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Patriarchy blamed for increase in rape homicides

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THE increase in rape homicide was due to a combination of the high prevalence of violence and a society which was patriarchal, said gender expert, Dr Shanaaz Matthews.

She said even though rape homicide had not been quantified by the police, a study she did with the Medical Research Council released last year reported that rape homicide had increased proportionately.

Rape was (involved) in more than one in four of the non-intimate femicide cases in 2009, she said, but it would be misleading to treat it in isolation from crime trends such as the murder rate and the violence against women.

"During the 2011/2012 financial year, a total of 15 609 murders were recorded by the police," said Matthews, and a woman was killed by her partner every eight hours.

She said combining the high prevalence of violence with the high rate of femicide could explain why rape homicide had increased.

Matthews was reacting to murder and rape cases including that of 17-year-old Anene Booysen, who was gang-raped, mutilated and left to die in Bredasdorp, Western Cape.

Mbuyiselo Botha, a gender activist from Sisonke Gender Commission, said the increase in rape homicide reflected the country's past.

"During apartheid, violence was used as a norm and there was a total disregard of human life. In those days in the township, people were burnt alive and children used to

watch those incidents. Still today, some people think you can rape and kill someone and get away with it," said Botha.

However, Colleen Lowe Morna, executive director of GenderLinks, said the increase in rape homicide reflected a sick society, where gruesome violations of human rights were seen as the norm and something people could get away with.

She said we could no longer use the past as a cop-out and it was time to start taking responsibility for our actions.

Nombiso Gasa, of the Council for the Advancement of the SA Constitution, said the rape murders reflected a larger problem of a country that was patriarchal, sexist, misogynistic and systematically devalued women, regardless of the constitution saying otherwise.

"Women and their bodies

are devalued, so is their contribution. Women are viewed as an extension of their men, something men own that can be used in whatever way a man feels," she said.

"Just because men believe they own women, they feel it justifiable to do whatever they want with women's bodies, even killing them, without expecting any consequences because a woman is just that, an object."

Gasa and Lowe Morna agreed there was a need to change the societal mindsets about women as a solution to gender-based violence.

"We need to build a society that respects women and men equally from birth to death," said Lowe Morna.

Today, the world commemorates One Billion Rising Campaign, based on a UN statistic that one in three women will be raped or beaten, making it one billion women globally.