

said she did not report because she feared poor treatment from the police. However, most women were sexually abused by people they knew, and particularly by intimate partners in abusive relationships. Within this context, it was found that women who had been sexually abused only once or twice by intimate partners tended to give different reasons for not reporting their abuse compared to women who had endured “partnership terrorism”. Table 26 summarises the primary reasons that women gave for not reporting their sexual abuse to the police, but it should be pointed out that many women had more than one reason for not reporting. Here I have only considered the primary reasons that women gave for not reporting, the reasons which they recorded as being the most important. Further, it is not always easy to separate the reasons from each other. A woman who said she did not report her abuse primarily because she feared reprisal from her abuser could also be understood as saying, in a sense, that the police (or anyone else) could do nothing to protect her from further victimisation from her abuser. Again, some of the reasons cited for not reporting encapsulated a rather broad range of motivations. While some women who recorded personal reasons for not reporting sexual abuse to the police meant by this that they were too ashamed or embarrassed to report the abuse, or that they did not consider it serious enough to be accepted as a “real” crime, others meant that they desired to preserve the relationship with the offender despite the abuse, or that they and/or their children were financially dependent on the abuser and could not afford to jeopardise their only source of income if he were to be arrested or sentenced to jail as a result of reporting.

**Table 26. Reasons for Not Reporting Sexual Abuse to the Police**

<b>Reason for Not Reporting</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0 - Don't know	25	11.2
1 - Police can do nothing	72	32.1
2 - Poor treatment from police	37	16.5
3 - Both 1 and 2	19	8.5
4 - Feared reprisal	27	12.1
5 - Personal reasons	39	17.4
6 - Happy with police treatment*	5	2.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100</b>

\* This group of five respondents did not report their sexual abuse to the police but did report their physical abuse. Their reasons for not reporting sexual abuse to the police were either that they feared reprisal (in the case of those who had experienced reprisal as a consequence of having previously reported physical abuse to the police) or personal.

From Table 26 it is clear that perceptions that the police cannot help women who have been sexually abused and/or treat such women badly when they do report their abuse, are widespread in the Camdeboo. 57.1 percent of women cited such perceptions as their primary reason for not reporting sexual abuse to the police. However, African women who did report and disclose abuse rated both their treatment by the police and the help they received from them more highly than Coloured or White women. In part, this may be due to more recent changes to the Camdeboo police services in terms of the accessibility and quality of services extended to African women, even if such changes are far from sufficient.

While in the survey overall, 57.1 percent of women cited dissatisfaction with the police as their primary reasons for not reporting sexual abuse, 12.1 percent cited fear of reprisal, and 17.4 cited personal reasons, 20 percent of women in abusive intimate relationships cited fear of reprisal as their primary reason for not reporting their abuse, while only 6.8 percent cited personal reasons for not reporting (59.3 percent also cited dissatisfaction with the police as their main reason for not reporting). By contrast, amongst those who had experienced only one or two incidents of sexual abuse (excluding those raped by strangers), only 3.2 percent cited fear of reprisal as their primary reason for not reporting: of the 78 women sexually abused once or twice by their boyfriends or husbands and spouses, only two cited fear of reprisal as their main reason for not reporting, while 28 percent cited personal reasons for not reporting. This finding supports research, and the experiences of service providers, that many women who have been subjected to only one or two incidents of abuse at the hands of intimate partners want to believe that their partner's abusive behaviour was atypical, or even caused by her own failures as a partner. Table 27 summarises the reasons that women who had experienced one or two incidents of sexual abuse gave for not reporting their abuse by relational distance.

**Table 27. Reasons for Not Reporting One/Two Incidents of Sexual Abuse by Relational Distance**

Perpetrator	Reason for Not Reporting												Total
	0: Don't know		1: Police can do nothing		2: Poor police treatment		3: Both 1 and 2		4: Feared reprisal		5: Personal reasons		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
1 Boyfriend	4	7.8	12	23.5	14	27.5	2	3.9	1	2	18	35.3	51
2 Husband/Spouse	5	18.5	10	37	2	7.4	5	18.5	1	3.7	4	14.8	27
3 Father	-	-	-	-	1	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
4 Other Family	1	10	3	30	3	30	-	-	-	-	3	30	10
5 Other Known	-	-	1	20	1	20	1	20	1	20	1	20	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3.2</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27.7</b>	<b>94</b>

The only woman in this group who was sexually abused by her father was raped by him when she was fourteen. She is now sixteen and the rape was her only incident of sexual abuse. She disclosed the incident to her sister, but did not report it, saying:

*I would probably have gone to the police if there had been a police woman there.*

Many women raised the need for more women police to deal with victims of sexual assault. As some of them said:

*The police must employ more women police officers because they will understand the victim's problems and give advice from a woman's point of view.*

*They must have more women police officers to assist as we are shy to tell the men everything.*

*They can employ more women police who will know and understand the feelings of a woman.*

The reasons given by women who had experienced multiple physical and sexual abuse in intimate relationships for not reporting their abuse differed significantly from those given by women who had only experienced one or two incidents of sexual abuse by intimate partners, as Table 28 shows. In particular, women who had experienced multiple abuse in

intimate partnerships were more likely to cite fear of reprisal and less likely to cite personal reasons for not reporting than those who had only experienced one or two incidents of sexual abuse by intimate partners.

**Table 28. Reasons for Not Reporting Intimate Multiple Physical and Sexual Abuse to the Police**

<b>Reason for Not Reporting</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
0 - Don't know	16	13.6
1 - Police can do nothing	44	37.3
2 - Poor treatment from police	13	11
3 - Both 1 and 2	13	11
4 - Feared reprisal	24	20.3
5 - Personal reasons	8	6.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>100</b>

Poor women in dependent relationships were particularly likely to cite fear of reprisal as their primary reason for not reporting intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse. Amongst women with no personal income and a dependency level of three, nearly 40 percent cited fear of reprisal as their primary reason for not reporting.

Altogether, 81 (68.6 percent) of the women who were victims of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse said that they did not report their abuse primarily because they believed that it would not be helpful and/or because they would not be protected from reprisal if they did so. 26 (22 percent) cited poor treatment from the police as their primary reason for not reporting, while 16 (13.6 percent) said they did not know why they had not reported the abuse, and 8 (6.8 percent) cited personal reasons as their primary reason for not reporting the abuse. This suggests that the majority of victims of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse were relatively clear about why they did not report their abuse. For these women, at least, there seems little reason to evoke rape myths or trauma symptoms to explain their underreporting. They recognised that they were virtually trapped into abusive relationships, and that their best help-seeking strategy was to call on the assistance and support of those who, by and large, were least qualified to offer it: their family and friends. Nearly one third of women in abusive relationships,

however, did not even make recourse to disclosing. They carried the burden of their abuse alone. By contrast, nearly one third of women who had only been sexually abused once or twice by intimate partners cited personal reasons for not reporting their abuse. It could be suggested that these women were more likely to accept rape myths, and that only “partnership terrorism” can shatter these myths.

Only 12.3 percent of women in physically and sexually abusive intimate relationships in the Camdeboo reported their sexual abuse to the police, while 41.7 percent did report their physical abuse. 35.8 percent of these women disclosed their sexual abuse to informal sources, while 72.5 percent disclosed their physical abuse. Yet nearly 80 percent of women raped by strangers reported the abuse to the police (and disclosed it). Perhaps they did so because they did not fear reprisal from their rapists, and none of the five women who did not report stranger rape cited fear of reprisal as a reason for not reporting.

Media coverage, such as that of the high profile Zuma rape case for example, may well have an impact on the willingness of victims of sexual assault to report their abuse to the police, but women’s perceptions of the criminal justice system also derive from other sources. In many cases, women’s perceptions of the police are based on first-hand experience, particularly in smaller communities. In the Camdeboo, for example, the intimacy of social relationships in small towns has frequently been perceived by women to be a barrier to reporting sexual abuse. Where the accused is either a member of the SAPS or a friend of SAPS personnel, there may be hostility towards the complainant and/or disappearance of evidence. In the Camdeboo survey, the levels of satisfaction with police treatment expressed by women who reported their sexual abuse tended to indicate support for the negative perceptions of the police held by non-reporting women. On a scale of 1 (very well) to 5 (very badly), women who reported their sexual abuse to the police rated their treatment by the police on average at 2.42. On the same scale, women who disclosed their sexual abuse to informal sources rated their treatment on average at 1.43. Treatment by health workers was rated at 1.62. On a scale of 1 (a lot) to 4 (not at all), women who reported their sexual abuse to the police rated the help they received

from the police on average at 2.10. On the same scale, women who disclosed their sexual abuse to informal sources rated their help from these sources on average at 1.63. Help by health workers was rated at 1.69.

In view of such findings concerning negative perceptions of and relatively poor experiences with the police, Lievore is surely correct to warn that ‘encouraging the reporting of sexual assault is futile if victims lack confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to provide protection and redress. Increased reporting could be progressed through understanding women’s perceptions of and attitudes towards the criminal justice system’ (Lievore: 118). She goes on to add that ‘future research could analyse differences in the way that victims and non-victims of sexual assault perceive the criminal justice system. This could include an assessment of the impact on the likelihood of reporting of rape myths and media images of sexual assault trials’ (ibid: 118-119). Further, Lievore notes that victims of sexual abuse are ‘more likely to come into contact with health professionals than with criminal justice personnel’ (ibid: 117-118). This pattern was also found in the Camdeboo research, and there is clearly a need for health professionals to receive more training in the treatment of victims of sexual assault. Health professionals also need to be trained in assisting victims of domestic violence. This is particularly important since medical professionals occupy a key position in service delivery to victims of sexual abuse, and, as Fugate et al point out, ‘women may see calling the police as very different from other interventions. Medical care and counselling are more often interventions directed at the victim, whereas much police intervention is focused on the abuser. Furthermore, abused women do not control the process or outcome of police intervention, and their perspectives are not taken into account’ (Fugate et al: 303).

While Lievore and Fugate et al emphasise the importance of the medical profession in assisting victims of sexual violence, Kaukinen also notes that those who have experienced sexual abuse are more likely to disclose to informal than formal sources (and, it should be noted, they are more likely to disclose to both formal and informal sources than to report to the police). These patterns of disclosure were clearly revealed in the Camdeboo survey. This has important implications for service delivery. As Kaukinen

argues, 'given the importance of family and friends for female victims and given that most victims do not involve the criminal justice system, social initiatives need to be directed toward expanding existing non-justice-based responses to violence and developing innovative programs that respond to the needs of all victims' (Kaukinen, 2002: 453). Lievore has suggested that, in Australia at least, the criminal justice system has taken great strides in reducing the secondary victimisation experienced by reporting victims of sexual abuse. In South Africa, however, much still needs to be done before women can have greater confidence in reporting their abuse to the police. But again, there is only so much that the criminal justice system can achieve. Sexual violence, and responses to it, are broader community and social problems. It is because of this that Ullman and Filipas argue that 'the pathological social climate must change to encourage all victims to seek help...Until sexual assault is seen as a legitimate crime no matter who commits it and victims are viewed as deserving of sympathy and help from society, victims will remain silent or rely more heavily on their informal social networks' (Ullman and Filipas: 1043).

## Conclusion

High rates of underreporting in South Africa are interpreted by some critics as evidence of a failure by government to significantly reduce sexual violence against women, since they suggest both that such violence is even more pervasive in the country than the already high official statistics admit and that the criminal justice system is failing to reduce it. Underreporting is seen by such critics as a measure of government and police performance and, in particular, as a measure of confidence of abused women in the SAPS. The political sensitivity of underreporting has tended to freeze public discussion of the issue into rather partisan exchanges over service delivery, and obscured the fact that there has been, as yet, no national, population-based survey on the extent of sexual abuse and underreporting in South Africa. This is unfortunate, because policy debates need to be better informed than they currently are.

While there is a great deal of research into gender violence, there is relatively little into the underreporting of sexual violence against women. Much of the existing survey research into underreporting examines the relationship between variables influencing help-seeking strategies, in particular socio-demographic, relational and incident-related variables. I have noted that such relationships need to be treated with caution. In the Camdeboo survey, for example, it was possible to establish correlations between certain socio-demographic variables, particularly race, income and economic dependence, and the underreporting of sexual abuse, but such relationships need to be situated within their socio-historical context if they are to amount to more than simple statistical correlations.

The main patterns of help-seeking found in this research were, firstly, that women reported (and disclosed) intimate sexual abuse at much lower rates than women who were sexually abused by strangers. In accordance with research into the effects of relational distance on underreporting, the survey found that women were far more likely to report (and disclose) sexual assaults by strangers than by people known to them, particularly an intimate partner. 8.2 percent of the women surveyed disclosed having being sexually assaulted by unknown assailants, and 79.2 percent of them reported their abuse to the

police. By contrast, 75 percent of women surveyed disclosed having been sexually assaulted by intimate partners, but only 12.3 percent of them reported such abuse to the police. This strong correlation between relational distance and underreporting may be explained by rape myths, but may equally be explained by economic dependence and/or fear of reprisal from abusive partners. Both factors may be germane. It is, I believe, impossible to state with certainty which factors best explain the underreporting of sexual abuse. Researchers may emphasize more distal factors such as rape myths, while victims may cite more proximal concerns such as fear of retribution. Thus, while it is also vital to consider women's perceptions of their sexual abuse and societal responses to it, since these are crucial to understanding help-seeking strategies and hence underreporting, these perceptions cannot on their own amount to a balanced explanation of underreporting.

Secondly, women who did report and disclose intimate multiple abuse tended to minimise their sexual abuse. Sexual abuse in intimate relations was found to be strongly associated with physical abuse, and 83.3 percent of the women who had experienced multiple sexual abuse did so within the context of multiple physical abuse by their intimate partners. This supports research pointing to the overlap of different forms of abuse. This overlap of physical and sexual abuse in intimate relationships also had important effects on the underreporting of sexual abuse. Women who had experienced sexual and physical abuse within intimate relationships were more likely to report their physical abuse to the police than their sexual abuse. It could thus be suggested that many women were not underreporting their sexual abuse so much as minimising it.

Thirdly, the highest rates of underreporting (but not necessarily disclosure) were found amongst the poorest women living in economically dependent relationships. The highest rates of multiple sexual abuse were found amongst women with low income and who were economically dependent on the household income, and the rates of underreporting of intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse were highest amongst women with low personal income: the highest rates of underreporting were found amongst women with no personal income and an economic dependency level of two or three.

Finally, this research has indicated that perceptions of poor treatment from the SAPS were not the main reason why victims of sexual violence in the Camdeboo did not report their sexual abuse to the police. Much effort has, quite rightly, been put into training members of the SAPS and others in the criminal justice system to improve their treatment of sexually abused women, yet underreporting rates remain high. This is because, while victims desire good treatment from the criminal justice system, what they need most of all is an end to their abuse and protection from further abuse. This is what the criminal justice system cannot adequately provide. 68.6 percent of respondents who had experienced intimate multiple physical and sexual abuse believed that the police can do nothing to help them or feared reprisal from their partners if they did report their abuse. The police in the Camdeboo do not have the capacity to protect women from abusive partners, and there is no place of safety for women seeking protection from abusive partners. Above all, there are few opportunities for women to end their economic dependence on abusive partners and there is little that the criminal justice system can do about this. Urging sexually abused women to report their abuse to the police in most cases runs counter to their perceptions of reality. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that these perceptions are accurate.

In sum, the evidence of this research suggests that the underreporting of sexual violence against women in the Camdeboo takes place within a social context of relatively high rates of interpersonal violence and widespread patriarchal gender relations, including the economic marginalisation of women, and a widespread and justified lack of confidence in the ability of the criminal justice system to protect women against violence from intimate partners. As long as these conditions remain intact, the underreporting of sexual violence against women will continue, calls for women to report their abuse to the police notwithstanding. While service providers should continue their efforts to create a criminal justice system which reduces the secondary victimisation currently associated with reporting sexual abuse to the police, it remains the case that more far-reaching social changes will be needed in order to reduce the underreporting of sexual violence against women. Under current circumstances, reporting sexual abuse to the police may not be the best help-seeking strategy available to sexually abused women, and alternative sources of

help may be more appropriate. Hence, policies aimed at helping sexually abused women should consider directing more resources into such alternatives, and not rely so heavily on the criminal justice system

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix 1. Measuring Violence Against Women.**

While different definitions of violence against women, adopted for theoretical or pragmatic reasons, will lead to different measurements and hence differing incidence and prevalence estimates of violence against women, debates over the measuring of violence against women are not only about the theory and politics of definitions. As Gelles remarks, ‘even if there were a consensus definition of violence, there would be various estimates of the scope of violence toward women because there have, and continue to be, various methods used to measure the incidence and prevalence of violence against women’ (Gelles, 2000: 787).

Research into violence against women reveals differences in the measurement of type, frequency, severity and time-frames, and these differences greatly complicate the comparability of research findings. Issues of measurement, however, are not germane only to comparability of research findings: they are also bound up with the validity of research. Hagemann-White notes that ‘there have been many debates on how violence should be measured and under what research conditions respondents are likely to give accurate information about its occurrence’ (Hagemann-White, 2001: 739). Especially in survey research, “research conditions” include the questions relating to the measurement of sexual violence, and not just to the manner and context of their asking. Hence, the questions operationalising what is being measured will strongly influence the validity of the research.

Researchers frequently measure only particular types of violence against women, either by victim-perpetrator relationship (for example, intimate partner violence), age (for example, child abuse) or by the nature of the violent act involved (for example, physical, sexual or psychological). It is important, in order to avoid confusion, that researchers make clear what type(s) of violence they are dealing with. The study conducted by

Garcia-Morena et al, for example, focussed primarily on intimate partner physical, sexual and emotional violence against women. Women were asked about their experiences of intimate partner physical, sexual and emotional violence and their experiences of non-partner physical and sexual violence before the age of fifteen. The violence they were measuring is clearly spelled out. While I believe that experiences of non-partner violence after the age of fifteen could have been probed in the study, at least they are clear on the matter.

Many researchers argue that it is important to get information on the frequency of abuse, since this (in addition to type and severity) may well have implications for theory and intervention. Walby and Myhill, for example, argue for more detailed information on frequency of violence (Walby and Myhill: 517). However, measuring frequency is complicated by the problem of recall or “memory decay”. Walby and Myhill note that, in measuring frequency, ‘there are obviously limits to the extent of recall, to the accuracy of people’s memories...which will restrict the value of the reported data. However, these are important events, which are not so trivial as to be easily forgotten’ (Walby and Myhill: 518). Yet, despite Walby and Myhill’s optimism, measuring frequency is clearly entangled with measuring perceived severity of violence or the threat of violence. Hagemann-White notes that ‘frequency of attacks presents itself as an alternative way of assessing level of violence but risks the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. Repeated, continuing abuse is not encoded in memory as a series of discrete incidents that are tallied by number and kind and can be reported with any accuracy for 12 months in retrospect. Frequency of behavioral acts may be less salient than the constant presence of a threat. Thus, measures of frequency may be less valid the higher the level of aggression’ (741).

Because the problem of recall makes accurate estimates of frequency questionable, and because measures of frequency may be less significant than some researchers believe, Garcia-Morena et al, for example, asked respondents whether they had experienced abuse once, a few times or many times. In the Camdeboo survey, we asked respondents whether they had experienced abuse once, twice, more than twice and whether the abuse was

continuing. The latter category referred to women who had experienced abuse more than twice and were still in an abusive relationship or situation.

Measuring the severity of abuse is complicated by similar kinds of problems as measuring frequency, and may also be of limited value in understanding violence against women. While the Conflict Tactics Scale attempts a behaviourist and “objective” ranking of violence based on an apparently comprehensive list of acts of violence, many researchers question its value (for comprehensive critiques of the Conflict Tactics Scale, see, for example, Archer; Dobash and Dobash: 275 – 281; Eliasson). A number of researchers prefer open-ended questions which record a respondents own perception of severity. Waltermauerer (Waltermauerer: 503) notes that some experiences of violence defined as “severe” on screening instruments may not always be considered severe by the respondent – or, I may add, vice versa. Other researchers, while rejecting the use of exhaustive severity checklists, simply modify the method by employing a more limited set of questions. Garcia-Morena et al, for example, asked a ‘limited number of questions about specific acts that commonly occur in violent partnerships’ on the grounds that such an approach ‘has been shown to encourage greater disclosure of violence than approaches that require respondents to identify themselves as battered’ (Garcia-Morena: 14). Employing six behaviourally specific questions (contained in the sixth question of the seventh section of their questionnaire), they distinguish “moderate” from “severe” physical violence based on the ‘likelihood of physical injury’ (Garcia-Morena et al: 14).

I have argued above that disclosure rates may be less dependent on the use of behaviourally specific questions than some researchers, such as Garcia-Morena et al, suggest. Partly because of this, I agree with the more “subjective” approach to measuring violence against women pioneered by Dobash and Dobash. According to Waltermauerer, this approach, ‘by ascertaining victims’ descriptions of behaviours and self-reports of perceived severity of experiences’ has ‘revealed that, in some cases, acts that were considered abusive by the individual were not always available’ on interpersonal violence checklists (see Waltermauerer: 503). In the Camdeboo survey, for example, women were asked to describe the worst physical and sexual abuse they had experienced. Many of the

responses would never have been contained in any checklist, no matter how seemingly comprehensive or exhaustive.

In my research, the only measure of severity involved were questions asking women to describe the worst incidents of physical and sexual abuse they had experienced. The measure was entirely subjective, and I tend to agree with Eliasson that 'to get an account of how many blows, shoves or the exact injuries that followed, does not yield much useful information for feminist practice' (Eliasson: 390). Also, recording in great detail the frequency and severity of abuse may lead researchers to overlook the point that, as Ward notes, sexual coercion, especially within intimate relationships, is 'more commonly achieved by threat or psychological tactics' than overt physical violence (see Ward: 134).

### **Time Frames**

The difficulties of measuring the frequency and severity of sexual violence are further complicated by considerations of time, particularly when estimating the prevalence and/or incidence of such violence. While prevalence (of sexual violence) refers to the number of women in a given population who have experienced sexual violence, incidence refers to the number of such incidents. Incidence is usually higher than prevalence, given that some women experience more than one incident of sexual violence. For Brownridge and Halli, 'prevalence is the extent to which the violent behaviour is distributed in the population, while incidence refers to the amount of violent behaviour that occurs among those in the population who experience violence' (Brownridge and Halli, 1999: 339).

However, in order to make comparisons between prevalence and incidence rates, some period of time needs to be stipulated, but even this is not so straightforward, and as Waltermaurer notes, 'a review of IPV instruments reveals numerous possible time frames for victimization, including the past 6 months...the past year...as an adult...the past 12 months of most recent adult relationship...lifetime...or no time frame but referencing a present partner' (Waltermaurer: 504). This range of time frames clearly makes for difficulties in comparing incidence and prevalence.

As far as “lifetime” measurements of sexual abuse are concerned (often asked in terms of “have you ever been abused?”) Lievore points out that some researchers define “ever” as from age 15 or 16 ‘as child abuse is often considered too sensitive an issue to ask about within the context of crime surveys’ (Lievore: 12). In the context of dedicated sexual violence surveys, however, matters may be different, and the Camdeboo survey placed no such restrictions on the lifetime time frame. Numerous respondents disclosed sexual abuse that they had experienced under the age of fifteen (the youngest age being five, two women disclosing sexual abuse at that age. The oldest age of disclosed sexual abuse was sixty eight). Research into the sexual abuse of children is notoriously difficult and fraught.

In South Africa official crime statistics, including those for rape and indecent assault, record prevalence and incidence over a twelve month period, and many researchers also use a period of one year when estimating prevalence and incidence of sexual violence. But even asking women to recall the frequency of sexual abuse over a period of one year may be problematic. As Hagemann-White puts it, ‘repeated, continuing abuse is not encoded in memory as a series of discrete incidents that are tallied by number and kind and can be reported with any accuracy for 12 months in retrospect. Frequency of behavioral acts may be less salient than the constant presence of a threat’ (Hagemann-White: 741).

## **Appendix 2. Ethical Considerations.**

My research has been guided by the ethical considerations outlined by Themba Lesizwe, a national network of trauma service providers (see Artz and Themba Lesizwe, 2005). Themba Lesizwe's code of ethics is based upon the code of ethics developed for the purposes of researching violence against women by Lillian Artz, who drew on and modified the guidelines and principles contained in the University of Cape Town research ethics guidelines, the Canadian Psychological Association and the American Sociological Association (see Parenzee, Artz and Moulton, 2001: Appendix D, 133 – 139). The most important of these considerations are outlined below.

In Section 1, “The Practice of Good Research”, Themba Lesizwe notes that researchers should plan their research ‘in consultation with others with expertise concerning the specific population under investigation’ (Artz and Themba Lesizwe: p3). This I did. Those involved in the research, including the design of the questionnaire and interview scheduling, were all deeply rooted in their communities and know them intimately. Respondents were interviewed in their home language (Afrikaans, Xhosa or English) by interviewers from their own towns (Aberdeen, Graaff-Reinet and Nieu-Bethesda). Interviews with farm-dwellers were conducted by women who knew the surrounding rural areas well.

In Section 2, “Consent”, Themba Lesizwe notes that informed consent is a ‘basic tenet or principle’ of social research drawing on individual participation and ‘requires the informed, voluntary and uncoerced consent of participants’ (see Artz and Themba Lesizwe: 3). Consent is considered to be “informed” when researchers explain in a language understood by participants:

- 1) the nature and purpose of the research;
- 2) the outcomes and benefits of the research;
- 3) how data will be collected and the findings used;
- 4) how information will be recorded, translated, stored and presented;

- 5) the degree and limits of confidentiality;
- 6) that participants may withdraw from the research at any time;
- 7) any factors that may influence their willingness to participate (such as emotional distress, possible risks and limitations to confidentiality);
- 8) any consequences that may follow from publication of the research;

Consent should preferably be in writing and signed by both parties. In conducting the research, interviewers obtained informed consent from all respondents as outlined in the above eight points. However, we did not obtain written consent in conducting the survey. In part this is because many women (literate and illiterate) are suspicious of signing official-looking documents, and we decided that obtaining verbal consent was ethically acceptable. Furthermore, people under the age of eighteen are defined as children and, constitutionally, consent must be given by their parent(s), guardian(s) or caregiver(s) as well as the child. Since a number of the survey respondents were under the age of eighteen, obtaining consent in this manner would have compromised their right to confidentiality (see Section 5 below). Indeed, obtaining consent in this manner for this type of research could have exposed respondents abused by a parent, guardian or caregiver (a foreseeable possibility) to unnecessary risk.

In Section 3, “Foreseeable Consequences, Intervention and Support”, Themba Lesizwe notes that researchers must consider the foreseeable consequences of their research, particularly insofar as these may affect participants. I have already noted how such considerations were taken into account when considering the issue of consent. Research involving survivors of violence and trauma may entail ‘re-victimisation and/or re-traumatisation’ (Artz and Themba Lesizwe: p 5). Because of this, researchers must:

- 1) not conduct research with vulnerable subjects if the required information can be obtained by other means.
- 2) protect participants against foreseeable physical and psychological harm or suffering which may be experienced during or as a result of the research;

- 3) design the research to include strategies to reduce possible distress, including arranging appropriate support for participants where necessary;
- 4) researchers must not provide advice to participants on any medical, psychological or legal matters unless 'professionally trained to do so' (Artz and Themba Lesizwe: 5);
- 5) respect participants' views and conclude the interview if and when the participant so wishes;
- 6) researchers should also take 'reasonable steps to protect themselves from secondary trauma' (Artz and Themba Lesizwe: 5).

With regards to point 1), it is clearly not possible to obtain accurate information on underreporting from sources other than women themselves, not all of whom could, in any case, be unequivocally described as vulnerable.

With regards to 2), given that the sample of respondents were not specifically victims of violence, no special protection was considered beyond the measures provided for in 3) of this section and in Sections 4 and 5 of the Code of Ethics (see below).

With regards to 3), all the interviewers had undergone basic training in trauma counselling and many had experience as frontline support workers. They were thus equipped to cope with distressed respondents and to refer such respondents to professional help if necessary

With regards to 4), interviewers were well aware of the limitations of their basic trauma counselling and support work experiences. They were carefully briefed to refer any requests for advice or assistance beyond their competence to professionals.

With regards to 5), interviewers were specifically trained not to enter into debate with respondents. They were also specifically trained not to press for responses to questions which respondents were reluctant to answer. They could, however, clarify and explain questions to respondents if necessary, but were trained not to provide, as far as possible, leading cues.

With regards to 6), regular debriefings were held with interviewers. Despite this, it is probably impossible to protect violence researchers from secondary trauma, and I have no doubt that those involved in the research have experienced at least some degree of secondary trauma.

In Section 4, “Participation”, Themba Lesizwe notes that:

- 1) research should be conducted at a time and place that is convenient to participants;
- 2) researchers must always be sensitive to the possibility of tiring participants and that, ‘as a general rule interviews should be kept short’ (Artz and Themba Lesizwe: p 6);
- 3) the interests of participants must always take precedence in any possible conflict with the interests of researchers

Point 2) was taken into consideration when designing the questionnaire, while interviewers were thoroughly sensitised to the implications of points 1) and 3).

In Section 5, “Confidentiality and Anonymity”, Themba Lesizwe notes that researchers are obliged to protect personal information in order to ensure the ‘integrity of the research’, the privacy of participants and the protection of sensitive information. Participants should be able to contribute anonymously, and the research should not identify participants in any way without their informed consent. However, guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality may be called into question if there are ‘exceptional reasons’ to do so, for example, ‘preventing harm to the research participant or another person, and legal obligations to report child abuse and neglect’ (Artz and Themba Lesizwe: p 6 and footnote 3).

The legal obligation to report child abuse to the police poses a particular ethical challenge to researchers and service providers, and we could anticipate this problem in the research because we had experienced it when providing services to women under the age of eighteen who did not wish to report their abuse to the police. In one particularly difficult

case, a thirteen-year old rape victim did not want to report the incident to the police. We decided that, since she had disclosed her abuse to us (and could receive assistance) under condition of confidentiality, her right to confidentiality should outweigh our legal obligation to report the matter to the police. Others may well have decided differently: in some cases ethical decisions are not clear-cut.

In the research, we came across fourteen respondents under the age of eighteen who disclosed sexual abuse but had not reported it to the police. However, only one was under the age of sixteen (the age of consent) and we felt that those deemed capable of consent should also be deemed capable of deciding their own reporting behaviour. In the case of the fifteen-year old, we felt that the same right to confidentiality we had applied to the case of the young rape survivor referred to above also applied in her case.

Ethical considerations most obviously apply to the subjects of research, but researchers also need to be treated ethically, as Section 3 point 6) above indicates. In addition to considering the secondary trauma experienced by researchers, I also had to consider other issues such as their own safety and interviewing workload.

Taking the ethical considerations outlined above into account had a significant impact on the design of my research and contributed in no small measure to the relatively smooth implementation of the survey.

**Appendix 3. Camdeboo Victim Empowerment Centre Abuse Questionnaire**

**Camdeboo Victim Empowerment Centre Abuse Questionnaire**

<b>Researcher:</b> _____	<b>Date:</b> _____
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**Respondent**

<b>Age:</b> _____	<b>Number of Children:</b> _____	<b>Highest Education:</b> _____		
<b>Relationship status:</b>	Single	Married	Cohabiting	Partner
<b>Employed:</b> _____	<b>Own Income:</b> _____	<b>Household Income:</b> _____		
<b>Ward:</b> _____	African	Coloured	White	

**Physical Abuse**

**Have you ever experienced physical abuse?**

1 never      2 once      3 twice      4 more than twice      5 continuing

**How old were you when you were first physically abused?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe abuse:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship of abuser?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you report this abuse to the police?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you ever discuss this abuse with anyone else? Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

**If physically abused more than once, describe the worst physical abuse that has happened to you:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**How old were you?** \_\_\_\_\_ **Who abused you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you report this abuse to the police?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you ever discuss the abuse with anyone else? Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sexual Abuse**

**Have you ever experienced sexual abuse?**

1 never      2 once      3 twice      4 more than twice      5 continuing

**How old were you when you were first sexually abused?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe abuse:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Relationship of abuser:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you report this abuse to the police?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you ever discuss this abuse with anyone else? Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

**If sexually abused more than once, describe the worst sexual abuse that has happened to you?**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**How old were you?** \_\_\_\_\_ **Who abused you?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you report this abuse to the police?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you ever discuss the abuse with anyone else? Who?** \_\_\_\_\_

## Reporting

**Have you reported any of your abuses to:**

**1 The police?**

1 never      2 once      3 twice      4 more than twice

**If never, why not:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**2 A health professional? (Specify):** \_\_\_\_\_

1 never      2 once      3 twice      4 more than twice

**3 Anyone else? (Specify):** \_\_\_\_\_

1 never      2 once      3 twice      4 more than twice

**The last time you reported your abuse to the police, did they treat you**

1 very well      2 well      3 alright      4 badly      5 very badly

**The last time you reported your abuse to a health professional, did they treat you**

1 very well      2 well      3 alright      4 badly      5 very badly

**The last time you reported your abuse to someone else, did they treat you**

1 very well      2 well      3 alright      4 badly      5 very badly

**The last time you reported your abuse to the police, did they help you**

1 a lot      2 quite a lot      3 not much      4 not at all

**The last time you reported your abuse to a health professional, did they help you**

1 a lot      2 quite a lot      3 not much      4 not at all

**The last time you discussed your abuse with someone else, did they help you**

1 a lot      2 quite a lot      3 not much      4 not at all

### **Service**

**1 What can the police do to improve their service to women who have been abused?**

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**2 What can health professionals do to improve the service to women who have been abused?**

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