

Chapter 3

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SEXUAL COERCION IN ADOLESCENT DATING RELATIONSHIPS

Sexual coercion, like other forms of violence, is a complex phenomenon resulting from the interplay of multiple factors. In this respect an ecological framework has been used increasingly to organise and explain findings about various types of violence (see Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002) including intimate partner violence and sexual violence (Heise, 1998; Heise & Garcia-Moreno, 2002; Jewkes et al., 2002). This framework consists of four interrelated, interacting levels representing individual, relationship, community and social factors that contribute to the occurrence of violence. In this chapter I accordingly use an ecological framework to organise the risk factors for sexual coercion from a selected review of the literature. Much of the existing research focuses primarily on male-to-female sexual coercion and consists of surveys conducted among college samples in the United States. As such, the bulk of the literature is limited in representativeness with respect to younger adolescents, adolescents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and adolescents from countries and cultural backgrounds other than America (Jackson, 1999). Furthermore, most studies have relied on quantitative methods to obtain information from college samples, thus providing limited information on the meaning that young people attribute to sexual coercion in dating relationships and the sociocultural factors that might influence their understanding.

3.1 Individual factors

The first level of the ecological model focuses on individual factors, such as past experiences, personality characteristics, attitudes and beliefs that increase the likelihood of a person being a victim or a perpetrator of sexual coercion in a dating relationship (Krug et al., 2002; Heise, 1998). Adherence to traditional gender roles, rape supportive attitudes, the acceptance of violence, and early childhood exposure to violence or sexual victimisation are among the factors which have received considerable attention in studies attempting to distinguish perpetrators from nonperpetrators, and victims from nonvictims.

3.1.1 Attitudes about gender roles and sexual relationships

Substantial research has examined gender role beliefs and various attitudes supportive of sexual coercion, including rape myths which deny or minimise the victim's injury or blame the victims for their own victimisation, as possible risk factors for sexual victimisation or the perpetration of sexual coercion in dating relationships. Several studies among college samples in the United States have found that compared to nonperpetrators, males who reported the use of sexually coercive behaviours were more accepting of traditional stereotypes about male dominance and gender roles, rape myths, adversarial beliefs about relationships between men and women, violence toward women and the use of verbal pressure or force to obtain sex (e.g. Abbey, McAuslan, Zawacki, Clinton & Buck, 2001; Christopher, Madura, & Weaver, 1998; Koralewski & Conger, 1992; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987).

While much of the research on gender role beliefs and attitudes supportive of sexual coercion in dating relationships has been conducted among college samples, there is some evidence at the high school level, that the acceptance of rape myths and violence supportive attitudes are linked to the use of sexual coercion by adolescent males (Lanier, 2001; Price, Byers & the Dating Violence Research Team, 1999). Furthermore, studies indicate that these beliefs and attitudes may be more prevalent among younger adolescents than older adolescents and young adults (Feltey, Ainslie, & Geib, 1991; Geiger, Fischer, & Eshet, 2004).

While the acceptance of rigid gender role beliefs and rape supportive attitudes are linked to the use of sexually coercive behaviours among males, findings from studies examining the relationship between these beliefs and sexual victimisation among young women are inconsistent. For example, several studies among college women reveal no attitudinal differences between victims and nonvictims (Carmody & Washington, 2001; Kalof, 2000). Other studies among college students and African American youth have found that female victims of sexual coercion, when compared to nonvictims, tended to view sexual relations between men and women as more adversarial and were more accepting of violence against women (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; West & Rose, 2000). Despite the inconsistencies, these studies show that a significant minority of young women support sexually coercive behaviour and victim-blaming attitudes, thus reflecting a culture that devalues women as a group and condones male aggressiveness toward women (Cowan, 2000; Geiger et al, 2004).

Although these studies have been instrumental in highlighting the influence of rigid gender role beliefs and rape supportive attitudes in the perpetration of sexual coercion in dating relationships, they provide little insight into why adolescents endorse these attitudes. Young people's attitudes, values and gender-role beliefs are acquired via the socialisation process and particularly in early interactions with family, peers and society. Understanding young people's beliefs requires insight into the social contexts and processes that promote rigid gender role beliefs and the acceptance of coercive sexual practices.

3.1.2 Exposure to sexual assault and violence in early childhood

Sexual abuse in early childhood emerges as a risk factor in the experience of sexual victimisation for females. Research has found that early childhood sexual assault was related to increased levels of sexual victimisation from peers among high school female adolescents (Small & Kerns, 1993), pregnant and parenting adolescents (Collins, 1998) and college women (Himelein, Vogel, & Wachowiak, 1994; Humphrey & White, 2000; Vogel & Himelein, 1995). Similarly, sexually aggressive behaviour in young men has also been linked to childhood experiences of physical and sexual abuse or the witnessing of family violence during childhood (Borowsky, Hogan, & Ireland, 1997; Senn, Desmarais, Verberg, & Wood, 2000). These findings suggest that exposure to coercion and violence in the family environment or social environment provide a context where young people may learn that coercion and violence is justified and acceptable in relationships.

3.2 Situational factors

Sexual coercion in adolescent dating relationships occurs under certain circumstances. The second level of the ecological model represents those risk factors which relate to the immediate context in which sexual coercion occurs (Heise, 1998). Research at this level seeks to identify the various kinds of coercive interactions and the circumstances under which they occur as well as how they are interpreted. Studies conducted among samples of college students in the United States have found that the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, sexual miscommunication, and the involvement of alcohol are among the interpersonal and situational factors which discriminate between coercive and noncoercive dating relationships. Although comparatively fewer studies have been conducted among younger

adolescents, studies among high school youth in the United States reveal a fairly prevalent attitudinal acceptance of sexual violence under similar circumstances. More than half of the high school males interviewed by Goodchilds and Zellman (cited in Abbey, Zawacki, Buck, Clinton, & McAuslan, 2004) agreed that it was acceptable for a man to force sex on a woman if she led him on, changed her mind, or sexually aroused him. Similarly, Sudermann and Jaffe (cited in Wolfe, Wekerle, & Scott, 1997) found that 20% of male high school students in their study reported that forcing a woman to have sex was all right if he spends money on her, if he is stoned or drunk, or if they had been dating for a long time.

3.2.1 Nature of the relationship

Men are more likely to view coercion as acceptable in an established relationship than in a new or casual relationship. For example, how well the man knew the woman and prior consensual sexual activity between the man and the woman discriminated between perpetrators and nonperpetrators of sexual coercion on dates among a sample of college students (Abbey et al., 2001). In another study among college students Monson, Langhinrichsen-Rohling, and Binderup (2000) found that the perceived seriousness of sexual assault decreased in a linear fashion as the level of acquaintance between the victim and perpetrator increased. College students consistently minimised the seriousness of the sexual coercion and attributed more blame to the victim when the victim was reported to have engaged in sexual intercourse with her dating partner on prior occasions. Men in general attributed less seriousness to rape in dating situations (Emmers-Sommer & Allen, 1999; Monson et al., 2000). Thus men involved in serious relationships who exercise sexual coercion are less likely to perceive they have done anything wrong.

South African youth also appear to tolerate coercive sexual practices within dating situations. For example, forced sex in a relationship was never described as 'rape' by the girls as "it is with your boyfriend" (NPPCHN, 1996; Wood & Jewkes, 1998). Similarly, in a schools-based survey south of Johannesburg, 27% of female and 32% of male participants said that forcing sex with someone you know was never sexual violence (CIETafrica, 2000). Another South African study among high school youth found that 52% of the males and 45% of the females attributed rape or sexual harassment to love of one's partner (Whitefield, 1999 cited in Eaton et al., 2003). Even though they may recognise the situation as abusive, they may tolerate it

because their partners say they loved them (Wood et al., 1998).

In this respect, adolescents' constructions of love and romantic relationships contribute to the use of sexually coercive behaviours in relationships. Conceptions of love often imply having sex with one's partner and for many adolescent men sex is an expected part of a relationship. The fusion of love and sex enables young men to use love as a coercive tool (Hird, 2000) with appeals to romantic feelings, such as "you would have sex with me if you loved me" constituting a major strategy for many boys to obtain sex (Hird & Jackson, 2001). Lloyd and Emery (2000) indicate that young girls may have difficulties in defining or making sense of the coercive experience because the perpetrator says he loves her. The construction of love may allow sexual coercion to be overlooked, forgiven or excused (Lloyd, 1991; Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

3.2.2 Sexual (mis)communication in dating relationships

Another factor that may contribute to sexual coercion in adolescent dating relationships is the lack of sexual communication between partners. Sexual encounters, particularly early in relationships, involve little direct communication with young people relying on nonverbal cues to determine one another's sexual intentions (Bateman, 1991; Moore, Rosenthal, & Mitchell, 1996). This indirect form of communication may lead couples to misinterpret one another's sexual intentions. For example, research among college students has consistently found that men perceive women as behaving more sexually and as more interested in having sex with them than women actually are (Abbey et al., 2001; Abbey et al., 2004). Among male college students, sexually coercive as compared with noncoercive dating situations were more likely to involve the man misperceiving the woman's friendly cues as sexual cues for a longer period of time (Abbey et al., 2001). Muelenhard and Linton (1987) contend that sexual miscommunication may contribute to sexual aggression in several ways. First, if a woman resists a man's advances, he might assume that she really wants sex but is merely offering token resistance. Second, even though a man may realise that his partner's resistance to sex is genuine, he may feel led on by the woman and thus justified in using force to obtain sex.

3.2.3 The involvement of alcohol

Studies among college samples in the United States and Canada reveal a link between sexual

victimisation and perpetration and the consumption of alcohol in dating situations (Abbey et al., 2001; Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987; Vogel & Himelein, 1995). For example, Abbey and colleagues (2001) found that among the college men surveyed who reported they had committed a sexual assault, more than one third (35%) revealed that the sexual assaults involved alcohol consumption, usually both the perpetrator and the victim. The relationship between the perpetrator and the victim also appears more casual in alcohol-involved sexual assaults compared to sexual assaults that do not involve alcohol (Abbey et al., 2004).

The role of alcohol in sexual victimisation and perpetration is multifaceted. While alcohol may not directly cause sexual coercion, young people's gender role beliefs and their expectancies about alcohol's sexually disinhibiting effects may contribute to sexual coercion in a dating relationship. In the case of female victimisation, a woman who is drinking alcohol may be perceived as sexually permissive and available (see Norris, 1994). In this respect, Abbey and co-workers (cited in Abbey et al., 2001) found that alcohol expectancies regarding sexuality were indirectly linked to sexual assault perpetration through their effect on men's misperception of women's sexual interest. Apart from engaging in behaviour which a woman might not have done if she had not been drinking, alcohol may also render a woman less able to defend herself (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Accordingly, studies among college students have also revealed that men use alcohol as a strategy to persuade unwilling women to have sex (Boeringer, Shehan & Akers, 1991; DeKeseredy & Kelly, 1995).

In the case of male perpetration, impaired cognitive functioning due to alcohol consumption may lead an intoxicated man to misperceive a woman's sexual interest (Abbey et al., 2004). Furthermore, as a consequence of impaired cognitive functioning, the cues that usually inhibit sexually aggressive behaviour, such as concern about negative consequences, are likely to be less salient than feelings of anger or frustration (Abbey et al., 2004; Seto & Barbaree, 1995). On the other hand, young people's beliefs in the effects of alcohol on a man's behaviour may also contribute to sexual coercion. Beliefs supporting alcohol's enhancement of men's sex drive have been found to discriminate between perpetrators and nonperpetrators of coercion among college men (Abbey et al., 2001; Wilson, Calhoun, & McNair, 2002). In addition, the involvement of alcohol use also appears to influence how the coercive behaviour is perceived. If intoxicated, college students regarded the male perpetrator as less responsible for the sexual

assault, whereas if the female victim was intoxicated, students regarded her as more responsible for the sexual assault and demeaned her character (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987). Therefore, due to the perception of an intoxicated man having less self-control (Shively, 2001) alcohol consumption may also provide male perpetrators with an excuse to justify their sexually aggressive behaviour (Muehlenhard & Linton, 1987).

In South Africa there is some evidence to suggest that alcohol may be related to instances of sexual coercion in dating relationships among South African adolescents. Wood (2001) found that forced sex in the form of verbal threats and physical violence by young men was prevalent in sexual relationships among youth from Umtata, occurring typically in contexts where men buy women alcohol in return for sex. Apart from this evidence, little information exists on the contributory role of alcohol use and expectancies in sexually coercive dating experiences among South African adolescents. Nevertheless, alcohol has been implicated as a contributory factor to other forms of interpersonal violence in South Africa. For example, hospital-based studies reveal that between 64% and 83.5% of trauma patients with injuries arising from violence consumed alcohol prior to the assault (Marais, Sukhai, & Donson, 2004; van der Spuy, 2000). Accordingly, establishing the role of alcohol in sexually coercive dating experiences among South African adolescents also represents an important area for research as this may have implications for prevention.

3.3 Community factors

The third level of the ecological model represents the community contexts in which social relationships are embedded, such as neighbourhoods, social networks and peer groups (Krug et al., 2002; Heise, 1998). At the community level, the male peer group and poverty are important contexts in which sexual aggression may be learned and tolerated.

3.3.1 Peer environment and norms

Several international studies among college and university males have found that peer support can encourage sexual victimisation of women (Boeringer et al., 1991; Boeringer, 1996; Humphrey & Kahn, 2000; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2000). Specifically, Boeringer and co-workers (1991) found that fraternities provided a social learning context for the use of nonphysical sexual coercion and the use of drugs and alcohol as a strategy to obtain sex.

Studies have shown that among college students, male peer support for the sexual victimisation of women is related to the extensive use of alcohol (Schwartz & Nogrady, 1996). Accordingly, DeKeseredy and Kelly (1995) have identified contexts of alcohol consumption, such as bars, as key settings of patriarchal discourse and gender inequality in which male peers perpetuate and legitimate sexual assault and violence as a means of maintaining control in dating relationships.

Among American middle school students, boys who reported they had friends who had been sexually abusive were more accepting of sexual dating violence and more likely to report past use of violence in a dating relationship, than boys who indicated that they did not have sexually coercive friends (Price et al., 1999). Young adolescents are typically concerned with gaining acceptance from peers, and dating and sexual relationships appear to be an important means of establishing, improving, or maintaining peer group status (Brown, 1999). Pressure from male peers to engage in (hetero)sex in order to prove masculinity may encourage young men to be sexually aggressive (Brown cited in Heise et al., 1995). A qualitative study among adolescents from the United Kingdom and New Zealand found that male peers served as a form of sexual police, constantly asking about one another's sexual accomplishments (Hird & Jackson, 2001).

A qualitative study of violence in sexual relationships among young people in Umtata (Wood & Jewkes, 1998) also suggests that the peer group context is an important factor in the use and legitimisation of coercive sexual practices among adolescents in South Africa. This study found that the number of sexual partners, choice of main partner, and ability to control girlfriends featured prominently in masculine constructions and were essential for the attainment of status within the male peer group. Similarly, female identities were also found to be substantially constructed in terms of success in relationships, which served to restrict women in their ability to resist violent men for fear of losing a relationship and their status within the female group. Furthermore, in another study among pregnant teenagers, Wood and colleagues (1998) reported that coercive sexual experiences were also legitimised by female peers who indicated that silence and submission was the appropriate response.

These findings illustrate the importance of understanding the processes by which peer groups

encourage and legitimise the use of coercion in sexual relationships.

3.3.2 Poverty and low socioeconomic factors

Socioeconomic status (SES) also contributes to the likelihood of young people experiencing physical abuse and sexual coercion within dating relationships. A South African study conducted among a group of high school learners found that adolescents with lower SES experienced eight times as much physical abuse and four times as much attempted rape and actual rape within relationships than did adolescents with high SES (Whitefield cited in Eaton et al., 2003). In another study undertaken among 14 to 24 year old women and men in KwaZulu-Natal, Hallman (2004) found that 10% of the females with the lowest reported household wealth compared to 3% of the females with the highest reported household wealth indicated having been forced to have sex. However, this study did not provide any details on the perpetrator therefore it is unclear to what extent the young women were forced to have sex by a dating partner. It is possible that in low socioeconomic contexts, where educational and recreational opportunities are typically limited, relationships may become an important means for young people to gain respect and position among peers, as well as material benefit for young women (Wood & Jewkes, 2001). Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) maintain that in this context, young men may more readily use coercion and violence in their relationships with women in order to establish, improve, or maintain their status among peers. For young women, the benefits of being in a relationship may outweigh the risk of placing themselves in situations where sexual assault is possible.

3.4 Sociocultural factors

Sociocultural values and norms contribute to a climate that tolerates and encourages coercive sexual practices within dating relationships, and operate through their influence on the community, interpersonal and individual levels (Heise, 1998). Cross-cultural studies have shown that sexual coercion and violence against women are more prevalent in societies where gender roles are rigidly enforced and the ideology of male superiority is strong, and where there are high levels of interpersonal violence in general (see Heise, 1998; Jewkes et al., 2002).

3.4.1 Sociocultural constructions of gender and sexuality

Sociocultural norms relating to male dominance and the sexual double standard for men and

women play a significant role in defining male-female sexual relationships, and hence contribute to the dynamics of coercive sex within adolescent dating relationships. From a feminist perspective, male sexual coercion and violence are about power and control, embedded within the prevailing traditional power structures of male dominance and female subordination. Thus, male sexual coercion and violence are a means of establishing and maintaining power and control over women in relationships (Bateman, 1991; Gamache, 1991; Larkin & Popaleni, 1994; Lloyd, 1991). Sex is defined by male need and initiation, and coercion and violence are used by men to assert their sexual right, and to create fear and ensure compliance in their victims (Lloyd & Emery, 2000).

According to recent theories, gender is not an inherent trait within individuals, but is something people *do* in their everyday social interactions (Connell, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). From a poststructuralist perspective gender is socially constructed through language or discourse. Discourse refers to an interrelated 'system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values ... [that] are a product of social factors, of powers and practices, rather than an individual's set of ideas' (Hollway, 1983, cited by Gavey, 1993, p.94). In this respect, Gavey (1993) indicates that discourse refers to ways of constituting meaning which are specific to particular groups, cultures and historical periods. Sociocultural discourses tied to gender play a powerful role in shaping ideas and views about normal sexual experience. Rich (1980, cited in Striepe & Tolman, 2003) conceived of 'compulsory heterosexuality' as a universally pervasive patriarchal institution organising male and female behaviour. This institution of heterosexuality consists of unwritten but clearly codified and compulsory conventions by which males and females conduct their relationships. In the case of heterosexual relationships, sociocultural discourses typically reproduce and sustain gender inequality in the form of male dominance and female subordination within male-female relationships (Reinhotlz, Muehlenhard, Phelps, & Satterfield, 1995).

In South Africa, as in many other countries, gender relations continue to be informed by the ideology constructed around heterosexuality, marriage, and the family (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991). Men and women are socialised to view their dyadic relationships as an expected outcome of adulthood, differentially defined in terms of gender. Historically, men have not only been expected to assume greater power in relationships, but have also been granted

privileges in terms of guardianship, educational and employment opportunities, and various economic rights that have been denied to women and served to render them economically dependent on men (Vogelman & Eagle, 1991).

However, in South Africa the ideological landscape around gender is complex and contradictory. South Africa consists of people from multiple cultural backgrounds, and while all are historically based on patriarchy, specific customs such as marriage are practised differently. For example, in traditional southern African cultures, such as those of the Zulu, Xhosa, and Sotho peoples, customary marriage is based on the exchange of *lobola* (the payment of bridewealth by the protective husband to the bride's father). Under customary law the bride passes from her father's authority to that of her husband's (Deveaux, 2003). Customary law also discriminated against women for example by denying them inheritance and forcing some to accept polygynous marriages (Deveaux, 2003).

Furthermore, in South Africa gender relations are inextricably linked to race and class (Simpson, 1992; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991). Historically, under the previous regime of Apartheid, South Africans were classified into racial groups of white, black, coloured and Asian in accordance with the Population registration Act. Under Apartheid privileges of power and dominance were accorded to white South Africans, particularly white men, depriving people from other racial groups opportunities with respect to education, employment and housing. Accordingly, the majority of women in South Africa have faced additional discrimination based on class and race (Simpson, 1992; Vogelmann & Eagle, 1991).

With the first non-racial elections held in 1994 however, gender equality was recognized as an essential component of building democracy and development in South Africa (Beall, 2001). Women have entered parliament in impressive numbers, and a National Machinery for Advancing Gender Equality, that consists of key structures such as the Commission on Gender Equality, has been established in South Africa (see Beall, 2001; Gouws, 2004; United Nations Development Programme, South Africa, 2000). Yet, as pointed out by Beall (2001), despite the significant advancements made toward gender equality many problems still persist in the form of deeply embedded socioeconomic structures and beliefs about gender relations. Men in general still have higher paid employment than women, and black people, women in particular, continue to bear the major burden of poverty.

Furthermore, studies continue to reveal that male control of women and notions of male sexual entitlement feature strongly in the dominant social constructions of masculinity in South Africa (Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002). Qualitative studies among South African young people have shown that the circumstances of sex are defined by men through the use of constructions of love and entitlement to which women are expected to submit (Wood et al., 1998). Several studies conducted among different communities in South Africa have shown that many young men believe that their girlfriends do not have the right to refuse sex, and feel justified in forcing unwilling partners into having sex (MacPhail & Campbell, 2001; NPPHCN, 1996; Varga 1999; Wood & Jewkes, 1998). In this respect, Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) argue that among South African men sexual coercion is both a manifestation of male dominance over women and an assertion of that position.

Sociocultural understandings of male and female sexuality also define different expectations of young women and men in relation to sexual conduct. Although there are differences across cultures and subcultures in what may be considered acceptable sexual behaviour for adolescents, gender-specific sexual scripts are evident worldwide (Barker, 2000; Crawford & Popp, 2003; Dowsett & Aggleton, 1999; Hird & Jackson, 2001) and contribute to coercive sexual relations between young men and women.

The prevailing sexual script for adolescent boys is predicated on the belief that boys' need for sex is biologically uncontrollable (Barker, 2000). Studies among adolescents around the world, for example the United Kingdom and New Zealand (Hird & Jackson, 2001), Cambodia, Cameroon, Chile, Costa Rica, Papua New Guinea, Philippines and Zimbabwe (Dowsett & Aggleton, 1999) and South Africa (Varga, 1999) reveal that beliefs persist that male sexuality is biologically different from female sexuality with males portrayed as having an urgent sex drive. Hollway (1984) identified the 'male sexual drive discourse' as a principal discourse in contemporary understandings of sexuality. This discourse of a naturally aggressive male sexuality originates in the sociobiological views of men's primary role to pursue and procreate. The construction of male sexuality as naturally aggressive and as an overpowering urge not only serves to portray men as not entirely responsible for their actions, but also contributes to male notions of sexual entitlement.

Within the traditional sexual script young men are socialised to define their masculinity in terms of the number of female partners and not to consider the quality of the relationship in their decision to have sex (Bateman, 1991). Studies from various parts of the world have shown how masculine identities are based on sex to prove their masculinity (Bateman, 1991; Hird & Jackson, 2001; Holland, Ramazanoglu, & Thomson, 1996; Lees, 1995; Wood & Jewkes, 1998). In their endeavour to demonstrate their sexual ability, men are not only encouraged but expected to initiate sexual activity, and to exert pressure to overcome a woman's resistance and even to use coercive strategies to obtain sex.

Young women are socialised to defend their sexual reputations by not appearing to desire sex and to engage in sex only in the confines of a committed dating relationship (Holland et al., 1996). In a review of studies focusing on the sexual double standard, Crawford and Popp (2003) illustrate how young women, but never young men, are judged negatively for showing interest in sex, having sex with many partners, having sex outside of a committed relationship, or for having sexual experience at an early age. Studies from Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States have shown that concern for sexual reputations features prominently in shaping adolescent women's experiences and sexuality (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Stewart, 1999; van Roosmalen, 2000). Young women's fear of being negatively labelled contributes to their silence around sexual desire and their silenced engagement in sex with men (Crawford & Popp, 2003; Tolman, 1994; van Roosmalen, 2000).

The social construction of male and female sexualities, encouraging male dominance and restricting female expression, operate to legitimise coercive behaviour in young people's sexual interactions and blur the distinction between male coercion and 'normal' heterosexual sex (Hird, 2000; Hird & Jackson, 2001; van Roosmalen, 2000). In addition, gender norms and unequal power relations compromise young women's sexual health by limiting their ability to negotiate birth control and safer sexual practices such as condom use or fidelity (Doyle, 1995; Heise et al., 1995; Maman et al., 2000; Rao Gupta, 2000; UNAIDS, 1999a). These sociocultural factors compromise men's sexual health too (Barker, 2000; Doyle, 2001; Rao Gupta, 2000; UNAIDS, 1999a). Gender norms within a society not only contribute to men being more sexually aggressive, but also encourage high risk sexual practices such as multiple

sexual partners.

In order to effectively improve adolescent sexual health requires an understanding of how dominant cultural conceptions of female sexuality and male sexuality contribute to coercive and high risk sexual practices in relationships. However, young people are not merely passive recipients of social norms. From a social constructionist perspective, sexual coercion is sustained by the ways in which young people view, experience, and talk about sexuality and relationships (Hird & Jackson, 2001; Lloyd & Emery, 2000). Understanding the ways in which young people may reproduce, enforce and resist dominant sexual scripts in various contexts, particularly the peer context, are important for addressing and preventing sexual coercion in adolescent relationships (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001; Tolman et al., 2003).

3.4.2 High levels of interpersonal violence in society

The general level of interpersonal violence in a society also impacts on sexual coercion. Cross-national and cross-cultural studies show that sexual coercion and violence tend to be more prevalent in societies characterised by high rates of interpersonal violence in general (Lottes & Weinberg, 1997; Sanday, 1981). South Africa is marked with high levels of interpersonal violence. Recent statistics from the *National Injury Mortality Surveillance System* reveal that the majority (58%) of nonnatural deaths among youth between the age of 15 and 24 years are due to violence (Matzopoulos, 2004). Furthermore, in an international comparison of fatal injury trends Matzopoulos, Norman, and Bradshaw (2004) found that South Africa's age-standardised homicide rate was more than five times higher than the global average and 30% higher than the AFRO region rate. In part, it is possible that the high levels of violence evident in South Africa are a reflection of a country in socio-political transition (Simpson, 1992). In their review of the epidemiology of rape and sexual coercion in South Africa, Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) point out that physical violence is used in a variety of contexts including between neighbours, nurses and patients, teachers and learners, and by colleagues in the workplace. Accordingly, Jewkes and Abrahams (2002) maintain that in South Africa sexual coercion constitutes a part of the broader problem of gender-based violence, which is significantly influenced by a general culture of violence in society.

3.5 Female perpetration and male victimisation

Although female-to-male sexual coercion is not well understood, there is some evidence to suggest that it is more prevalent in societies characterised by male dominance, high levels of male sexual aggression, and high levels of violence in general than in egalitarian societies with lower levels of interpersonal violence. For example, a significantly higher percentage of American men (50%) compared to Swedish men (22%) reported being subjected to sexual coercion by women (Lottes & Weinberg, 1997). It may be that women are simply modelling the role of men as aggressors in an attempt to assert their sexuality. Alternatively, the pervasiveness of violence in general may be a factor promoting female as well as male aggression.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I used an ecological framework to organise the risk factors for sexual coercion from a selected review of the literature to illustrate that sexual coercion, like other forms of violence, is a complex phenomenon resulting from the interplay of multiple factors including individual, relationship, community and social factors. However, much of the existing research focuses primarily on male-to-female sexual coercion and consists of surveys conducted among college samples in the United States. Accordingly, studies on younger adolescents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as from countries and cultural backgrounds other than America are scarce. Furthermore, most studies have relied on quantitative methods to obtain data, thus providing limited information on the meaning that adolescents attribute to sexual coercion in dating relationships and the sociocultural factors that might influence their understanding of male-female relationships. While studies have highlighted gender differences with respect to sexual behaviour and coercion, Tolman and colleagues (2003) point out that there is a marked absence of a *gendered analysis* in research methods and interpretations. In this respect, more qualitative studies are required to understanding how gender contributes to coercive and high risk sexual practices in relationships. Specifically, understanding the ways in which young people may reproduce, enforce and resist dominant sexual scripts in various contexts, particularly the peer context, is important for addressing and preventing sexual coercion in adolescent relationships.