

STILL MARGINAL

Crime in the coloured community

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Is the crime problem in the Western Cape and the Northern Cape rooted in the coloured population? Official figures suggest that coloured people are twice as likely as any other ethnic group to be murdered, and twice as likely to be incarcerated. Unfortunately, it is impossible to properly explore the linkage between the crime rates in the Cape and the coloured communities without station-level crime statistics, which the police no longer release to the public. Nevertheless, more research is needed to understand the links between this group and the crime problem.

Coloured people are a minority group in South Africa. According to the 2001 Census data, they represent just 9% of the country's population. But in two provinces – the Western Cape and the Northern Cape – they are the majority.¹ Any discussion of conditions in these two provinces cannot ignore this population group.

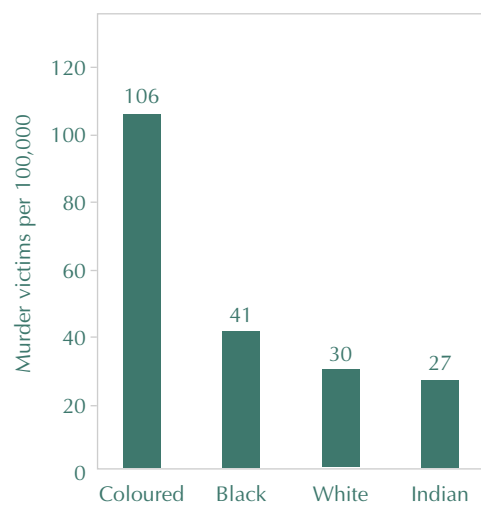
There is not, nor has there ever been, a clear definition of the population group referred to as 'coloured', and the usefulness of the term has been questioned. But it does refer to a group of people who, rightly or wrongly, were lumped together in the past, and therefore share a common history. This history has often been a troubled one. The commonly heard lament is that coloured people were not 'white enough' under apartheid and are not 'black enough' in the new democracy. The sense of this complaint is that coloured people continue to feel socially excluded, even under democracy.

Assigned a status above black Africans under apartheid, the largely Afrikaans-speaking coloured population found itself voting for the National Party in 1994 and thus initially delivering the province to the opposition. Arguably, this affiliation has led to continued marginalisation. Reinforcing this distance is the problem of crime, which is at once a symptom and cause of exclusion.

Victims and perpetrators

As is discussed elsewhere in this issue (see the article by Thomson), coloured people are far more likely to be murdered than any other group, and this has been the case for quite some time. Thomson's projected figures indicate that coloured people are more than twice as likely to be murdered than black people in 2003 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Projected murder rate in South Africa, by race, 2003



Source: Thomson, 2004

This sad fact is backed up by figures from the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System (NIMSS), which also show coloureds to be far more vulnerable. In both 2001 and 2002, the NIMSS recorded a disproportionately large number of coloured homicides in the total reviewed: 14% in 2001 and 13% in 2002, compared to the 9% share held by coloureds in the national population. As is also true in the black community, homicide is the number one cause of non-natural death among coloureds, outpacing suicides, automobile accidents, and other non-intentional injuries by a wide margin. The 2002 data show that coloured victims are the only ethnic group more likely to be stabbed (44%) than shot to death (39%) – the average is 54% shot compared to only 30% stabbed.²

Unfortunately, it is highly likely that the assailants of these victims were also coloured. Victim survey data, as well as docket research on murder by the SAPS' Crime Information Analysis Centre, suggest that the vast majority of murder victims are killed by

people they know, including intimate partners and family members.³ Due to persistent segregation in the country, the chances are that most murder victims are of the same ethnicity as the perpetrator.

Coloured people are also over-represented in the nation's prisons according to the Department of Correctional Services (Figure 2). Coloured people represent only 9% of the national population, but they make up 18% of the national prison population. Coloured people are also nearly twice as likely to be imprisoned than African blacks.

Higher levels of incarceration suggest, but do not establish, higher levels of criminality in this community. There are other reasons why more coloureds might be in jail than other ethnic groups, including the possibilities that this population group is being targeted for enforcement, that this group may lack access to good legal counsel, or that judges in the area are especially punitive. It may be that other ethnic groups have other ways of dealing with crime problems, through private security or traditional means of dealing with offenders, while the coloured community is more reliant on the state.

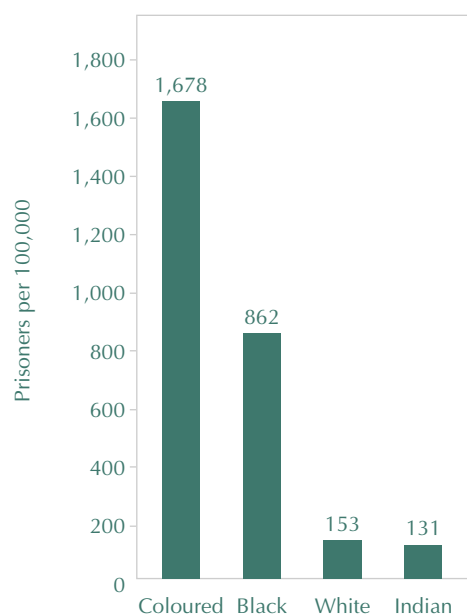
What high incarceration rates do establish is the level of exposure within the community to a correctional system too overpopulated to encourage rehabilitation, including being subject to the violence of gangsterism, drugs, and the possibility of being sexually assaulted while in custody (see S Gear and K Ngubeni, *SA Crime Quarterly* No 4, June 2003).⁴ The effects of this victimisation may lead to further violence upon release. Being incarcerated may also lead to life-long gang allegiances that keep inmates locked into criminal lifestyles even after release.

But this does not explain why coloured people find themselves in this situation to begin with. While much further research is required to answer this question, some obvious points need to be made at the outset.

Problems confronting the coloured community

Because the coloured people have experienced higher murder rates since the earlier parts of the last

Figure 2: Rate of incarceration in South Africa, by race, 2003



Source: Department of Correctional Services, 2003

century, any explanation of the violence in this community would have to include extensive historical research, which is beyond the scope of this article. Focusing strictly on present social conditions, however, several factors can be identified that could be linked to long-term trends.

Pressured idleness

As a population group, the coloured people remain better off than the black African population, though considerably poorer than the whites or the Indians. For example, the white population of South Africa sits at about 6% unemployment, while 27% of coloured people are unemployed and 50% of the black population is unemployed.⁵

Looking at changes since 1994, however, unemployment has increased only 19% in the black community, compared to 35% in the coloured community.⁶ Thus, relative to accustomed standard of living, the coloured community has experienced more detrimental change since 1994 than the black community.

In addition, with the loss of the job preferences given to coloureds under apartheid, many coloured people today find themselves competing with black Africans for lower skill jobs: 32% of employed coloured people work in "elementary occupations" (unskilled labour) compared to 34% of black people.⁷ Thus, any sense that affirmative action is favouring black Africans, who hold political power, would increase the sense of exclusion.

Given that the Western and Northern Cape provinces have the highest matric pass rates in the country,⁸ an obvious strategy would be for coloured graduates to move toward the high skill end of the job market. The latest census results suggest that this is not happening. While coloured people are slightly more likely to have finished secondary school than blacks (19% versus 17%), they are less likely to have tertiary education.⁹ Of members of the population aged 5-24, 36% of the coloured community is not enrolled in an educational facility, compared to 27% of the black community.¹⁰

Why young coloured people are not continuing their education at the rate of young blacks is a

subject in need of further research. But those who opt out of tertiary study further contribute to the pool of urban, idle, and marginalised youth.

Claustrophobia

Formal employment is far more important in urban areas than rural ones, and the coloured population is largely urban based. In the Western Cape, coloured people were resettled under apartheid into high-density 'dormitory communities' in the Cape Flats. This has meant greater access to formal housing, but little room to expand as families grew.

Only 4% of coloured people live in shacks, compared to 16% of the black population, but coloured people have the largest household size of any population group. Despite the fact that fertility levels are less than in the black community (an estimated 2.5 live births among coloureds in 1998 compared to 3.1 in the black community),¹¹ coloured households average 4.3 members, compared to 3.9 among black people.¹² While this may not sound like much, consider that many coloured people are living in two bedroom flats, and that these average figures include households many times this size.

As a result, areas like the coloured townships of the so-called Cape Flats are characterised by high concentrations of jobless people who need cash to pay rent, purchase food, and pay for services. Disadvantaged under apartheid, they may still feel disadvantaged under democracy, and have no revolutionary hopes that the situation will change drastically in the future.

Population density has been correlated with juvenile delinquency in at least 12 academic studies. But residential mobility has been deemed an even more robust correlate¹³ and, paradoxically, all indications are that the coloured areas are some of the most stable. In the Cape Flats, the high cost of rent outside the coloured townships causes tenants to cling to their 99-year leases. As children are born and families expand, these densely settled areas leave little room to expand. As less than 4% of coloured households live in shacks, squatting is hardly an option. This causes further crowding, but strong population stability.

Ironically, however, the stability of the population in the Cape Flats seems to have become a factor in shaping the nature of crime in the area. In a word, it could lead to the creation of gangs.

Gangsterism

With little room inside the home, coloured youth in urban areas spend a lot of time on the streets. The playgroup becomes a kind of surrogate family, but with a different set of norms. When the norms of the street become more important than the norms of the home, you have a gang.

Stable populations feed this phenomenon. Long-term residence may result in identification with 'turf' among local youth. Lack of mobility may cause perpetrators to pick local victims, but the face-to-face familiarity found in stable neighbourhoods could deter selecting immediately local victims. This could result in the broader community becoming fragmented into factions, which are at once protective and aggressive.

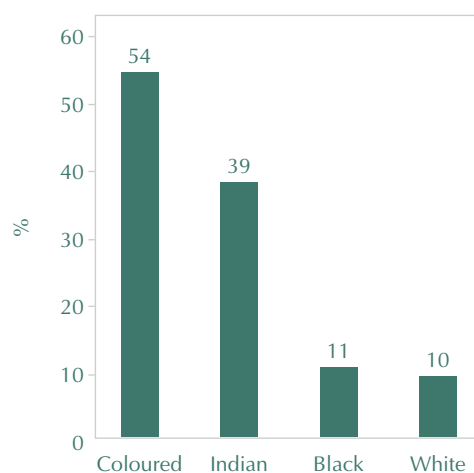
A great deal has been written on gangs in the coloured community, but much of this now needs updating. There is need for fresh research in this area, and for the national government to develop a strategy for dealing with the issue.

Substance abuse

Due to their presence in the country's wine growing areas, many coloured people have historically worked in the vineyards. As a result of the so-called 'dop system', in which labourers were paid part of their wages in wine, alcoholism is rife in certain parts of the community. A 1995 survey of Stellenbosch farms revealed that the *dop* system was still prevalent on 9.5% of farms,¹⁴ and the legacy of alcoholism could extend well beyond the years of farm labour. The *dop* system is diabolical in its ability to keep labour submissive and dependent, and has had the side effect of promoting violence, dysfunctional families, and foetal alcohol syndrome.

As discussed in the previous article, foetal alcohol syndrome is more prevalent in the Western Cape than just about anywhere in the world, and this is especially true in the coloured community. In the Stellenbosch study cited above, nearly 6% of the

Figure 3: Percent of arrestees testing positive for Mandrax



Source: MRC/ISS 3 Metros Arrestee Study, 2000

children in the study showed signs of foetal alcohol syndrome.¹⁵

The NIMSS tested the blood alcohol contents of people who died unnatural deaths in 2002, and found that coloured people were the ethnic group most likely to have alcohol in their systems at the time of death: 68% compared to an overall average of 50%. They were also the group most likely to have extreme levels of alcohol present, with 17% having blood alcohol contents of more than .25 g per 100 ml, compared to an overall average of 12%.¹⁶

Unfortunately, alcohol is not the only substance abused in the community. Mandrax, a street version of a discontinued pharmaceutical sedative of the same name, is abused in South Africa like nowhere else in the world. The tablet is smoked with a combination of tobacco and cannabis that has been treated with a solvent in a combination known as a 'white pipe'. Urine testing of arrestees has shown that over half of coloured men in the sample tested positive for Mandrax in their systems (Figure 3).¹⁷

Mandrax has been one of the primary commodities traded by gang members since the mid-1980s, and its dis-inhibitive effects may be associated with violence. In addition, drug markets have increased

the stakes in gang conflict, providing another impetus for turf wars. The Mandrax market also paved the way for dealing in even more addictive drugs that have emerged in the country and the community since 1994, including crack cocaine and crystal methamphetamine.

There are very few state rehabilitation facilities in the Cape – far too few to cope with the need. The complex links between drugs and gangsterism need further research, and an action plan needs to be devised to address the uniquely South African scourge of the white pipe.

Is the Cape crime problem a coloured problem?

In order to evaluate whether coloured people contribute disproportionately to the crime problem in the Cape, the crime rates in coloured and non-coloured areas would have to be compared. Unfortunately, this is impossible without station-level crime statistics – figures that the government no longer releases to the public.

Without this information, it is impossible to tell whether the present crime rates are being fuelled primarily by incidents in coloured areas or other areas, or whether the violence is related to gangs or to tensions around the influx of migrants from the Eastern Cape, for example.

Looking back at 1998 figures, crime rates between station areas can be compared. In the West Metropole police area of Cape Town, several station areas were nearly ethnically 'pure': Langa, Nyanga, and Guguletu were almost 100% black, while Manenberg, Mitchell's Plain, and Phillipi were almost 100% coloured. In the Eastern Metropole police area, Atlantis, Bishop Lavis, and Elsie's River were almost 100% coloured, and Khayalitsha was almost 100% black.

While crime rates in all these areas are bad, the 1998 figures suggest that it is the black areas of the Cape Town metropole that had the worst violence problem. Nyanga had the worst murder rate (176 per 100,000), Guguletu the worst firearm robbery rate (340 per 100,000), and Langa the worst assault with grievous bodily harm rate (1,123 per 100,000). Mitchell's Plain had the worst burglary rate (1,040

per 100,000), and coloured areas generally scored higher for property crime. Whether this pattern is still true today will remain a state secret for the time being.

Simply urban and marginalised?

But crime rates in most of these areas of the Cape Town metropolitan area are quite egregious, and if a greater share of the coloured population lives in such urban areas, compared to the share of the black population that lives in them, this could partly explain the higher crime rate in the coloured community in general. The relatively low rates of murder in the black community may be due to the fact that a large portion of this group is based in low-crime, rural areas.

In other words, murder rates in the national coloured population may be highest because a higher share of the coloured population is both urban and poor when compared to other ethnic groups. While the most dangerous police station areas in the country may be black, the average coloured station area is more dangerous than the average black station area.

This does not explain why it is in the urban areas of the Western Cape and Northern Cape in particular that crime is so bad, as opposed to the other urban areas. More research is required to sort out what lies behind this problem, and to inform the interventions needed to correct the situation. Access to current station-level statistics would be a great help in this regard.

Endnotes

- 1 According to Census 2001, coloured people comprise 54% of the population of the Western Cape, followed by black people (27%), white people (18%) and Indian people (1%), and 52% of the Northern Cape, followed by black people (36%), white people (12%), and Indian people (less than 1%).
- 2 *Third Annual Report of the National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, Crime, Violence, and Injury Lead Programme of the Medical Research Council, Cape Town, 2001.* The 2002 data was derived from a special report prepared for the ISS by the MRC.
- 3 *2002/3 Annual Report, South African Police Service, Pretoria, 2003.*
- 4 For a description of the risks involved in serving time in South Africa, see S Gear, and K Ngubeni, *Daai*

- Ding: Sex, sexual violence, and coercion in men's prisons*, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Johannesburg, 2003.
- 5 Strict definition, aged 15-65, Census 2001.
 - 6 M Schonteich, Terrorism in the new South Africa: What threat does it pose?, Paper presented to Griffiths and Associates, 14 February 2003.
 - 7 Census 2001.
 - 8 Northern Cape has highest matric pass rate, SAPA news release, 30 December 2003; *Fast Facts*, South African Institute for Race Relations, Johannesburg, February 1999.
 - 9 Census 2001.
 - 10 Ibid.
 - 11 *South Africa Demographic and Health Survey 1998*, Preliminary Report, Department of Health, Medical Research Council, Macro International; 1999, as cited at <http://new.hst.org.za>.
 - 12 Census 2001.
 - 13 L Ellis and A Walsh, *Criminology: A global perspective*, Needham Heights, Allyn and Bacon, 2000, p 147-148.
 - 14 JM Te Water Naude, K Charlton, R Sayed, M Dausab, C Marco, K Rendall-Mkosi, and L London, The Dopstop Association – Promoting health on farms, *Health Promotion Update*, Issue No 53, July 2000.
 - 15 Ibid.
 - 16 MRC, 2002, op cit.
 - 17 T Leggett (ed), *Drugs and crime in South Africa: A study in three cities*, ISS Monograph No 69, Pretoria, Institute for Security Studies, 2002.