

South Africa in grip of strangulation spate

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Murder of women by strangulation is a serious problem in South Africa. Researchers writing in the open access journal *BMC Public Health* compared four South African cities for the period 2001 to 2005, and report information about the prevalence and timing of attacks, and give details about the victims.

Most cases of strangulation are committed by men against women, as it requires a large disparity in strength between attacker and victim. According to the authors of the study, Shahnaaz Suffla, Ashley van Niekerk and Najuwa Arendse of the South African Medical Research Council and University of South Africa, "Gender-based violence persists as a global problem. In the year 2000, there were an estimated 119,000 female homicides worldwide and South Africa is estimated to have the highest rate of intimate female homicide in the world, despite its democratic transformation, strong emerging economy and widespread structural and social improvements".

The authors found that most cases of strangulation occurred early in the morning and that, while most victims had drunk no alcohol, drinking more than the legal limit was associated with a higher occurrence than drinking in moderation. In all of the cities studied, most strangulations occurred in the home. The authors said, "The strangulation rates we found are likely to be high relative to those of other African countries, where the overall homicide rate is up to 30% lower than in South Africa".

While strangulation rates declined over the five years studied in Pretoria,

Johannesburg and Durban, they increased in Cape Town. The Western Cape Province, of which Cape Town is the capital and largest metropolitan centre, also reported the highest number of reported cases of rape during this period. According to Suffla and her co-authors, "This supports the proposed link between sexual violence and female strangulation".

Citation: Female homicidal strangulation in urban South Africa, Shahnaz Suffla, Ashley Van Niekerk and Najuwa Arendse, BMC Public Health (in press)

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