

Beheading for muti shocks sex workers

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Desiree Murugan

Durban - The brutal beheading of a Chatsworth sex worker has sent shockwaves through the ranks of Durban sex workers.

They described the murder of Desiree Murugan as “sick and inhuman”, saying they now feared “for their lives”.

“We know it’s a dangerous profession, but to just kill and decapitate another human being like that is really barbaric,” said a sex worker from Lillian Ngoyi (Windermere) Road, Morningside.

Murugan’s headless body was found stabbed 195 times at the Shallcross sports stadium last month.

Her body was found by municipal staff, while her head was found a few days later in the Imfume area on the South Coast.

Her brain, pieces of her ears and nose, as well as flesh and skin from her face, were removed and stored in tins.

Murugan’s hair, which apparently was most sought after by her killers, was still intact.

“Sex workers are human too and don’t deserve to die in such a manner,” said another Morningside sex worker.

She, like most of her colleagues, always armed herself with a knife or another weapon before heading out at night.

“We know the dangers of what we do,” said the sex worker, adding that she has had brushes with some hard-headed clients who have assaulted her after refusing to pay.

“But, I’m a tough lady. I fought back,” she said.

Expressing horror, Joy Conradie, from the Umgeni Community Empowerment Centre (Ucec), an NGO that works on sex-worker and trafficking cases, said such cases were frequent.

“This happens to sex workers all the time. They are abused, beaten up and sometimes not paid,” she said, adding that some of the women the centre helps rehabilitate had cigarette burn marks.

“There is just too much violence towards these women,” said Conradie.

Ucec, in partnership with KZN Human Trafficking, Prostitution, Pornography and Brothel Provincial Task Team and the Department of Justice, will embark on an awareness campaign in Chatsworth next month.

“We’re trying to combat human trafficking and prostitution. We will engage the community and sex workers in the area,” said Conradie.

A presentation, sketch play and question-and-answer session will form part of the October 3 awareness campaign.

Meanwhile, president of Traditional Healers’ Association of SA, Sazi Mhlongo, has condemned the killing, saying the act was one of witchcraft and not traditional healing.

Six people, including a traditional healer, Sibonakaliso Mbili, 32, Vusumuzi Gumede, Falakhe Khumalo, 18, and three minors have been charged with the murder.

Khumalo pleaded guilty last week and was sentenced to life.

In his plea, he implicated all five co-accused saying he had visited a traditional healer, Mbili, who had offered him R2 million to find the head of an Indian, coloured or white woman with long hair.

The three minors – a girl aged 15 and two boys aged 16 and 17 – changed their minds earlier this week in the Durban Magistrate’s Court and decided to plead not guilty, after saying earlier that they wanted to plead guilty. They will appear again in court with Mbili and Gumede on Monday.

All five are in custody.

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