

# Rape in Marriage

Rape is a crime that makes women afraid. We learn as we grow up that we must watch how we talk, how we look, how we smile, to avoid being attacked by men. Every day hundreds of women in South Africa are raped. Most women do not report rape - so the actual number of rapes that happen is not known. People often say that rape happens because of the way a woman dresses. Or because she was out late at night. But numbers show that most women are raped in their own homes, often by men they know, or have seen around. And many women are forced at times, by their husbands, to have sex against their will.

We believe that rape is a crime against women, no matter who the rapist is. We believe that husbands or boyfriends have no right to force a woman to have sex against her will. Caroline Leemisa, Lerato Nompula, and Dikeledi Sekhitla, from Khanya College in Johannesburg went out to talk to people about this issue of rape in marriage. Some people felt that husbands have no right to force sex on their wives. But some felt that this was a husband's right. The Khanya students asked the people they met: "Is there rape in marriage?"

Maureen is a student. She is 22 years old. She said: "Yes, there is rape in marriage, because women have so long been treated as inferiors and as sex pots. I believe that a woman's feelings should be respected. Women sometimes have moods whereby they don't feel like making love. This does not mean she does not love her husband."

Nathaniel is a 26-year old student. He said: "Immediately a man marries a woman, he has a right over her. Since lobola still exists in our country, and a woman appears to be a commodity, then when a man has bought that commodity, he has a right to have sex with her, even forcefully. He should not be punished for this."

But Lebu believes forced sex is rape. He is a 23-year old student. He said: "If one is not in a mood of making love, and she is forced, this is regarded as rape because it is done against the woman's will."

SPEAK

## Why Does Rape in Marriage Happen?

Laura works at Khanya College. She offers counselling to the students. She said: "I believe that marriage is for two people who want to spend their lives together, and who are committed to each other. Women in most cases are oppressed. They are told what to do, sometimes against their will. This extends to sex. There is this thing of a power relation. Men are more powerful. They abuse women. They put women into situations which they cannot control. And usually there is no way out. I believe that rape is not only a sex issue. It also involves aggression, and anger. The power relationship is imbalanced. Men are usually dominant. These are social attitudes that are passed on."

Themvikile believes that men use their wives as an outlet for their frustrations. He said: "You see, other men suppress their feelings of anger and frustration. So, in order for them to release those feelings, they abuse their wives."

He feels that lobola is part of the problem. He said: "You see, sometimes you find that other men feel justified in sleeping with their wives even if it means using force. They feel that if they have paid lobola for their wives, they can do anything, anytime and anyhow with, or to them."

## Solutions to the Problem

Rape in marriage does happen. The question arises: "What can be done about it?"

Sellwane is 20-years old. He believes that partners need to talk more with each other about the problem. He said: "Sometimes a person does not want to make love, but she does not say so directly to her husband."

Lebu feels that couples should have sex only if they both agree to it. She said: "Sex should be mutual, and it is an agreement derived out of the passion of two partners."

Themvikile thinks the solution lies in marriage guidance. He said: "In marriage, both partners are equal, and since rape is an abuse, and it

has a serious effect on the victim, it is wrong. A rapist in the eyes of society, especially a husband raping his wife, loses all dignity and respect. If a husband is convicted for raping his wife, this will not solve the problem, or guarantee that he won't do it again. They should get to the root of the problem. Both the husband and the wife can do this with the help of the marriage counsellor."

Desmond is a 23 year-old student. He feels that respect between couples is important. He said: "I feel that people, especially if they are married, should always be in a position to discuss their activities in marriage. There should be a sound basis for communication. People should learn to know each other and respect each other's feelings. If one party says 'no', then it should be 'no'."

Thabo believes that part of the problem stems from the way women are seen in society, and this is what needs to change. He said: "Women are taken to be inferior and men use their superiority to make love by force to women."

They do not take them as their wives but as their sex tools. They usually do not take any notice of women's feelings. Men can't control their feelings."

### **A New Kind of Relationship**

We need a new kind of relationship where women and men can communicate as equals. Where men do not see women as their property to use as they wish. And where women demand the right to be treated as human beings and not as things.

As Maureen said: "Men should respect their wives as equals, and they have to understand them as partners. If husbands are using violence and force when it comes to the bedroom department, then one gets the idea that he does not love his wife. Action must be taken against such people."

What do you think about these things? Write to SPEAK and tell us your views. Write to: SPEAK Collective, P.O. Box 19375, Dormerton, 4015, Durban, South Africa. Let other readers hear what you have to say! ●



Photo by: Eric Miller, Afrapix

South African women protest male violence.