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# ASSESSING THE FUTURE OF RURAL POLICING

## The impact of closing the Commandos

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Implicit in President Mbeki's controversial announcement in February 2003 that the Commandos are to be phased out is a statement that the SAPS is now strong enough to police rural South Africa on its own, and that the uncomfortable, transitional role the military has been playing in this area can come to an end. The key question posed in a recent ISS study was whether rural policing would be strengthened or weakened by the decision. The research suggests that closing the Commandos will weaken rural policing but strengthen the policing of contact crimes in rural towns.

In February 2003, President Thabo Mbeki announced that the South African Defence Force's Territorial Reserve, popularly known as the Commandos, would be phased out. This phasing out process is now well underway. By the end of 2009, the last of South Africa's 183 Commandos will have ceased operating, their rural crime prevention and borderline control functions taken over by the South African Police Service (SAPS).

The announcement that the Commandos are to be phased out has elicited a great deal of controversy. This is hardly surprising. Any debate about the Commandos must inevitably find itself tackling the charged and difficult question of the relationship between security and race. At one end of the spectrum, government has been accused of leaving isolated white families of the agricultural hinterland vulnerable to violent crime. At the other, it has been lauded for closing down a quasi-private militia sensitive to white farmers' security but insensitive to black citizens' rights.

### Background to the Commandos

The Commandos have in fact occupied an awkward and ambivalent position in government thinking

ever since 1994. From the inception of the South African Defence Force in the 1960s, assisting the police with day-to-day policing was never meant to be a central function of the Commandos. The Commandos' primary function was then, and remains now, one of rear area defence during wartime. Rear area defence consists in securing military communication and supply lines, guarding strategic civilian infrastructure such as power stations, national key points such airports and broadcasting infrastructure, and protecting civilian life from enemy hostility in rural South Africa. The rationale is to free up permanent forces for frontline warfare.

The most prominent secondary function conceived for the Commandos was that of assisting state departments in times of crisis, be the crisis drought or floods, civil disorder, or the outbreak of an epidemic. Commandos' involvement in policing really escalated as a matter of circumstance – the circumstance being the internal insurgency against apartheid which began in June 1976 and never really ended until the demise of the old order. The policing with which Commandos were involved was blunt, aggressive and paramilitary. A veteran

Commando member interviewed for this study in Johannesburg's West Rand recalled participating in an "internal security operation" in the township of Khutsong. He told us that:

We literally used to close the entire township down. Hundreds of soldiers and riot police would cordon off the whole township and we would search every room of every house and every shack in every street. The operation would take maybe four or five hours. By the end of it, we had between us seen every article of underwear in the township, every Sunday dress, every kitchen ladle.

It is hardly surprising that when the African National Congress came to power in 1994 it felt strongly that the role of the SANDF in ordinary policing should cease. The 1996 Defence White Paper made it clear that it was "a matter of urgency that plans are formulated to allow for the withdrawal of the SANDF from a policing role."<sup>1</sup>

Realities on the ground during the mid-1990s, however, mitigated against the removal of the Commandos from policing functions. While South Africa's new police force, the SAPS, was getting its house in order, the crime rate remained high. Crime in rural areas took on inflammatory political meanings. Violent crimes against farmers were dubbed 'farm attacks', a heavily loaded term which suggested a blurring of the lines between criminal aggression and guerrilla activity, and between acquisitiveness and political revenge.

Faced with high levels of violent crime which had been sharply politicised, and a police force distracted by the tasks of consolidation, the withdrawal of the crime fighting capacity from rural areas contained in the Commandos was deemed extremely unwise.

Thus, the Commandos occupied this ambivalent no-man's-land role for the first ten years of democracy. President Mbeki's February 2003 announcement that the Commandos were to be phased out is an implicit statement that the SAPS is now strong enough to police rural South Africa on its own, that

the uncomfortable, transitional role the military has been playing in the policing of rural South Africa can come to an end.

The task of a recent research project conducted for the Institute for Security Studies, the findings of which are summarised in this article, was to determine whether President Mbeki is right. Our task was to assess the rural safety capacity that will be lost with the closing of the Commandos, and to discuss the manner in which the SAPS will replace that capacity. The ultimate question we posed was whether rural policing would be strengthened or weakened by the closure of the Commandos.<sup>2</sup>

### **Composition and functions of the Commandos**

The early 1990s was a period of weakening and decline for the Commandos. They haemorrhaged personnel copiously, partly because of the end of conscription, partly because many veteran members refused to work for the military under an ANC government. They also began to suffer under steady and incremental budget cuts, as South Africa's military spending in general began to decline.

Beginning in 1996, the Territorial Reserve was given a budget to recruit aggressively in the black townships of rural South Africa. The vast majority of the new recruits were unemployed and joined in order to earn a living. Following a period of basic training, an entry level recruit earns R114.00 per day (in 2005 prices) and can work for up to 180 days per year. An entry level Territorial Reserve member can thus earn in the region of R20,000 per year, no mean sum in the context of a rural South African township.

As far as recruitment criteria are concerned, recruits must be South African citizens, must not have a criminal record, and should have a matric school qualification. However, a large number of recruits with a Standard Eight education have also been accepted into the Territorial Reserve over the last decade.

The Territorial Reserve thus changed dramatically in a very short space of time. In 1990, it was the institution into which hundreds of thousands of white South African men were periodically mobilised for military service. Its manifest presence was that of an

auxiliary force in the maintenance of public order and social and political control. By 1996, it was a very different beast. White membership had dwindled considerably – in some areas to little as a few dozen. Black membership grew exponentially as the Territorial Reserve became a *de facto* employment provider and skills developer in rural towns across the country. At present, between 12,000 and 15,000 people are solely dependent on Commando work for their income.<sup>3</sup>

The Commandos of today bear the hallmarks of this legacy. Each Commando hosts two types of structures: area bound units and non-area bound units. Generally – although there are obviously many exceptions – white members of the Commando are full participants in the civilian economy and thus give comparatively little of their time to Commando work. They are generally active in area bound units. These units have two functions:

- gathering of information and intelligence, which gets relayed to joint, interdepartmental security planning structures; and
- an area bound rapid response capacity, in essence a mutual assistance function for neighbours, particularly rapid response in a time of emergency.

The demands on the time of a member of an area bound unit are small. To remain active and retain his entitlement to keep an army-issue assault rifle at his home, a member must report quarterly for weapons training and must submit to annual inspections which ensure that his weapon is properly stored and in good working order.

The second type of unit present in each Commando is the non-area bound unit, also known as the reaction unit. These are largely – again, not entirely – staffed by black members recruited in the mid and late 1990s. Most wish to maximise the amount of time they spend on duty, for they are breadwinners whose primary or sole source of income is Commando work.

Non-area bound units are not permitted to work independently of the police. They are strictly an auxiliary force, assisting in intelligence-driven crime prevention SAPS operations. They are, in short, a

force multiplier, one with limited powers and capacities. Below is a list of the types of operations non-area bound units are permitted to join, and, where necessary, a brief description of their operation-specific role:

- observation posts (Commando members do not have powers of apprehension or arrest. Observation posts should be led by SAPS members);
- listening posts;
- roadblocks (Commando members' function is to secure the roadblock; they do not have powers to search vehicles or to approach members of the public and they are also not permitted to open fire on vehicles which fail to stop at roadblocks);
- vehicle check points;
- vehicle and foot patrols (again, SANDF soldiers do not have powers of apprehension or arrest and patrols should be led by police officials);
- cordon-and-search operations (SANDF soldiers have the powers to cordon, but not to search).

To give a sense of the scale of the Commandos and the operations in which they are involved, at the end of March 2004 total Commando strength was 43,976, of which 17,957 was utilised and 26,019 was dormant. Between the beginning of April 2004 and the end of March 2005, Commando members were involved in 79,004 operations. The vast majority of these were farm visits (29,351) and vehicle patrols (24,242). Commando members were also present at more at 9,072 foot patrols, 4,207 roadblocks, 2,926 vehicle check points, 2,995 observation posts, 4,907 cordon-and-search operations, 16 air support operations, 46 motorcycle patrols and 49 equestrian patrols.<sup>4</sup>

As can be seen from the description of their functions above, the non-area bound units are pretty blunt policing instruments. Equipped with very restricted policing powers and highly circumscribed functions, they are little more than feet on the ground, or force multipliers. Their job is really that of a kind of security guard – defending the agricultural property – and increasing security force visibility in rural areas.

In our experience, though, SAPS station commissioners were delighted, in some cases

relieved, to have them. The typical rural policing jurisdiction in South Africa includes a rural town at its centre – replete with suburbs, townships, and informal settlements – and a vast expanse of farmland stretching to its periphery.

The vast majority of reported crimes – from burglary, to robbery, to assault – occur in town centres, and that is where station commissioners invest the greater part of their personnel and infrastructure. Station commissioners are thus only too delighted to have a steady and reliable source of force multipliers to assist in the policing of the rural districts of their jurisdictions. Indeed, in two of the three areas we visited, farmers had come to rely far more on the Commandos than police for their primary policing services.

#### **Do Commandos represent rural SA?**

Although the research suggests that Commandos do not represent the rural population of the country, this finding is less controversial than may appear at first sight.

Typical Commando operations are aimed at preventing crimes against the people, property and businesses of the rural middle class. Does this make the Commando a problematic structure? Political orthodoxy tells us that all public security structures must represent everybody's interests, that the Commandos, for instance, must include everybody. But is that goal possible?

Rural South African communities are deeply divided – by race, by inequality, and by a great deal of history. Asking a public security structure – whether a Commando or the SAPS – to bridge these divides, is perhaps asking too much. It is asking a structure tasked with defending people and property to mend souls; a structure with limited means and blunt instruments to conduct social engineering. Public security organs must, of course, be given mandates which are fair. And everybody must be given the policing service they require. But that is a very different point.

However, when the capacity contained in the Commandos is used injudiciously, they can indeed cause a great deal of harm. When every gathering of

black people around a crate of beer is deemed to be a hotspot; when every rural drinking establishment in the countryside is deemed a potential source of crime; when every rural settlement is regarded as a hideout for criminals, Commandos begin to aggravate racial tensions and to do their jobs inequitably. That is when they begin to police the property of one constituency by invading the privacy and violating the dignity of another.

Commandos ought to do 'hotspot policing' – putting uniformed bodies in places where crime is known to occur. But the sort of hotspot policing at which they are best is largely passive. Their job is not to scour the countryside for weapons and potential criminals.

#### **Rural policing without the Commandos**

Despite many hiccups, at the time of writing it appears that the SAPS will successfully replace the capacity that will be lost with the closure of the Commandos. The SAPS has set aside a budget to recruit and remunerate an annually escalating number of reservists beginning in the current financial year until 2009. Many of these reservists will hopefully be recruited directly from the ranks of the Commandos.

For the 2005/06 financial year, funds have been set aside to call up 2,000 reservists for a maximum of seven days per month for active duty. This figure will rise incrementally until by 2009/10 20,000 reservists will be called up for a maximum of seven days per month. At the rank of Inspector, reservists will be paid R126.99 per day of active duty at 2005 prices.<sup>5</sup>

If one assumes that 12,000 part-time soldiers currently earn a living in the Commandos, and that they work an average of 120 days per year, their collective manpower totals 1.44 million working days per year. If, by 2009, the SAPS deploys 20,000 reservists on active duty for seven days each month, collective manpower will total 1.68 million working days per year.

By this narrow and limited measure, a total gain of 14% of annual working days would have been achieved by the time the last Commando closes its doors in 2009.<sup>6</sup> The issue that remains is how the SAPS will fashion and deploy this capacity.

### Rural towns vs. the agricultural hinterland

It is our contention that the SAPS will, over time, shift increasing proportions of the capacity it inherits from the Commandos from the rural districts and into the town centres of rural policing jurisdictions. The closure of the Commandos will thus result in the weakening of rural policing but in the strengthening of the policing of contact crimes in rural town centres.

All police services exercise discretion in deciding which aspects of policing to prioritise. In the SAPS, this discretion is exercised primarily at a national level. Area and station level managers are given quantifiable crime reduction and police action targets to meet. At present, the highest priority crimes in the SAPS are contact crimes, and are attached to an annual crime reduction target of seven percent. This is a normative, value-laden decision, and a commendable one at that.

In small town police stations, however, the policing of rural sectors will suffer as a result. Many of these stations straddle a sharp divide between urban and rural areas. Most contact crimes are committed in urban sectors. If and when the capacity contained in the Commandos is transferred to the police, area and station level managers are bound to transfer much of this capacity from the rural sectors in which it is now deployed to urban sectors. Not to do so would be to respond irrationally to their own performance indicators; they must do so in an attempt to meet their targets.

In making this argument, we are not necessarily criticising the police. We acknowledge that deciding how to distribute policing resources is a difficult matter and that the decisions the SAPS has made in this regard are entirely defensible. Prioritising the policing of, say, aggravated robbery over sheep theft is not just understandable but commendable. The SAPS should be aware though that there are places where its existing organisational incentives might, unless checked, result in situations where agricultural crimes are almost entirely unpoliced.

The SAPS should also consider that the station commissioners who inherit the capacity currently contained in the Commandos will be placed in an

invidious position. On the one hand, a very vocal and vociferous local constituency – commercial farmers – will protest that existing capacity be left where it is at very least; strengthened at best. They will demand better service.

Indeed, by establishing Crime Sector Forums in rural sectors, the SAPS is encouraging that such demands be made. Yet pressure exerted on the station commissioner from within the SAPS, in the form of performance targets, will be to feed the urban sectors at the price of rural sectors. The station commissioner will find himself wedged between the demands of a grassroots constituency and the priorities established nationally.

### Acknowledgement

This article is based on a monograph published recently by the Institute for Security Studies: J Steinberg, *After the Commandos: the future of rural policing in South Africa*, ISS Monograph 120, Oct 2005.

### Endnotes

- 1 South African White Paper on Defence, Chapter 4, paragraph 33, 1996, at <<http://www.mil.za/Articles&Papers/Frame/Frame.htm>>.
- 2 After their closure, the Commandos' non-policing functions – namely, wartime rear area defence and peacetime assistance in "exceptional circumstances" – will become the responsibility of the permanent force. Assessing the SANDF's capacity to perform these functions after the closure of the Commandos was beyond the remit of our research.
- 3 Author's correspondence with Major General JF Lusse, co-chairman, National Joins Task Team, 2 August 2005.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Author's communication with SAPS Assistant Commissioner Ben Groenewald, 26 July 2005.
- 6 Individual Commando members who are recruited into the police reserve will not, however, gain a 14% increase in income. On the contrary, they will lose income. Currently, an entry-level recruit in the Commandos (the equivalent to a police corporal) who works 120 days per year at R144 per day earns R13,680 per year. Under the police reserve dispensation, a middle-ranking inspector, working his maximum of 84 days per year, will earn R10,667 per annum. Commando members who join the police reserve, and rely solely on their SAPS work for their livelihoods, will in general experience a steep decline in income.



# AIDS, ORPHANS AND CRIME

## Exploring the linkages

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In the hardest hit regions of the world, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is increasing poverty and inequality and reversing decades of improvements in health, education, and life-expectancy. It is also leaving millions of children orphaned and living in situations of acute vulnerability. Yet, even as the international community mobilises in support of these young people, some researchers and practitioners are linking orphaning and crime, suggesting that growing numbers of impoverished orphans may pose a threat to individual and communal security in some countries. This connection is generally presented as a neat, linear relationship. But is this the case?

**T**he literature linking growing numbers of orphans to crime suggests three main ways in which AIDS related orphaning may lead to higher levels of victimisation.

The first and most common argument is that the illness and death of parents will leave children scarred and marginalised in ways that predispose them to delinquency and criminal behaviour. Proponents believe that growing poverty, together with the emotional trauma associated with multiple AIDS related losses and stigma, reduced levels of parental care, and the loss of positive role models will place children at high risk of developing antisocial tendencies.

The second argument is that growing numbers of orphans will provide a recruitment pool for individuals and organisations wishing to violently challenge the existing socio-political order in African countries. According to Cheek, a swell of young people without family care and formal schooling may constitute an “extra national” population group vulnerable to co-optation into socially disruptive activities and ethnic warfare, which if exploited “could effectively destabilise most countries in southern Africa”.<sup>1</sup>

A third theme is that the demographic change brought about by the epidemic, specifically an overrepresentation of adolescents and young adults in heavily affected populations, will create problems. Schonteich speculates that because young men are most likely to commit crime, a disproportionate number of young men between the age of 15 and 24 in severely affected countries may lead to higher levels of crime – particularly violent crime and group-based aggression.<sup>2</sup> Others argue that by straining social institutions like the labour market and educational system, ‘youth bulges’ resulting from either HIV/AIDS or fertility trends may make countries generally more unstable and prone to violence.<sup>3</sup>

These arguments suggest that HIV/AIDS will exacerbate crime in two main ways:

- that children set apart and damaged by AIDS related orphanhood will be disproportionately more likely to engage in criminal and violent behaviour than other children;
- that the epidemic will increasingly create an environment conducive to crime.

It is the latter that most accurately frames the issues under discussion.

### AIDS orphaning in context

On its current trajectory, the epidemic stands to leave millions of children orphaned. It is likely that many will be left in situations of intense hardship. Common consequences of orphaning including growing poverty and its correlates, the loss of parental affection, reduced levels of care, stigma, and the psychosocial implications of repeated personal and material losses such as trauma, stress, depression, and a loss of social connectivity (Figure 1).

Such loss and growing vulnerability are obviously undesirable, but it is questionable whether, in the African context, they make children orphaned by AIDS a 'special case' among large numbers of other vulnerable children.

As shown in Figure 2, war and poverty have already created large numbers of orphans in sub-Saharan Africa. The numbers vary according to how orphans are defined.<sup>4</sup> Using an expansive definition of orphanhood (children under the age of 18 who have lost one or both of their parents), the latest estimates by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) suggest that there may be as many as 43 million orphans living in sub-Saharan Africa, of whom only about 12 million are thought to have lost parents to AIDS.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous studies also show that children in southern Africa have frequently 'lost' parents through the physical and social movements associated with migrant labour and fluid marital and partnership arrangements.<sup>6</sup> Even when parents are alive, fostering, or the care of non-biological children whose parents live elsewhere, is common.

Data from the South African Project for Statistics on Living Standards and Development survey (SALSS) conducted in 1993, for example, shows that roughly 17% of African children between the age of six and 19 were living apart from their biological parents, while 12% of coloured and just under 5% of Indian and white children were fostered.<sup>7</sup> National estimates from elsewhere in Africa suggest similarly high levels of fostering, with as many as one in five children living apart from their parents in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi.<sup>8</sup>

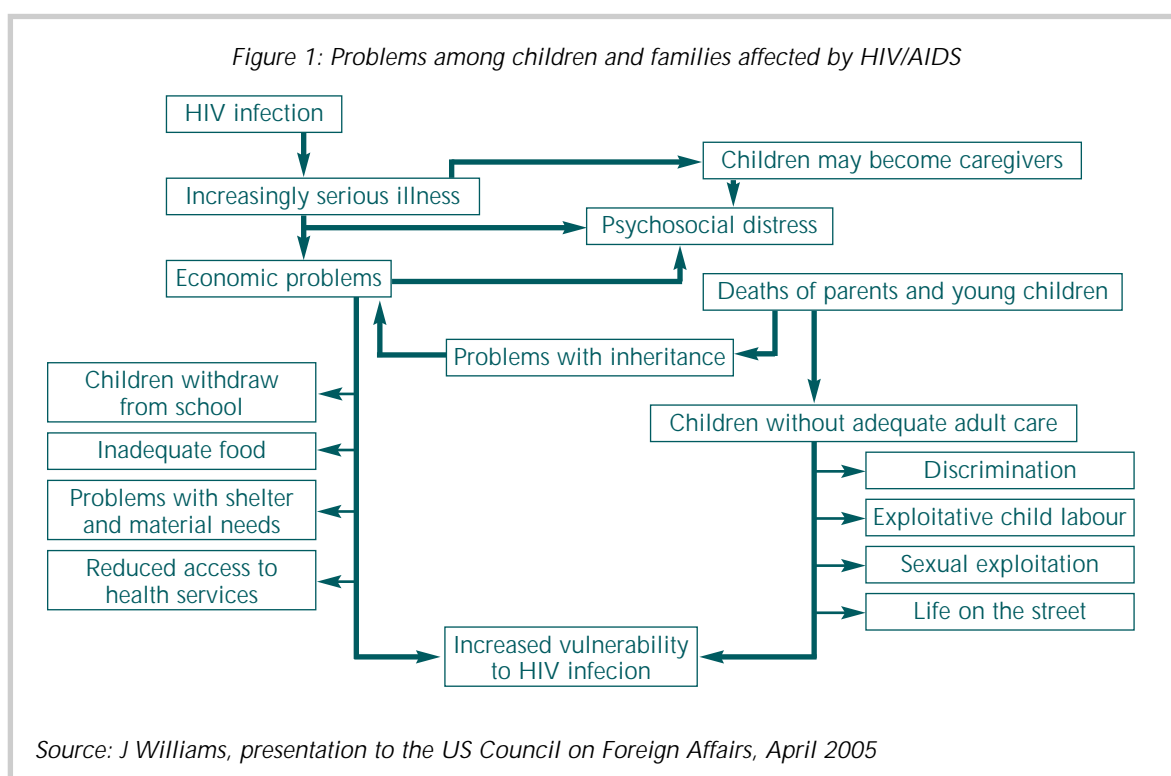
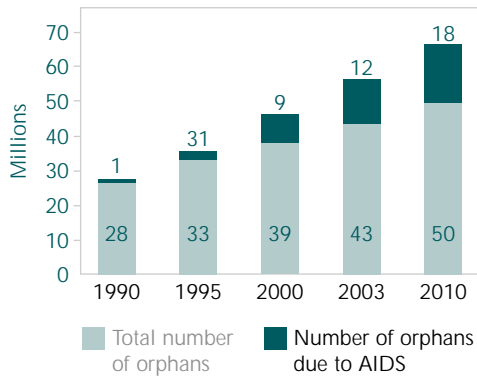


Figure 2: The estimated number of orphans in sub-Saharan Africa, 1990 – 2010



Source: *Children on the Brink*, 2004

The implications of AIDS related illness and death are seldom confined to households who lose members to the epidemic. Foster argues that children not immediately touched by the virus may feel the effects of HIV/AIDS when families provide money to support sick relatives, their mothers leave home to provide care, or their standard of living deteriorates as their family takes in orphaned children.<sup>9</sup>

As the epidemic takes hold, they may also be affected as government services and structures tasked with providing for vulnerable children become overstretched,<sup>10</sup> or economies affected by the epidemic provide fewer jobs. High levels of illness and death may also have an insidious psychosocial impact. Killian notes that South African children living in severely affected areas are excessively anxious about death and often reflect obsessively about illness and mortality.<sup>11</sup>

Such dynamics, together with the high levels of poverty that exist in many of the communities worst affected by the epidemic, mean that few of the above problems are confined to children who lose parents to AIDS. As Ramphela notes, the loss and absence of parents, insecurity, and emotional trauma characterise the lives of many poor children in Africa:

Whereas the family is supposed to create a safe haven in life's troubled waters...uncertainty permeates family life in a

manner that is difficult for outsiders to comprehend. The family unit can not be taken for granted and the availability of a mother, let alone both parents, is a luxury few children enjoy...the provision of basic needs is beyond many, and trusting and respectful relationships are an exception rather than the rule.<sup>12</sup>

This is not to say that children immediately affected by HIV/AIDS do not frequently suffer enormous difficulties. Studies show that they often experience deepening poverty and considerable psychosocial stress. Many also show, however, that these effects vary according to factors such as age and gender, whether children are maternal, paternal or double orphans, whether they are taken in by the extended family, and which relatives then provide care.

Several studies similarly indicate that children orphaned by AIDS are often no more disadvantaged than poor children in comparable circumstances. This suggests that the implications of orphanhood vary according to context, and that the boundaries between children orphaned by AIDS and other orphans and vulnerable children are frequently blurred.

There are only a handful of studies on the implications of AIDS related illness and death for the psychological, emotional, and social adjustment of children and, as noted by Wild, our knowledge is based on "an intermingling of sound data, less reliable data and clinical data and is therefore somewhat less secure than it might appear at a first glance".<sup>13</sup> The few African studies available suggest that children whose parents have AIDS or have died of AIDS tend to experience more anxiety and depression than other children, but are no more prone to delinquency.<sup>14</sup>

The available evidence therefore suggests that although children orphaned by AIDS are negatively affected by their parent's death, there is little about these children that should make them disproportionately more likely to turn to crime and violence than other poor children. Rather than focusing on whether children orphaned by the epidemic pose a peculiar threat to stability and security then, we should look at how HIV/AIDS may

create an environment in which the deepening poverty and vulnerability of a larger group of children, together with demographic change, encourage greater levels of criminality.

### **Linking HIV/AIDS and crime**

Criminologists acknowledge that pinpointing the 'causes' of crime is a difficult undertaking. However, the available literature suggests that there are likely to be strong correlations between the dynamics triggered by the epidemic and crime.

Factors like material need, social exclusion, unemployment, poor education, and family breakdown, for instance, lie at the heart of many of the prevailing theories of why individuals commit crime. High levels of inequality are also closely associated with victimisation – and may in fact be more consistently correlated with crime than poverty.<sup>15</sup> Researchers working in South Africa have found that "inequality is highly correlated with both burglary and vehicle theft",<sup>16</sup> while research in the United States suggests that economic disparities may foster frustration and anger that contributes to violent crime.<sup>17</sup>

This relationship between inequality and crime has been explained using the concept of relative deprivation, which breeds social tensions so that "the poor seek compensation and satisfaction by all means, including committing crimes against both poor and rich".<sup>18</sup> Less directly, factors such as urbanisation and its correlates – which could be exacerbated by the growing economic hardship associated with the epidemic – have also been linked to higher levels of criminality the world over.

At the micro level, there are a number of relevant personal, family, and environmental variables. As noted by Schonteich, biographical factors such as age and gender are closely correlated with criminality, with official arrest and victimisation figures from around the world showing that most crime is committed by young men.<sup>19</sup> The relationship between crime and age is particularly strong. As Smith notes, "probably the most important single fact about crime is that it is committed mainly by teenagers and young adults".<sup>20</sup> American data for the years 1980, 1994 and 2000, for example, shows that arrest rates for both

violent and property crime increased dramatically amongst adolescents in their early teens, peaked around the age of 18 and then decreased continually after the age of 20.<sup>21</sup>

There are also a range of purely social variables associated with a greater propensity towards criminal behaviour. The most relevant include:

- family variables, such as growing up in a single parent family, poor levels of supervision, having family members who are involved in criminal behaviour and exposure to strife, violence, and abuse; and
- schooling variables, including a lack of formal schooling, failing or dropping out of school, as well as exposure to overcrowded and unsupportive school environments.<sup>22</sup>

### **Impact of HIV/AIDS on crime rates**

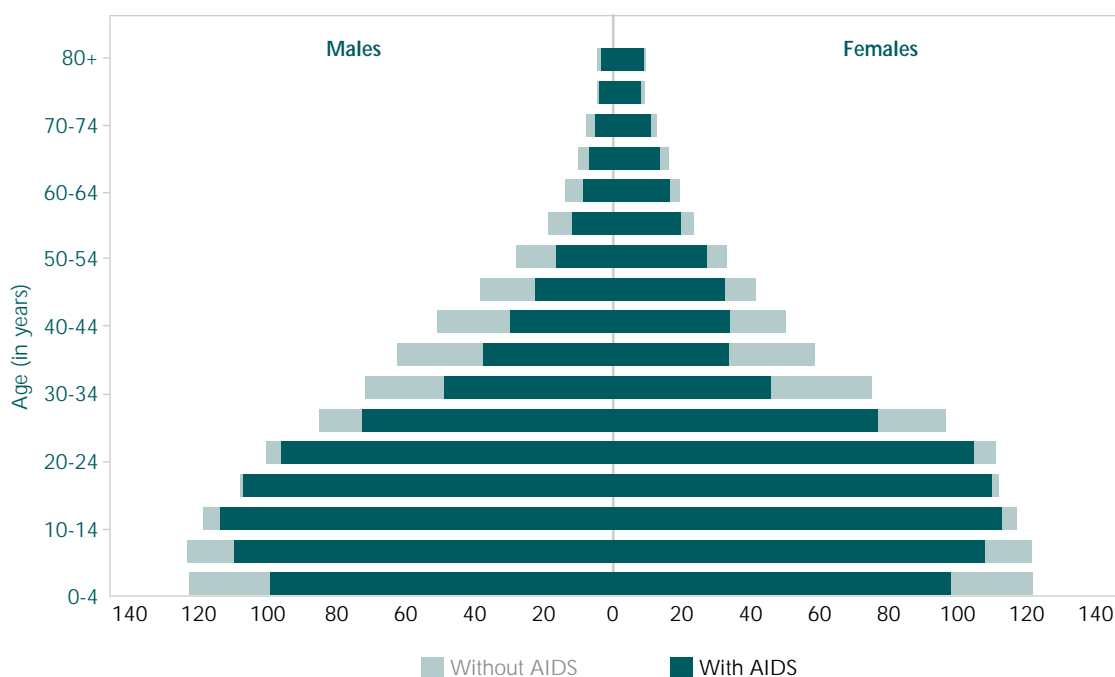
Given these correlates, it is likely that the demographic change, growing levels of poverty and inequality, and compromised service delivery resulting from the HIV/AIDS epidemic will be associated with higher levels of crime. To date, though, there is scant evidence to support these conclusions.

Most countries in southern Africa are in their third decade of the epidemic and their epidemics have matured to the point that large numbers of people are dying.<sup>23</sup> The US Census Bureau estimates that average life expectancy may have already halved in Botswana and Zimbabwe from an expected 70 years to 39 and 38 years respectively.<sup>24</sup>

The population structure of some of the worst affected countries has deviated from the expected pattern and, although expected to worsen in the future, countries like Botswana may be seeing a hollowing out of their population structures as a result of rising death rates among adults in their thirties, forties, and fifties (Figure 3).

Available estimates also suggest that orphan numbers are increasing. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) alone, it is estimated that approximately seven million children have lost either one or both of their parents to AIDS since 1990, and as many as two million have lost a parent to the epidemic since the turn of the millennium.

Figure 3: The demographic profile of Botswana with and without AIDS, thousands, 2005



Source: B Epstein, *The demographic impact of AIDS*, US Census Bureau, undated

In 2003 the number of children living without one or both of their parents as a result of AIDS ranged from 120,000 in Namibia to 4.2 million in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC); the number of children to have lost both parents ranged from 19,000 in Namibia to 420,000 in Zimbabwe.<sup>25</sup>

Despite this, it is difficult to pinpoint a significant impact on crime – although a paucity of reliable data makes such seemingly simple comparisons more difficult than one might expect.<sup>26</sup>

The results from the International Crime and Victimization Surveys (ICVS) conducted by United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) suggest that despite the makings of an ‘orphan crime wave’, countries like Botswana do not show comparably higher levels of victimisation than other African countries for which data are available. The results indicate a total victimisation rate of 32% of the population in Gaborone, compared to rates of 41% and 38% for Maputo and Johannesburg respectively.<sup>27</sup>

Other sources, such as the UNODC Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems (which collects official police data from UN members states) place Botswana’s victimisation rate second to South Africa and comparable to Swaziland (5,207 per 100,000 compared to 7,997 and 4,803 per 100,000), although such findings may be more reflective of better reporting and recording of crime in South Africa and Botswana than actual levels of victimisation.<sup>28</sup>

Statistics on homicide, which are often considered to be the most accurate measure of crime due to higher recording rates (and a body that must be accounted for), suggest that Botswana has less of a crime problem than many of its neighbours. Recent Interpol statistics give it a murder rate of 13 per 100,000, on a par with Swaziland and behind South Africa (43) and Lesotho (51).<sup>29</sup>

These statistics have limitations – including issues of comparability, representivity and accuracy<sup>30</sup> – but suggest that while there is likely to be an

association between the HIV/AIDS epidemic and crime, this relationship is not a simple, linear one. There appear to be a number of reasons for this.

The first is that crime is a complex phenomenon. For instance, although poverty is often a motivating factor, it is not true that the poorest societies have the highest rates of crime or that the poorest people necessarily commit the most crime.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, although inequality is more consistently correlated with crime than poverty, economic disparities are not always associated with crime.<sup>32</sup>

Conflict theorists like Davies attribute this to the relativity of deprivation. He suggests that although the prevalence, duration, and degree of deprivation can help to predict the likelihood of conflict, the likelihood of violence is more closely linked to thwarted expectations than prolonged general poverty.<sup>33</sup> 'Relative deprivation' may therefore be gauged in relation to one's own past affluence.<sup>34</sup>

The second is that, even when young people are exposed to particular risks, they will not necessarily turn to crime. Criminologists recognise that even when levels of offending are high, the decision to engage in crime remains an individual choice<sup>35</sup> and exposure to micro-level risk factors does not necessarily condemn a child to problems in later life.<sup>36</sup> Like criminology, the burgeoning literature on risk and resilience is far from clear-cut, but work by Garbarino and others in the United States shows that the impact of risk factors is highly dependent on children's environment, and it is only when three or more risk factors combine with an overwhelming and unsupportive environment that children are likely to become delinquent or violent.<sup>37</sup>

The implications of exposure to deprivation and other sources of risk are mediated by factors such as personality and temperament, coping style, age of exposure, and the availability of caring adults and social supports in children's environment. The likelihood of long-term maladjustment is therefore dependent on the availability of conditions for recovery as much as the form, number or severity of precipitating stresses.<sup>38</sup>

Even low levels of support in childhood appear to enable children to overcome severe disadvantages,<sup>39</sup>

and it is estimated that less than one third of children raised in situations of poverty and deprivation are affected negatively by these experiences.<sup>40</sup>

The third reason why the relationship between the HIV/AIDS epidemic and crime is not a simple, linear one is that crime is linked to both the opportunities for committing crime and the cost and likelihood of being caught.

Even when levels of poverty and vulnerability are high, the likelihood of individuals breaking the law is mediated by factors such as social norms concerning the acceptability of crime, the availability of firearms and other weapons, and the strength of a country's criminal justice institutions. Countries with weak gun or border controls and ineffective criminal justice systems, for example, are likely to experience higher levels of crime than those in which guns are harder to obtain and criminals stand a greater chance of being caught and punished.<sup>41</sup>

#### **The heterogeneous nature of crime**

Another factor complicating efforts to predict the effects of HIV/AIDS on crime is what Leggett refers to as "the diversity of human behaviours that fall under the general heading of 'crime'".<sup>42</sup> Human beings commit crime for a wide range of reasons and different types of crime have different motivations.

Someone who steals food in order to survive or to earn a living, for instance, may be motivated by poverty, while public violence may be linked to factors such as relative deprivation, historical rivalries or economic frustration. Greed-motivated or pathological crimes, on the other hand, are more closely associated with individual variables that have nothing to do with either poverty or the inequitable distribution of wealth. Violent crime may also be, at least in part, linked to factors such as the availability of weapons and attitudes to violence.

How the epidemic impacts on crime will thus be bound up with how the effects of the epidemic play themselves out in particular settings, the prevailing macro-economic and social environment, as well as

structural factors such as the availability and acceptability of firearms or other weaponry.

Future scenarios may thus unfold in a multitude of ways. It could be, for example, that the correlation between crime and the epidemic is strongest in urban areas where economic stress and disparities are felt more keenly and city living loosens traditional social ties. In poor rural communities, where economic disparities are less marked and prevailing norms reject interpersonal violence, the effects of the epidemic might be confined to petty and non-violent property crime.

The stresses associated with the epidemic could also result primarily in higher levels of domestic violence or increased levels of rape and sexual assault rather than other forms more publicly oriented violence. While this is undoubtedly an undesirable outcome, it is unlikely to threaten society in the way envisaged in much of the literature.

### Conclusion

There is very little empirical data available to test the links between the HIV/AIDS epidemic and crime; and a great deal more is needed before definitive conclusions about these links can be drawn. A broad reading of the criminological literature, however, suggests that the relationships involved are not simple ones. There is evidence to suggest that demographic change, growing levels of poverty and inequality, and compromised service delivery may contribute to higher levels of crime, but it is difficult to predict the magnitude of these effects.

Given appropriate support and viable opportunities for economic and social inclusion, children are unlikely to turn to crime. Labelling children as a security risk without properly understanding the nature of the links between the epidemic and crime stands to increase the stigma and discrimination to which children orphaned by AIDS are already exposed, and may exacerbate rather than ameliorate security concerns. It is thus important to better understand the nature and parameters of this so-called threat. Only then can we design and implement the vital programmes to support the most vulnerable.

### Acknowledgement

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# PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## How social service delivery can prevent crime

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The Departments of Education, Health and Social Development bear the main responsibility for taking care of South Africa's children through the fulfilment of their core functions, as well as various interdepartmental programmes. These services and programmes provide many important opportunities for crime prevention. This article assesses the potential of these three departments to help prevent crime among children and youth up to the age of 18.

**T**he Constitution and various pieces of legislation place substantial responsibilities on the state for service delivery to children and youth. The provision of these services presents important opportunities for crime prevention – opportunities which ought to be met as part of government's role as the ultimate guardian of our children's overall health and well-being.

For Pease, crime prevention "involves the disruption of mechanisms which cause crime events."<sup>1</sup> It is this broad definition of crime prevention that will act as a guide throughout this article. More specifically, the nature of services under review can be understood as 'social crime prevention' – an approach described in more detail in Crawford's typology in Table 1 below, which provides a framework for describing various crime prevention approaches.

The two central questions dealt with in this article are what activities within the core functions of the Departments of Education (DOE), Health (DOH) and Social Development (DSD) may contribute to crime prevention in South Africa, and to what

extent these may serve crime prevention efforts in the country.

A brief overview and assessment of national policy and its potential is provided, and some aspects of delivery are discussed. The article therefore refers to the national departments where policy is intended to be made and evaluated, as opposed to the provincial departments where policy is expected to be implemented.

### Children as targets for crime prevention

Much of the crime prevention literature emphasises children and young people as specific targets for proactive efforts to prevent or reduce crime.<sup>2</sup> Childhood and adolescence are recognised as phases of development during which vulnerability to the factors that may result in offending and victimisation is most palpable.<sup>3</sup> The World Health Organisation also notes:

Violence prevention programmes targeted at children or those who influence them during early development show greater promise than those targeted at adults.<sup>4</sup>

Table 1: A typology of crime prevention

	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
<b>Social</b>	Education and socialisation, public awareness and advertising campaigns, and neighbourhood watch.	Work with those at risk offending: youths, and the unemployed as well as community regeneration.	Rehabilitation, confronting offending behaviour, aftercare, diversion, and reparation.
<b>Situational</b>	Target hardening, surveillance, opportunity reduction/removal, environmental design, and general deterrence.	Target hardening and design measures for 'at risk' groups, risk prediction and assessment, and deterrence.	Individual deterrence, incapacitation, assessment of 'dangerousness' and 'risk'.

Source: Crawford, in E Pelsler, *Crime Prevention Partnerships: Lessons from Practice*, Institute for Security Studies, 2002, p 4.

Risk factors identified in international studies relating to both children and young people include:

- family disruption;
- violence;
- poor parenting;
- poverty;
- inadequate housing and health conditions;
- poor schooling;
- truancy;
- school drop-out or exclusion;
- peer group activities and pressures;
- discrimination; and
- lack of training and work opportunities.<sup>5</sup>

Noteworthy is the fact that many of these factors are also associated with poverty and inequality. Especially in relation to children and youth, it is difficult to distinguish between those strategies – often related to the fulfilment of basic rights – that promote overall well-being and health on the one hand, and prevent crime on the other. Much of the crime prevention literature notes the importance of broader measures to ensure that:

- children are provided with opportunities for fulfilling their basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing;
- children are afforded safe and protective homes and neighbourhoods to grow up in;
- they are offered opportunities through education, support and nurturing, in order that they may fulfil their potential.

#### **Policies and programmes aimed at children and youth**

Of the three departments under review, the Department of Education is most centrally focused on children and youth through its General Education and Training (GET) programmes. In terms of the Child Care Act, and other legislation, the Departments of Health and Social Development also cover a broad range of needs relating to these groups.

The key question for those concerned with crime prevention is to what extent these Departments' programmes can reduce the chances that children and young people will either become offenders or victims. The next section briefly reviews the services and programmes each department has committed itself to providing, that can impact on crime.

#### *Department of Education*

The DOE provides a range of educational services to children, which includes public schooling, early childhood development services (which are specifically focused on the delivery of Grade R), and catering for those children considered to have 'special educational needs'.

More directly in relation to crime prevention, the national Department of Education houses a school safety sub-directorate, which is mirrored in the

provinces, but with varying degrees of capacity. The DOE also has a national policy on HIV/Aids for learners and educators in public schools and students in further education and training, and runs the primary school nutrition programme, which supplements nutrition to poor children.

Apart from general schooling, further education and training and higher education, other services directed at youth include Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), and the Expanded Public Works Programme (through early childhood development). The Department's website also states that it runs youth development programmes.

#### *Department of Health*

The Department has a national policy on maternal, child and women's health, which includes a programme to provide free health care to children under the age of six. The Department manages an integrated nutrition programme, as well as a programme for the prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.

The primary health care (PHC) programme includes adolescent and youth health services, in which adolescents are defined as aged between 10 and 19 and youths are aged between 15 and 24. Within the context of its PHC work, the DOH has also published School Health Policy and Implementation Guidelines<sup>6</sup> as well as the Child Health Policy, and the Child Abuse Policy Framework and Guidelines for Health Workers.

#### *Department of Social Development*

In the White Paper on Social Welfare, the Department commits itself to:

...giving the highest priority to the promotion of family life, and the survival, protection and development of all South African children.<sup>7</sup>

The primary contribution of this Department is through its social assistance programme which governs the provision of social grants. The child support grant, the care dependency grant, and the foster care grant are direct measures in support of children. In addition, this Department is also

responsible for child protection and child justice, the overall management of the child and youth care system, and the provision of ECD services to children aged 0 to 4.

The contribution and responsibilities of the Department of Social Development in relation to children is explored in detail by Streak and Poggenpoel.<sup>8</sup> This Department aims to provide youth development services and has reportedly developed two youth centres providing skills training for young people.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Opportunities and constraints for preventing crime**

##### *Budgets and the funding of services*

A key problem is that a range of the services under review are in direct competition with one another for provincial funding, especially due to the extension of social security provisions such as the child support grant.<sup>10</sup>

While there is no question that poverty alleviation (through the provision of the child support grant) can make an important contribution towards the health and well-being of children and young people, this cannot be at the expense of other more targeted services and programmes. More specifically, other social development services compete for funds within this budget, with social security taking up an average of 92% of social development budgets in 2003/04.<sup>11</sup>

The funding of service provision is also a challenge. Non-governmental organisations provide the bulk of many of these services, yet they receive only limited funding from government, even in cases where they provide statutory child protection services. Although no comprehensive studies have been undertaken, there are also indications that provinces approach the funding of these service providers differently, which undermines the goal of equitable and accessible services for the country as a whole.

The funding crisis in the non-governmental service delivery sector has been exacerbated by recent decisions to reduce funding to NGOs, as has been the case in Gauteng.<sup>12</sup>

### *Primary prevention*

Primary prevention activities in relation to children and youth may involve general education and information programmes aimed not only at these groups, but more importantly, at their parents and caregivers too. The departments under review provide very few services of this kind, with activities confined to specific annual calendar events in which attention is given to particular issues, such as Child Protection Week.

Whether or not behaviour can be changed through mass media-driven public education messages has been widely debated. Nevertheless, some basic messages, as well as information about basic issues such as rights, how to access services, etc. may help to prevent crime. Messages that emphasise and reinforce current behaviour, or that promote minor behaviour change serve a potentially important role, for example, how to access social security, and promoting the enrolment of young children in early childhood programmes, free schooling, free health care, etc.

The nature of communication is also important. The choice of medium (i.e. radio, television, or print), the language used, and the methods used to communicate are all critical. Many lessons have been learned both locally and internationally regarding the most effective strategies.

Prevention services at this level may also be targeted and specially intended to strengthen the resilience, and increase the life skills, of specific individuals and groups. Examples of this are parenting programmes for young, single mothers, and life and social skills development for adolescents. These programmes – while targeted at specific groups – need to be provided on a mass scale. This raises the question of the role of schools in enhancing skills for resilience.

### *Early childhood and ECD programmes*

International experience shows that early childhood offers seemingly limitless opportunities for preventing crime, as well as a range of other health and social problems. Greenwood notes that multiple positive outcomes are possible from basic, directed investments in early childhood.<sup>13</sup> More specifically, he points to the potential for achieving increased

emotional or cognitive development for the child, improved parent–child relationships, and improved educational processes and outcomes for the child, among others.

Exploiting the great potential offered by early childhood development (ECD) presents its own set of significant challenges. The first is the vast numbers of children that this service should reach. For example, in 2001, fewer than one-sixth of the estimated 6.4 million children in the 0–7 age range were enrolled in some kind of ECD provisioning, with a little less than half of the 5–6 age group being accommodated (413,000 out of an estimated 960,000 children of this age group).<sup>14</sup> These services – 75% of which are funded through fees – were also largely provided by civil society organisations, meaning that delivery is largely unsupported by government.

The greatest concern, from a crime perspective, is not just the reach of services to children in need, but the nature and quality of services that are delivered. In other words, the services must actually achieve their intended outcomes. At their simplest, outcomes may be defined as serving the “emotional, mental, spiritual, moral, physical and social development of children”.<sup>15</sup>

Several questions may be raised about the quality of ECD delivery in South Africa. For the 0–4 age group, there are very limited minimum norms and standards for the content of ECD programmes (although service guidelines do exist). The qualifications of ECD practitioners is also questionable: only 10% of ECD educators were deemed to be appropriately qualified, with a further 15% considered to be “underqualified”.<sup>16</sup>

For the 5–6 age group intended to be serviced by the DOE, through Grade R services, the vast numbers of children who should have access remains a challenge. Enormous disparities have also been found between education investments in ECD as opposed to normal schooling. Average per capita spending on ECD is R390.00 with per capita spending in school education averaging R4,243.00.<sup>17</sup> Vast provincial disparities have also been noted in ECD expenditure.<sup>18</sup>

These kinds of weaknesses significantly limit the potential of these services to serve their intended purposes, and to prevent crime. Delivery in relation to Grade R alone in the coming years will present a considerable challenge for the DOE.

Given the constraints on education resourcing, the question of how the critical opportunities offered by ECD for building the health, well-being and resilience of children can be taken advantage of remains an open one, with the greatest burden for the 0–5 age group continuing to be one carried by families and civil society organisations. The missed opportunity will be that such services will not be standardised, co-ordinated, equitably funded or quality-controlled. Wildeman and Nomdo summarise the situation eloquently:

...for all its *derived (and therefore secondary) status*, the challenges of ECD are nothing other than the fight for the future of the next few generations of South Africans.<sup>19</sup>

*Early intervention in relation to children and youth*  
The term 'early intervention' has been used in South Africa to refer to those services to children and families that should be provided immediately when problems become apparent. Early intervention is a type of 'secondary crime prevention' and it is at this level that opportunities to reduce crime exist. These opportunities hinge on two critical factors:

- the need for vigilance among all those who deliver services to children as to the signs, symptoms and risk factors for offending and victimisation;
- the availability of high quality services to intervene when problems are discovered and thus reduce the risks of further offending or victimisation.

The government services under review include interventions of this nature. For example, the DOH's Primary Health Care (PHC) package of services includes services to children who have been victimised. Similarly, the DSD promotes diversion – a mechanism for directing young offenders away from the criminal justice system into programmes intended to respond to the offending behaviour.

The early detection and diagnosis of behavioural problems in children would in theory enable us to offer services appropriate to their particular needs. The questions, however, are whether professionals working with children are skilled enough to identify and respond to problems, and whether appropriate early intervention programmes are available.

Indications are that existing services are dominated by those relating to child protection, and that few resources are available for the equally important early intervention services. Currently, both government and non-governmental service-providers are forced to choose between these services.

#### *Schools and crime prevention*

Critical to the overall protection and development of children and young people is the role of the schooling system. For successful crime prevention, the school system must not only be a successful educator, it should also fulfil a range of other functions:

- ensuring that no harm comes to the children in its care;
- seeking opportunities to intervene when abuse, neglect and other problems are apparent;
- promoting opportunities for children to excel in all aspects of their development and not only in relation to educational achievement.

Activities and programmes that result in children staying engaged in education (as well as the other extra-mural aspects of formal education), are an important vehicle for crime prevention. If this fails, a range of effects may be felt by society. There is evidence that the nature of formal schooling may be unsuited and irrelevant to many children and families that live under particular pressures (e.g. poverty) and that many children may seek alternatives that are more appropriate to their circumstances. One such alternative is disengagement from school and making a living off the street.<sup>20</sup>

Centrally, it is the responsibility of the DOE to encourage children to stay in school, and when there are signs of disengagement (such as truancy

or drop-outs), it is the responsibility of this Department to take appropriate action.

Programmes that provide for children who have opted out of the formal education system can also help to prevent crime. Children who live on and off the streets, young men who have left school to seek work, and young women who have left school and have become parents, are all important target groups for services. However, whether the three departments under review, as well as those that provide skills and labour, can offer the specialised services required, remains to be seen.

#### *Programmes aimed at offenders*

In relation to offending, Loeber et al note that "generations of studies in criminology show that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour."<sup>21</sup> International studies have also shown that a small number of offenders are responsible for the vast majority of offences.<sup>22</sup>

These trends point to the potentially dramatic effects of focusing on those who have already committed crimes. Diversion and probation services are primary examples of such interventions. They are also important examples of how government services can make a direct impact through early intervention, and a means through which the DSD in particular can play a role in preventing crime.

When children come into contact with the criminal justice system after being arrested, they (and their families) are brought to the attention of service-providers, who then have an opportunity to assess their behaviour. This is advantageous because it allows service-providers to intervene and provide services that may reduce the risk of re-offending.

This is undoubtedly an unusual and important opportunity for service-providers in both social development and correctional (prisons) settings. Yet it seems that few services of this nature are being offered, and government funding for the non-governmental organisations involved is very limited. The financial burden for the provision of diversion services is, for the most part, carried by non-governmental service-providers such as Nicro and Khulisa.

While the DSD has made some progress in developing probation services, the numbers of available personnel are still limited, and services to children may possibly be undertaken at the expense of such services to adult offenders. Under these conditions, it seems unlikely that the considerable opportunities for crime prevention will be realised.

Moreover, as with many aspects of service provision already discussed, it is not only the availability of services, but their nature and quality that will determine crime prevention outcomes.

#### **Conclusion**

International research is clear that investing in the health, safety and overall well-being of children renders significant returns for society as well as for the prevention of crime. Investments in the well-being of children are also likely to result in multiple positive outcomes, which may include preventing crime.

But in order to reap the benefits of such investments, services must not only be accessible, but also of a sufficient quality. While many opportunities are available to the three departments under review, these are likely to be reduced by the limited reach of services, the poor quality of services, and some institutional arrangements that weaken service provision such as budgets and the nature of funding.

#### **Acknowledgement**

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# DANGER, THREATS OR JUST FEAR

## Witness intimidation in three Gauteng courts

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A witness satisfaction survey among 450 witnesses at three magistrates' courts in Gauteng shows that witness intimidation and fear are more pervasive than is generally acknowledged. These problems require responses that go beyond the Witness Protection Programme which is intended to deal only with a small number of the most extreme cases of intimidation.

**T**he word 'witnesses' and the issue of witness intimidation usually bring to mind images of witness protection programmes. For many of us familiar with Hollywood movies, we imagine witnesses abandoning their homes and, with their entire families, moving to a new city under a new identity, to establish a new life. The real world is, however, a bit different.

Not only is this type of witness protection programme enormously disruptive to the witness, but also costly to the state. For these reasons the South African programme, which falls under the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), primarily provides protection until the case is completed in court. Remoulding witnesses' identity, and relocating them, is an unusual occurrence. Even if costs were not an inhibitory factor, the average witness has no desire to completely uproot themselves and start a new life.

Witness protection programmes are also only used in a select number of cases. The latest NPA annual report indicates that 247 witnesses, and 252 family members, were on the programme in March 2005. These witnesses were testifying in 329 cases, a fraction of the more than a million cases heard by

the courts each year. Some of the witnesses who face the most serious risks are accomplices who have agreed to give state evidence, and these make up 80% of witnesses on the programme.<sup>1</sup>

As has increasingly been emphasised by international research,<sup>2</sup> witness intimidation is a multi-faceted issue to which witness protection programmes may only provide an appropriate response in some of the most serious 'high level' cases.

A newly published report by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) on a survey of witness satisfaction in three Gauteng magistrates' courts<sup>3</sup> illustrates the complexity of witness intimidation and supports the international research results. The findings may also now be compared with those of the Public Service Commission's national survey of court users, conducted shortly after the CSVR study.<sup>4</sup>

### About the study

The CSVR witness satisfaction survey was carried out late in 2003, covering 450 witnesses at three regional magistrates' courts in Gauteng. A high

proportion of the violent and other serious cases which are dealt with by our courts are heard in the regional magistrates' courts. Courts with a relatively high turnover of cases, one in Johannesburg, one in Soweto, and one in a black residential area on the East Rand, were selected for the study.

Respondents included victims of crime and other defence or prosecution witnesses. When asked 'Has there been anything about being a witness or victim that has made you feel frightened or intimidated?', 27% of respondents answered in the affirmative. While the sample of intimidated witnesses is relatively small (121 people), their responses to questions about their intimidation is nevertheless important, as this information informs our limited understanding about the subject.

As the survey data shows, there are a range of reasons why people feel afraid. In some cases there may be good reason for believing that the witness is in danger, and some are threatened or physically attacked. But in other cases witnesses' fear may not be related to the danger of physical harm, with many identifying the processes of giving evidence and undergoing cross-examination as the main reason for anxiety. Some say the general experience of attending court is the source of their worries, while for others – perhaps those who have familial or social ties to the accused – fear may be related to the possibility of conviction and imprisonment.

#### Which witnesses were intimidated?

Respondents confirmed what has already been illustrated by studies in other countries, namely that witnesses who experience intimidation are often the victim of the offence. In the CSVR study, victims were relatively more likely to say they had been frightened or intimidated than other witnesses appearing for the prosecution or the defence (Table 1). Even though defence witnesses were least likely to have been intimidated, one in five nevertheless said they experienced this problem. Female witnesses were more likely than males to answer this question in the affirmative.

#### Source of the intimidation

When asked to select the source of their intimidation from one of a number of options, over three quarters

Table 1: 'Has there been anything about being a witness that has made you feel intimidated?'

	Yes (%)	No or don't know (%)	Total (%)
<i>Witness type</i>			
Victim/injured party	36	64	100
Other prosecution witness	27	73	100
Defence witness	21	79	100
<i>Gender</i>			
Male	22	78	100
Female	35	65	100

of those involved indicated that this originated from other people (an individual and/or group) as opposed to the court process or environment. Individuals were by far the most likely single source of intimidation (59%) in the survey (Table 2).

More than a quarter of respondents say they felt intimidated by the court process or the environment. Among this group, the biggest worries were about the process of testifying, being cross-examined, and appearing in court. There was a small overlap between these categories, with 6% of witnesses indicating that they were intimidated both by other people and by the court process (Table 2).

The individuals who were intimidated by other people were asked more detailed questions about

Table 2: 'Was this intimidation by an individual, group, the whole process, or the court environment?'

	Number	%	Cumulative %
Yes by individual	59	50	50
Yes by group	20	16	66
Yes by individual and group	7	6	72
Yes by process/environment only	27	23	95
Yes by process/environment and group and individual	7	6	(100)*
Total	120	(100)*	(100)*

\*Total actually exceeds 100% due to rounding.

who these people were. A significant majority (61%) indicated that they were intimidated by people related to the defence (the defendant, the defendant's friends or family, defence witnesses or the lawyer). By comparison, few respondents said the source of the intimidation was the victim, the victim's friends or family, or a witness for the prosecution (total of 15%). Even less were threatened by officials such as the police or magistrates (total of 12%).

The results above showed that victims were more likely to feel intimidated than any other type of witness. Victims were also more likely than other respondents to feel intimidated by people as opposed to the court process. Overall, 29% of victims, 20% of other prosecution witnesses, and 15% of defence witnesses felt intimidated by other people. By contrast between 5% and 7% of the total number of witnesses in all three categories indicated that they felt intimidated by the court environment or process.

When considering who witnesses felt intimidated by according to the type of respondent reporting the intimidation, the data shows that of those victims who said they felt intimidated by other people, 80% said they were intimidated by parties related to the defence – in by far the most cases, it was the defendant him/herself who intimidated the victim. Interestingly, even among witnesses for the defence, the most common source (36%) of intimidation was the defendant.

#### **What made witnesses feel insecure**

Respondents were also asked an open-ended question regarding the main thing that made them feel frightened or intimidated. Those who said their feeling of fear was related to another person or group, gave a wide variety of responses:

- A few indicated that they had been victims of attacks or attempted attacks, sometimes on their way to court. This included one shooting.
- Some respondents had been threatened with violence. In several cases this involved the threat that they or members of their families would be killed.
- A number indicated that there had been other actions by one of the parties involved in the case such as visiting their house, making remarks, or a person pointing, staring or laughing at them.

- A couple of respondents felt that having contact with the accused was intimidating. This contact came in the form of the identification parade or having to sit in the same room as the accused.
- A number of respondents said their fear was based on concerns about what might happen as a result of their being a witness. They were concerned that family and friends of the accused would do something to them, or that their house would be burnt down. A couple of witnesses were afraid because the accused or his/her associate had guns. Witnesses were also worried about the possibility that the accused might be acquitted and then victimise them.

Respondents who attributed their feeling of intimidation to the court environment or process tended to say their fear was related either to the process of testifying, or to a concern about the outcome of the case:

- A number of witnesses were intimidated by court procedures, and particularly by the process of testifying. Among this group, the biggest worry was about being cross-examined. Others said they were frightened because this was the first time they were appearing in court. The fact that the trial takes place in public, or that they might not be believed, were also concerns for witnesses.
- Some witnesses, presumably those with social or familial ties to the accused, worried about the outcome of the trial. Some were concerned that their children would be jailed, or that their children would not be provided for as a result of the accused person being imprisoned. Some also indicated that they had been disturbed by seeing other people being sentenced.
- Some witnesses simply said that they found the whole experience of being at court intimidating.

Table 3 provides an outline of the main reasons for concern among those witnesses who indicated that they felt frightened or intimidated. Roughly a third who felt insecure said they had been attacked, or threatened with violence or death.

#### **Variations according to types of cases**

Intimidation was also found to be more likely in cases involving violence than in other types of

*Table 3: Main thing that made witnesses feel intimidated*

Source of intimidation	Rough estimate of relative incidence %
<i>Other people</i>	
Potential danger	25
Threatened with death	14
Threatened with violence	14
Attacks or attempted attacks	5
Other actions	13
Encounter with accused person	4
Total	75
<i>Process and environment</i>	
Concern about testifying	11
Concern about trial outcome and jail	10
Whole experience was intimidating	4
Total	25

cases. When data on intimidation caused by other people was examined in relation to the type of offence that required the witness's testimony, a high correlation was found between cases of interpersonal violence and intimidation.

Overall, 50 of the 92 witnesses (54%) who said that they were intimidated by other people were appearing in cases of inter-personal violence: either assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm (assault GBH) or attempted murder, sexual offences or common assault (Table 4).

This trend is reinforced when the statistics are examined within each offence category: 33% of witnesses in assault GBH or attempted murder cases, 30% in sexual offences cases, and 29% in common assault cases said they felt intimidated by other people (Table 4). These percentages are higher than for any other type of crime recorded in the study. This makes sense because these types of violent offences are also those in which suspects or perpetrators are likely to be known to the victims. In contrast, only 14% of witnesses in robbery cases said they were intimidated by other people. Although also a violent crime, robberies are more likely to be committed by perpetrators who are strangers to the victim, than by someone they know.

### **Are officials notified about intimidation?**

All of the witnesses who felt frightened or intimidated were asked if they had told any government official about this. One third of these witnesses said they had informed an official, with most saying they told the police or prosecutors. When asked whether they believed that the official had dealt with the issue effectively, views among witnesses were split fairly evenly, with 46% saying "no" and 44% saying "yes". A small percentage (10%) was unsure about how effectively their complaint was handled.

### **Comparison with the PSC survey**

It is worth comparing these findings with those of the Public Service Commission (PSC) survey of court users conducted shortly after the CSVSR survey in late 2003. In the PSC study 1,133 witnesses at 42 magistrates' courts throughout South Africa were interviewed. Overall, the survey found that 22% of respondents felt intimidated at some stage during the court case. A fairly similar figure of 27% was recorded by the CSVSR.

But the two surveys provide quite different results with regard to the sources of intimidation. In the PSC survey, respondents were most likely to feel intimidated by the magistrate (33%) and prosecutors (20%). Among those respondents who were related to the defence in some way, the defence lawyers (18%), the defendant (12%) and his or her family or friends (14%) made respondents feel uneasy. The general court environment (22%) and language of the court (10%) also accounted for a significant proportion of respondents' feelings of intimidation.<sup>5</sup>

By contrast, the CSVSR survey found that intimidation, when caused by people, could largely be attributed to those associated with the defence. Unlike the PSC survey, relatively few respondents to the CSVSR survey said they felt intimidated by criminal justice officials.

Although the PSC study covered the whole country, the sample of intimidated witnesses (roughly 250 people) is still relatively small. The results on witness intimidation, like those of the CSVSR survey, therefore need to be seen as indicative rather than authoritative.

Table 4: Type of case in which witnesses who said they felt intimidated, appeared

	Total number who were intimidated by person/group	Total number of witnesses in this category	% intimidated by person/group
Assault GBH or attempted murder	22	66	33
Sexual offence	12	40	30
Assault common	16	56	29
Theft or handling stolen goods	13	66	20
Robbery	12	88	14
Housebreaking	4	33	12
Malicious damage to property or arson	1	5	20
Traffic offence	1	5	20
Unlawful gathering	1	5	20
Drug related offence	1	21	5
Fraud or forgery	1	19	5
Other specify	5	32	16
Do not know	1	2	50
Refused to answer	2	18	11
Total	92	456	20

#### Implications for tackling intimidation

The results of both the CSV and PSC surveys raise questions about how we approach the issue of 'witness intimidation'. While the CSV survey presents a slightly different picture, the PSC survey suggests that those who make witnesses feel most uncomfortable are not aggressive or vengeful suspects, but rather the officials of the criminal justice system.

Although most witnesses in both surveys also said their questions had been dealt with properly and politely by officials, the results indicate that more needs to be done to address the anxieties of witnesses about court officials and court processes. Because criminal justice officials exercise the authority of the state, they may provoke anxiety amongst members of the public. This needs to be reduced as it could jeopardise the fairness of proceedings, and unduly influence the outcome of the case.

More generally, the findings highlight that 'witness intimidation' covers three somewhat different, but related, concepts:

- threats: some witnesses have been threatened by another person;

- fear: some witnesses feel frightened; and
- danger: some witnesses may be in physical danger.<sup>6</sup>

These three concepts do not, however, encapsulate all dimensions of the problem of witness intimidation. As research on domestic violence illustrates, accused persons may use other forms of coercion, such as controlling the family income, to manipulate and intimidate witnesses.

Ironically, witnesses who are actually in physical danger may not experience threats or fear. Crime syndicates may, for example, not bother with threats, choosing instead to simply 'remove' witnesses for the prosecution from the picture.

As opposed to 'threats' and 'danger' which may be regarded as objective dimensions, fear on the other hand is a subjective state. Even if objectively in danger, a witness may not necessarily be afraid. Conversely, as the CSV survey illustrates, feelings of fear are not necessarily related to physical danger. Some witnesses, including many who are perhaps more timid by nature, are frightened by the very fact of having to give evidence in court.

Witness protection programmes focus on witnesses for the prosecution who are in serious physical danger, and can only therefore deal with a fraction of the overall problem. Such programmes cannot respond to or protect witnesses from potentially impatient magistrates, or aggressive cross-examination.

Viewed in this way, a more sophisticated understanding of witness intimidation is needed. In particular, attention must be given to supporting witnesses when they give evidence before a court. While the concerns of some witnesses may seem trivial or even irrational, such fears could turn a potentially good witness into an unconvincing one, and so damage the chances of a conviction or a fair trial.

A priority in tackling witness intimidation is that detectives and prosecutors, in consultation with the witness, should consistently evaluate cases to identify whether there is a danger of harm, or other intimidation, to the witness, and assess what steps are appropriate to protect the witness. Witnesses should be provided with a telephone number of someone who they should contact in the event that an attempt is made to intimidate them, or if they believe they are in danger.

One of the measures which is currently used is the denial of bail when there is reason to believe that the accused may harm or interfere with witnesses. Bail conditions forbidding the accused from making contact with the victim or other witnesses may also be imposed, and these should be strictly enforced. However, even when bail is denied, or bail conditions are adhered to, witnesses may still be vulnerable to harm or intimidation from associates of the accused.

### **Conclusion**

As many criminal justice officials acknowledge, witnesses are central to effective crime investigation and prosecution. But although several initiatives have been developed to make courts more witness-friendly, the need to be more responsive to witnesses is not a policy priority in the criminal justice system.

As both the CSVr and PSC surveys illustrate, a range of issues needs to be addressed if witness satisfaction is to improve. Feelings of fear, and the concrete dangers facing many witnesses, need to be dealt with alongside the problems of frustration at remands and long hours spent waiting at court, the quality of facilities for witnesses, improved information, and a range of other service delivery issues. Improving the quality of service to witnesses generally – through information, facilities, and assistance with court preparedness – may also play a role in allaying the fears and concerns of many witnesses.

### **Endnotes**

- 1 National Prosecuting Authority Witness Protection Unit annual report for the 2004/2005 financial year.
- 2 See for example, Home Office, *Speaking up for Justice*, Report of the Interdepartmental Working Group on the Treatment of Vulnerable or Intimidated Witnesses in the Criminal Justice System, London, Home Office, 1998.
- 3 D Bruce M and Isserow, *Putting People First? A survey of witness satisfaction in three magistrates' courts in Gauteng*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Johannesburg, 2005.
- 4 Public Service Commission, *OPSC Citizen Satisfaction Survey – Evaluation of Services under Department of Justice and Constitutional Development*, unpublished report, 2005. Findings of the survey are also discussed in some detail in the CSVr report.
- 5 Respondents were allowed to select more than one option.
- 6 These concepts are discussed in more detail in a forthcoming handbook for police on working with witnesses which will be produced by CSVr.

# VIOLENT DEATHS IN SA

## The 2003 National Injury Mortality Surveillance System

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The latest data from the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System – the most detailed source on the ‘who, what, when, where and how’ of fatal injuries in South Africa – shows that homicide remains the most common cause of injury-related deaths. Homicide rates varied significantly between the four major urban centres covered, and firearms were a key contributor to the high homicide rates. Alcohol was confirmed as an important risk factor for murder, with the highest percentage of alcohol positive cases being recorded in Cape Town.

A study based on mortality data from 2000 estimated that there were more than 32,000 homicides in South Africa – a mortality rate of 72 per 100,000 population.<sup>1</sup> Although this study probably overestimated homicide by approximately 7%,<sup>2</sup> the data still imply a mortality rate due to violence that is nearly eight times the global rate of 8.8 deaths per 100,000 population.<sup>3</sup>

Although more recent data from the South African Police Service suggest that homicide rates may have decreased,<sup>4</sup> the 2003 National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS) annual report indicates that homicide remains the most common cause of injury-related deaths.<sup>5</sup> This means that South Africa still has some way to go before our rates of violence begin to approach those experienced elsewhere in the world. This article describes selected findings and interpretations from the most recent NIMSS data pertaining to homicide.<sup>6</sup>

### Background to the NIMSS

The NIMSS has provided information about the extent and scope of deaths due to non-natural

causes in South Africa since 1999. It is the most detailed source of information on the *who, what, when, where* and *how* of fatal injuries in South Africa and has secured full coverage of five of the country's six metropolitan centres as well as several other major towns and cities.

Data are collected at state mortuaries by the police and forensic pathology departments. The cause of death is categorised according to the International Classification of Disease version 9 (ICD 9) to enable international comparisons. Spatial and temporal data are recorded as well as blood alcohol data from state forensic chemical laboratories.

Although studies have used the NIMSS data as a basis for extrapolation to national estimates, the data set is more reflective of urban rather than rural injury patterns in South Africa. In 2003, 36 mortuaries in seven of South Africa's nine provinces supplied data to the NIMSS (Table 1). This represents between 36–49% of all injury-related deaths that occur in South Africa.<sup>7</sup>

The aim is ultimately to establish a permanent system that will record all such deaths that occur annually in South Africa in order to provide information to:

- describe the incidence, causes and consequences of non-natural deaths;

- prioritise injury and violence prevention action directed at high-risk groups and socio-environmental risk factors;
- identify new injury trends and emerging problem areas;

Table 1: Participating mortuaries, 2003 (n = 24,600)

Province	City	Mortuary	Number of deaths recorded*
Eastern Cape	East London	Mdantsane	421
		Woodbrook	983
	Port Elizabeth	Gelvandale	549
		Mount Road	327
		New Brighton	727
Gauteng	Johannesburg	Diepkloof	1,663
		Germiston	2,489
		Johannesburg	2,470
		Roodepoort	1,338
	Pretoria/Tshwane	Bronkhorstspruit	173
		MEDUNSA	633
KwaZulu-Natal	Durban	Pretoria	1,838
		Chatsworth	838
		Gale Street	2,382
Mpumalanga		Phoenix	1,403
		Balfour	53
		Barberton	11
		Carolina	2
		Delmas	40
		Ermelo	133
		Groblersdal	41
		Hazyview	109
		Komatipoort	143
		Nelspruit	212
		Piet Retief	99
		Sabie	48
		Secunda	24
		Standerton	8
Volksrust	71		
Northern Cape	Kimberley	Kimberley	402
North West**	Klerksdorp	Klerksdorp	197
		Wolmaranstad	10
		Potchefstroom	136
Western Cape	Cape Town	Salt River	2,403
		Tygerberg	1,962
	Stellenbosch	Stellenbosch	262
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>24,600</b>

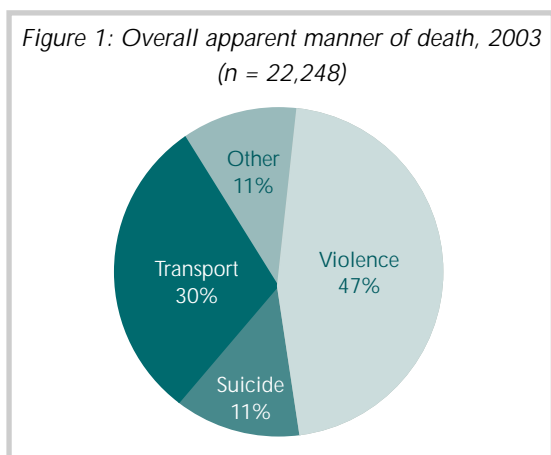
\* The total includes undetermined deaths.  
 \*\* Only five months' data for North West Province.

- monitor seasonal and longitudinal changes in the non-natural fatality profile; and
- evaluate direct and indirect violence and injury prevention and control measures.

### Distribution of homicide in 2003

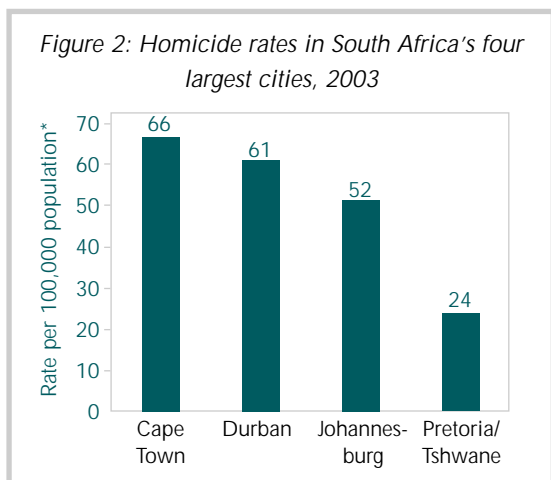
In 2003 10,499 (47%) of the 22,248 non-natural deaths in the NIMSS where the apparent manner (or intention) of death was known, were homicides (Figure 1). Homicides accounted for a significantly higher percentage of non-natural deaths ( $p < 0.01$ ) in Cape Town (55%) and Durban (54%) than in Johannesburg (47%) and Pretoria/Tshwane (31%).

Figure 1: Overall apparent manner of death, 2003 (n = 22,248)



Among the major cities with full coverage, the highest mortality rate was recorded in Cape Town, where there were 66 homicides per 100,000 population, compared to 61 per 100,000 in Durban, 52 per 100,000 in Johannesburg and 24 per 100,000 in Pretoria/Tshwane (Figure 2).

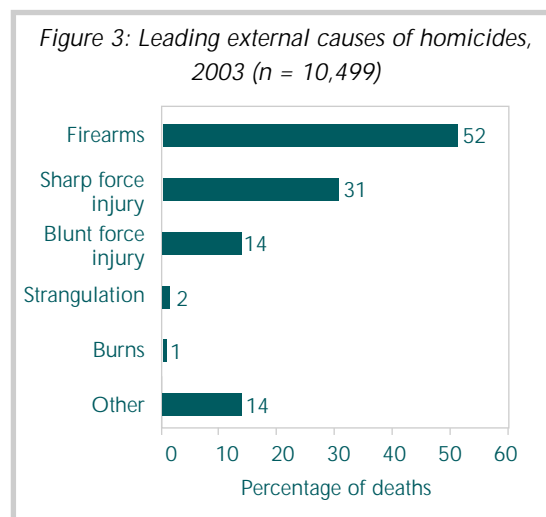
Figure 2: Homicide rates in South Africa's four largest cities, 2003



\* Age adjusted to WHO world standard population distribution.

For the sample as a whole, the cause of death was unknown in only 70 of these homicides. Of the remaining deaths, the leading cause was gunshot injuries (Figure 3), which accounted for 52%, followed by sharp force injuries (31%), blunt force injuries (14%) and strangulation (2%).

Figure 3: Leading external causes of homicides, 2003 (n = 10,499)



Among the major cities, the leading causes of death were firearms, followed by sharp force injuries (e.g. stabbing), blunt force injuries and strangulation. However, there were relatively more sharp force fatalities in Cape Town, compared to Durban and Johannesburg where the rates for firearm homicide were higher.

### Firearms

Firearms were the leading external cause of homicides across all age groups from the age of five years. Of the 6,167 firearm deaths recorded by the NIMSS in 2003, 87% were violence-related and the rest were mainly suicide-related, except for 20 unintentional deaths (less than 1%). Gunshot injuries accounted for 53% of male and 41% of female homicides. The 46 recorded firearm deaths among children aged 0–14 years in Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria/Tshwane were all violence-related except for one unintentional injury death in Johannesburg.

### Male and female homicide

Males were disproportionately affected by fatal violence with 6.5 male homicides recorded for every female homicide. Although male homicides are more

Table 2: Mortality rates per 100,000 population in South Africa's four largest cities in 2003

	Cape Town		Durban		Johannesburg		Pretoria/Tshwane	
	Population 2,951,842		Population 3,133,006		Population 3,337,138		Population 2,054,521	
	Total deaths	Deaths/ 100,000 pop.	Total deaths	Deaths/ 100,000 pop.	Total deaths	Deaths/ 100,000 pop.	Total deaths	Deaths/ 100,000 pop.
Crude homicide rate	2,166	73	2,071	66	2,024	61	548	27
Firearm homicide	933	32	1,193	38	1,384	41	319	16
Sharp force/stabbing	871	30	596	17	323	10	108	5
Blunt force	319	11	212	7	219	7	77	4
Male: female ratio	8.5:1		7.5:1		7.2:1		5.1:1	
Age standardised rate*	66		61		52		24	

\* WHO world standard population distribution

common than female homicides internationally, the ratio recorded by the NIMSS was approximately double that of the world average of 3.2 male homicides for every female homicide.<sup>8</sup>

The male to female ratio was highest in Cape Town (8.5:1), followed by Durban (7.5:1), Johannesburg (7.2:1) and Pretoria/Tshwane (5.1:1) (Table 2). Cape Town had the highest rate of fatal violence among females (7.7 per 100,000 population), followed by Johannesburg, Durban and Pretoria/Tshwane at 7.6, 7.3 and 4.5 per 100,000 of the population respectively.

Although men are at greater risk of being murdered, the majority of perpetrators for both male and female deaths are male. A recent MRC study found that in 2001, approximately half of all women murdered were killed by an intimate partner<sup>9</sup> and there are several allusions to this in the NIMSS data. Males outnumbered females for most causes of homicide in the NIMSS data set, with the exception of deaths due to strangulation. Furthermore, a far higher percentage of women were killed in private homes than men (42% versus 32%).

#### Age of victims

Analysis of homicide by age reveals that the number of homicides increased dramatically from the age of 15 to 44 years, with the highest number of homicides recorded in the 25–29 age group (Figure 4). In 2003,

homicide was the leading manner of non-natural death for all ages from 15 to 45 years and violence-related gunshot injuries are the single largest cause of injury death for all ages from 15 to 60 years.

Surprisingly, homicide rates among South African children were no higher than the world average in most age groups. The exception was among girls younger than four years where homicide rates were approximately 60% higher than the world average.<sup>10</sup>

#### Temporality of homicide

The most common days for homicide were Saturdays followed by Sundays in all four major cities, although the weekend peak was most noticeable in Cape Town, where nearly half of all homicides (49%) occurred on these two days. Overall, more violent deaths occurred between 20h00 and 23h00 (27%) than any other three-hour period, and again this evening peak was apparent in all four cities.

In the four major cities, homicide peaked in Cape Town between January and March; in Johannesburg between February and April, in Pretoria/Tshwane from October to December and in Durban between March and May (Figure 5).

#### Alcohol

More than half of homicide victims tested positive for alcohol, with the highest percentage of alcohol

Figure 4: Homicide by age in 2003 (n = 9,222)

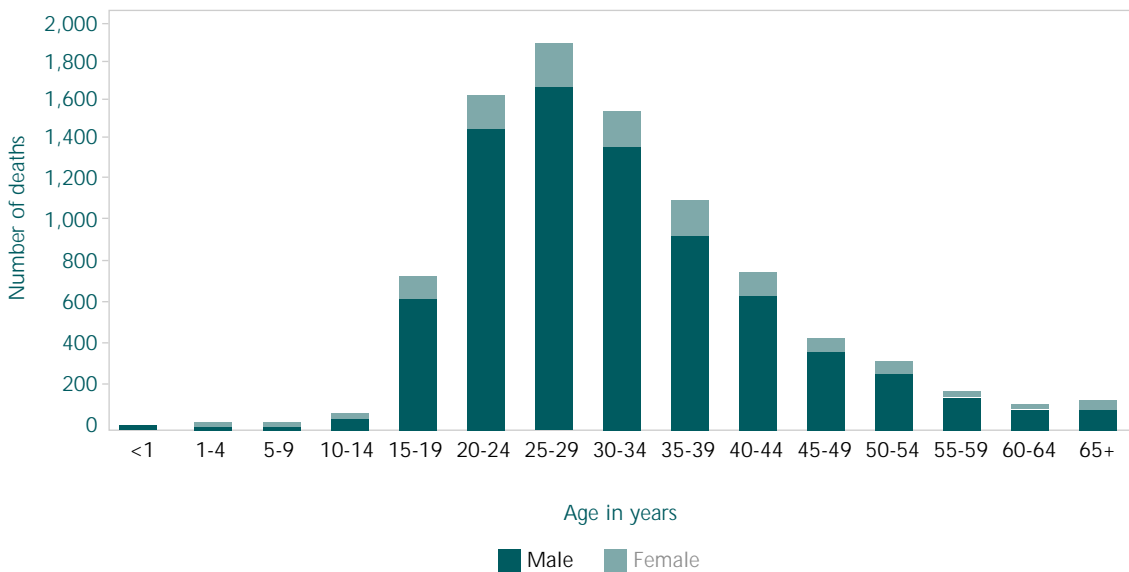
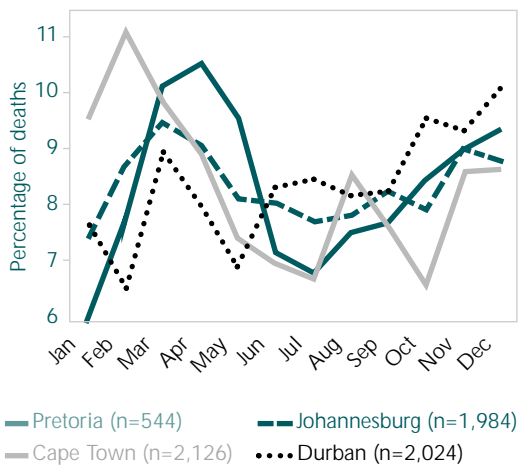


Figure 5: Homicide by month in 2003 (n = 6,678)



positive cases being recorded in Cape Town (53%), followed by Pretoria/Tshwane (49%), Johannesburg (46%) and Durban (44%). The levels of intoxication in Cape Town were also significantly higher than in Johannesburg ( $p < 0.01$ ) and Durban ( $p < 0.01$ ). Victims of sharp force homicide had the highest percentage of alcohol-positive cases (72%) as well as the highest mean blood alcohol concentration among the alcohol positive cases (0.19g/100ml).

In summary, the analysis of the NIMSS data indicated that homicide rates are much higher in South Africa than in the rest of the world and that there is also considerable variation in homicide rates between different urban centres. Firearms were a major contributor to the high homicide rates in all of the cities included in the NIMSS, and future analysis will provide pointers as to whether the new Firearms Control Act will have been successful in reducing firearm violence.

The data also clearly showed that males are at greater risk of being murdered than females, particularly those in the 15-44 year age group. The NIMSS results also confirmed that alcohol was an important risk factor, and it should be noted that other studies have shown a link between alcohol dependence and child abuse,<sup>11</sup> while excessive drinking by men is significantly associated with partner violence across different settings.<sup>12</sup> These factors, as well as the weekend and evening peaks have important implications for law enforcement and violence prevention.

#### Are rates of violence decreasing?

The 2003 NIMSS data established both the substantial prevalence and magnitude of homicide in South Africa's four largest metropolitan cities.

Table 3: Homicide in South Africa's four largest cities from 2001 to 2003

	2001	2002		2003	
	No. of homicides	No. of homicides	% change	No. of homicides	% change
<b>Cape Town total</b>	2,420	2,421	0	2,166	-11
Firearm	1,113	1,192	+7	933	-22
Sharp force	932	870	-7	871	0
Blunt force	322	313	-3	319	+2
<b>Durban total</b>	2,100	2,175	+4	2,071	-5
Firearm	1,354	1,416	+5	1,340	-5
Sharp force	528	601	+14	608	+1
Blunt force	261	260	0	238	-8
<b>Johannesburg total</b>	2,274	2,285	0	1,932	-15
Firearm	1,643	1,577	-4	1,323	-12
Sharp force	347	398	+11	313	-19
Blunt force	219	247	+9	201	-11
<b>Pretoria/Tshwane total</b>	653	629	-4	548	-13
Firearm	398	384	-4	319	-17
Sharp force	120	111	-8	108	-3
Blunt force	86	98	+14	77	-21

These deaths imposed a significant social and economic burden, which threatens development strategies and also undermines South Africa's potential as a tourism destination. As the need to address these problems becomes increasingly urgent, it is important to understand whether rates of violence are increasing or decreasing. Because the NIMSS has maintained full coverage in all four cities since 2001, only very preliminary trend analysis is possible.

Comparisons with SAPS data are complicated by the use of different time periods (SAPS uses a financial year and NIMSS a calendar year), as well as different geographical boundaries. However, there does seem to be concurrence about a lower rate of homicide in 2003.

NIMSS data shows that in 2003 the number of homicides in all four major cities was lower than in 2001 and 2002 (Table 3), but these preliminary results should be treated with caution. The Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg totals for 2002 were higher than any other year, and in Cape Town there has been a gradual increase in the number of

homicides since 1993.<sup>13</sup> The release of 2004 homicide data by SAPS in September 2005 provided further evidence of a decreasing trend.<sup>14</sup>

It is, however, worth questioning the utility of comparing the NIMSS data with that of the SAPS. Although the police's crime data potentially offers a richer pool of information, as there is not only a larger number of cases, but also the potential for more event-specific descriptive variables, these databases need to be underpinned by reliable reporting of non-natural deaths. South Africa's strict death registration system, which specifies that all non-natural deaths be subject to a post-mortem investigation, lends itself to a robust and accurate surveillance system. This is particularly true in urban areas, where it is more difficult for bodies to be disposed of outside the system.

#### Future options for the NIMSS

Further expansion of the NIMSS has temporarily been hampered by a lack of funding, as well as uncertainty about the pending transfer of state mortuaries from the Department of Safety and Security to the Department of Health. This is one

reason that the most recent annual report for 2003 data has focussed on mortality in South Africa's four largest cities, namely Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Pretoria/Tshwane, where the NIMSS has full coverage. The other reason is that city level safety will become increasingly important as the 2010 Football World Cup draws nearer.

Cities provide ideal test beds for translating research into action for several reasons:

- they have streamlined and centralised information systems;
- city managers, local authorities and policy documentation are more easily accessible; and
- there are well defined population and geographical boundaries that allow for effective tracking and evaluation of intervention impacts and outcomes.

The utility of the information collected by the NIMSS lies in the pointers it provides for improving the prevention and control of injuries in South Africa, and in evaluating the impact of direct (e.g. gun law enforcement) and indirect (e.g. socio-economic development) interventions that are expected to reduce some of the major causes of fatal injury.

At the city level, the NIMSS and other sources of crime, violence and injury data can be used to inform violence and injury prevention initiatives through the various phases of formulation, implementation and evaluation. Utility may be enhanced by linking various systems such as death registration and SAPS crime analysis data, and inter-agency collaboration is one of the measures proposed by the Medical Research Council–UNISA Crime, Violence and Injury Lead Programme that will enable enhanced city safety between now and 2010. Others include systematic reviews of existing injury prevention strategies and the development of city-level policies for injury and violence prevention and safety promotion.

#### Acknowledgement

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#### Endnotes

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Cover photograph

By Henner Frankenfeld/PictureNET Africa  
Roxanne Els (left) with classmate and friend  
Mahlogonolo Makgapo at Uitsig Primary School,  
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