

WHY LAW ENFORCEMENT IS NOT ENOUGH

Lessons from the Central Karoo on breaking the cycle of crime and violence

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A 2003 initiative to develop a crime prevention strategy for the Central Karoo District Municipality helped formulate the 'life cycle' that perpetuates crime and violence, which is discussed in this article. Children's developmental needs are obvious and logical if we are to raise young people with good self esteem, who are capable and prepared to contribute to society in a constructive manner. Yet in the Central Karoo (and many other communities) our children's needs are being ignored. As a result, children learn to fend for themselves and some quickly tip over from being vulnerable victims to becoming young offenders. This article shows that as long as we ignore children's needs, we can never build a criminal justice system that will adequately address crime and violence in South Africa. It demonstrates why safety is an issue for society as a whole and not just for the police, courts and prisons.

Crime and violence are arguably the greatest obstacles to a prosperous and peaceful South Africa where all people can live together free from fear and able to participate in all that the country has to offer. Over the past ten years the South African Police Service (SAPS) has recorded approximately two million serious crimes each year. Of these, about a third are so-called 'contact' crimes – crimes such as murder, car hijacking, armed robbery and rape that drive a society into a corner of fear and distrust.

Living dangerously: drink, drugs and guns

The relationship between alcohol, crime and violence is complex and central to any debate

about the lack of safety in South Africa (Parry & Dewing 2006). The most obvious connection is between alcohol and domestic and other interpersonal violence. This is reflected in the fact that these crimes are commonly recorded on Saturdays, followed by Fridays and then Sundays (CSIR Central Karoo Study 2006; Cullinan 2004; Obot 2007).

Drinking to the point of being drunk and beyond is common across most cultures in South Africa. People drink because they are lonely or because they are gathered together. They drink when they are sad or when they are happy. They drink to commiserate or to congratulate. They drink to

celebrate or to 'drown their sorrows'. In 2006, South Africans spent R41 billion on alcohol. During the same period:

- 47 per cent of homicide victims tested positive for alcohol at time of death (MRC 2004)
- 66 per cent of people presenting in trauma units at hospitals tested positive for alcohol (MRC 2004)
- More than 50 per cent of rape victims were 'high or drunk' at the time of the incident (SAPS 2007a)

The relationship between alcohol and the commission of crime is often referred to (Parry 2006; Open Society Foundation for South Africa 2004). What needs much more inspection is the connection between alcohol and the vulnerability to victimisation. Both relationships contribute to our high rate of recorded murder, rape, attempted murder and assault.

Drugs and crime have a similarly complex relationship, where the need to feed a drug habit is a motivator for crime. Drugs also affect the kind of crime that is committed; perpetrators under the influence of drugs, particularly drugs such as Tik and crack cocaine, are likely to be less inhibited, more aggressive and out of control (SAPS 2007b).

Guns also play a significant role in our lack of safety. Over 62 per cent of homicides are committed with guns, and of course guns are used in close to 100 per cent of car and truck hijackings and armed robberies (Soros 2006; Matzopoulos 2005). The ready availability of guns makes it easier for perpetrators to commit certain crimes (Kirsten et al 2006).

According to the 2007 SAPS annual report, an approximate 66 guns a day are lost or stolen from the legal pool to the illegal pool, enabling an estimated 192 000 new violent crimes in the course of last year – or 528 per day (SAPS 2007b), as each gun is used in about eight crimes before it is recovered.

Gun crimes put pressure on the criminal justice system with a greater need for investigation, arrest, prosecution and, if convicted, a much longer

sentence (a minimum of 15 years) – thus increasing the burden on our correctional facilities (Sloth-Nielsen & Ehlers 2005; Kirsten et al 2006; Mistry & Minnaar 2003). These facilities are already overcrowded, with existing capacity at 111 000 and existing population at about 160 000 inmates (Steinberg 2005; Fagan 2005).

This in turn makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the Department of Correctional Services to deliver programmes that will contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders once they are released (Muntingh 2001). Currently less than 19 per cent of all inmates of correctional facilities in South Africa participate in such programmes. The single largest group of inmates is those sentenced to between ten and 15 years – these are the serious offenders who arguably most need the interventions since they are more likely to reoffend when they are released if there is no change while they are incarcerated.

Guns also make us very scared. The knowledge that an attacker is armed with a gun dramatically increases the trauma associated with victimisation. Gun violence sets us apart from many other societies where there are high rates of crime. While theft may be distressing, it is not, generally speaking, life threatening. Armed robbery is.

Living in fear: walls, guards and alarms

We are a society overwhelmed by fear of crime, experience of crime, the impact of crime, and violence (Open Society Foundation 2004). Typical responses to traumatic events include some, and at times, all of the following: sadness, anxiety, distress, depression, anger, a sense of loss, irritability, short temper, emotional swings, a need for revenge, feelings of being out of control and chaotic and an inability to look forward or plan for positive events in the future (Burton et al 2003).

We see these responses all around us – in the traffic with road rage, in acts of petty corruption by people who would in other circumstances not commit crimes, in increased interpersonal conflict and pessimism with regard to our future. And, of course, in increased drinking and binge drinking.

Perhaps the most destructive impact of crime and violence is that it encourages a fear-driven response at a cost of more than R46 billion per annum in private security (Berg 2007). The urban landscape is made up of fortress-like enclaves, walled and gated communities protected by armed guards, electric fences, alarms and, of course, surveillance cameras (Landman & Schönteich 2002).

We have through all of this lost a sense of our destiny. We look anxiously over our shoulders but tend not to carry with us a vision of a safe South Africa; something worth striving towards; that place where we can live together in peace, harmony and prosperity, where our children play safely in the streets of leafy suburbs and doors and windows are thrown open to the warm summer evening air (CSIR 2007).

While it is evident that these and other security based responses to crime and violence have not reduced our vulnerability to victimisation, it is difficult to persuade neighbourhoods, communities, towns and cities to adopt alternative strategies (Buur & Jensen 2004; Emmet et al 2007). When creative suggestions are made, the response is often to ask for proof of success – and there is rarely such proof available, as few examples of well supported, properly resourced crime prevention interventions that have been monitored and evaluated, exist.

What exists is evidence that our current efforts have not succeeded, nor do they show any signs of breaking the cycle of crime and violence that holds our beautiful country in its grip. Lessons from a study in the Central Karoo, however, provide clear direction on how a more holistic approach to tackling the cycle of crime and violence can succeed.

Living desperately: a study of the Central Karoo

In 2003 the CSIR Crime Prevention Research Group (CPRG) was commissioned by the European Union on behalf of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to facilitate the development of a local crime prevention strategy for the Central Karoo District Municipality. The intention was that the learning achieved in the Central Karoo could be used elsewhere in the country, particularly in rural contexts.

The study provided an opportunity to better understand the cycle of crime and violence at a local level and to use this understanding to promote crime prevention interventions with short, medium and long term objectives. The study focused on the causes of crime and violence, and identified the roles and responsibilities of a wide range of stakeholders including, but by no means confined to, those in the criminal justice system.

'What does it look like when it's fixed?'

The CPRG had developed a Local Crime Prevention Toolkit (LCPT) based on research into the obstacles experienced in dealing with generic crime and violence related problems in various places around the country (CSIR 2007). The research identified a need for process tools to help establish multi-disciplinary local crime prevention partnerships necessary for the development and implementation of local strategies.

The LCPT methodology requires the articulation of a shared vision of a safe place, the identification of who must be doing what to get there, indicators of progress towards that safe place, the gathering of baseline information (sometimes called a safety audit) to establish a starting point, the development of a local crime prevention partnership (LCPP) and strategy, and an implementation plan and monitoring and evaluation framework (CSIR 2006).

The Central Karoo study thus inevitably required widespread consultation with local communities and service providers. Using the LCPT methodology the research team began by asking people to imagine 'what it looks like when it's fixed'. In groups of varying composition, participants were asked to paint or draw images of a safe Central Karoo. From the elements that made up the images, we identified the key activists and actions that would be required to achieve a safe community, village, town and district.

Life without alcohol abuse?

Typically in this exercise people paint a utopian place, free from burglar bars and drunken fights, where children play safely in the streets and old and young, men and women, are free to move about day or night (CSIR 2006).

What was significant, however, was that participants could not imagine life without the oppression of alcohol abuse. They drew liquor outlets with rows of taxis waiting to take drunken people home; they drew crèches to look after children while their mothers went out drinking (CSIR 2006). This helped identify alcohol abuse as one of the biggest contributors to crime and violence in the district and we ensured that our investigations drew out information about the relationship between alcohol and the lack of safety in the Central Karoo.

The police told us that over 90 per cent of crimes were related to alcohol abuse. In one of the small towns with a population of less than 7 000 people, there are 64 known illegal outlets for the sale of alcohol (CSIR 2006). Alcohol is often purchased with social grant money – and as the illegal shebeen owners are often also micro-lenders, many people are in effect paying massive interest on their alcohol consumption.

Alcohol also makes people very vulnerable. In line with data elsewhere in the country, the connection between alcohol abuse and victimisation was clear. Young girls become vulnerable to rape as a result of getting drunk, very often in illegal shebeens where underage drinking is allowed. The area also records one of the highest incidences of Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) in the country, and in the world. This means that babies are born to drinking mothers at a disadvantage that they are unlikely to overcome in their lives.

The study found that there were many people in the Central Karoo for whom there is no particular purpose in society. Young men were problematised and characterised as dangerous and without usefulness (CSIR 2005). Business people resisted expanding their businesses as they felt that the young people were unmotivated and unreliable – once again alcohol was mentioned as an indicator of a lack of interest in working and progressing.

There was a fear that drugs were becoming more prevalent, that underage children in shebeens were encouraged to take drugs and to sell them in the local schools. Child prostitution was also linked to the sale of drugs and to children's need to support their drug habits.

The life cycle that perpetuates crime and violence

In collating the findings, we began to map the context for crime and violence (in the centre of Diagram 1) and the life cycle that perpetuates crime and violence. It was demonstrated that the victim is the same person as the offender – just at a different point in the life cycle (see outer circle of Diagram 1).

The life cycle began with dysfunctional families, often as a result of accidental pregnancy and without a present father. Children were neglected and abused and violence was normalised at an early age (see the right-hand half of the circle in Diagram 1). Children were both victims of violence in their homes and bystanders to violence between adults. During their essential early childhoods, they did nothing and were often to be seen sitting passively and unsupervised, staring out at the street. When they went to school, they could be truant without consequence and once again were left to their own devices in the afternoons, leaving them vulnerable to further victimisation outside of the home. Basic needs were often not met and children were hungry and bored.

Extensive research into the importance of these early years demonstrates some logical and vital developmental needs if we are to grow our children into young people with good self esteem, who are capable and prepared to contribute in a constructive and useful way:

- Children need love, peace and nurturing from conception and throughout their childhood
- Children should be protected from harm and victimisation
- Physical contact should be related to love and care
- Children should be supervised and attend school without truancy
- Children should be offered a wide range of activities, both to keep them busy and out of immediate harm, but also – and vitally – to ensure that they learn to do things well, love doing them and want to do them again

These developmental needs seem obvious, logical and vital – yet, in the Central Karoo (and we have subsequently found the same to be true in many

and various other communities), our children's needs are being ignored. In the absence of intervention, children quickly learn to fend for themselves and some tip over from being vulnerable victims to becoming young offenders.

While it was possible to ignore the needs of children while they were vulnerable victims, once they tipped over into offending behaviour (see the left-hand half of the circle in Diagram 1), they were quickly identified as a problem and the community demanded that the police act against them. The police responded by saying they had inadequate resources, which worsened the already unstable relationship between the police and the community.

The children meanwhile found a sense of belonging, identity and purpose in gangs and among other children engaged in risky behaviour. They quickly found themselves in conflict with the law and joined the problematised category of 'youth', marginalising themselves from mainstream opportunity; becoming angry, resentful, and without purpose. These young people engaged in risky behaviour of all kinds, including sexually risky behaviour. In many cases young girls saw their sexuality as a commodity – but in others they were the victims of non-consensual sexual activity.

By the time they were 15 years old, many young girls were pregnant and raced to the top of the cycle as the dysfunctional parents, to perpetuate the cycle once again. Young men, with little or nothing constructive to offer, were without hope for the future – possibly the most dangerous element in any society. For a young man for whom tomorrow offers no expectation of good things, there is no fear for the consequence of today's behaviour.

The study demonstrated known truths:

- That while not all victims of violence will go on to become violent offenders, the overwhelming majority of violent offenders first experience violence as victims or as witnesses of violence
- That we need to invest as early as possible in the life cycle – if possible during pregnancy and at the first moments of life, if we are to see a return on that investment in terms of growing constructive, contributing adults (see Diagram 2)

- That as long as we ignore the needs of children, we can never build a criminal justice system that will adequately address the levels of crime and violence
- That safety is an issue for society as a whole and not just for the criminal justice system

Living for the future: recommendations

The study eventually resulted in a series of recommendations, as depicted in Diagram 2. Notably, many of the recommendations were in the social arena rather than the criminal justice domain. As a result, we engaged the departments of Social Development, Sports and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Health, and Education, at least as much as we did the SAPS or Department of Justice.

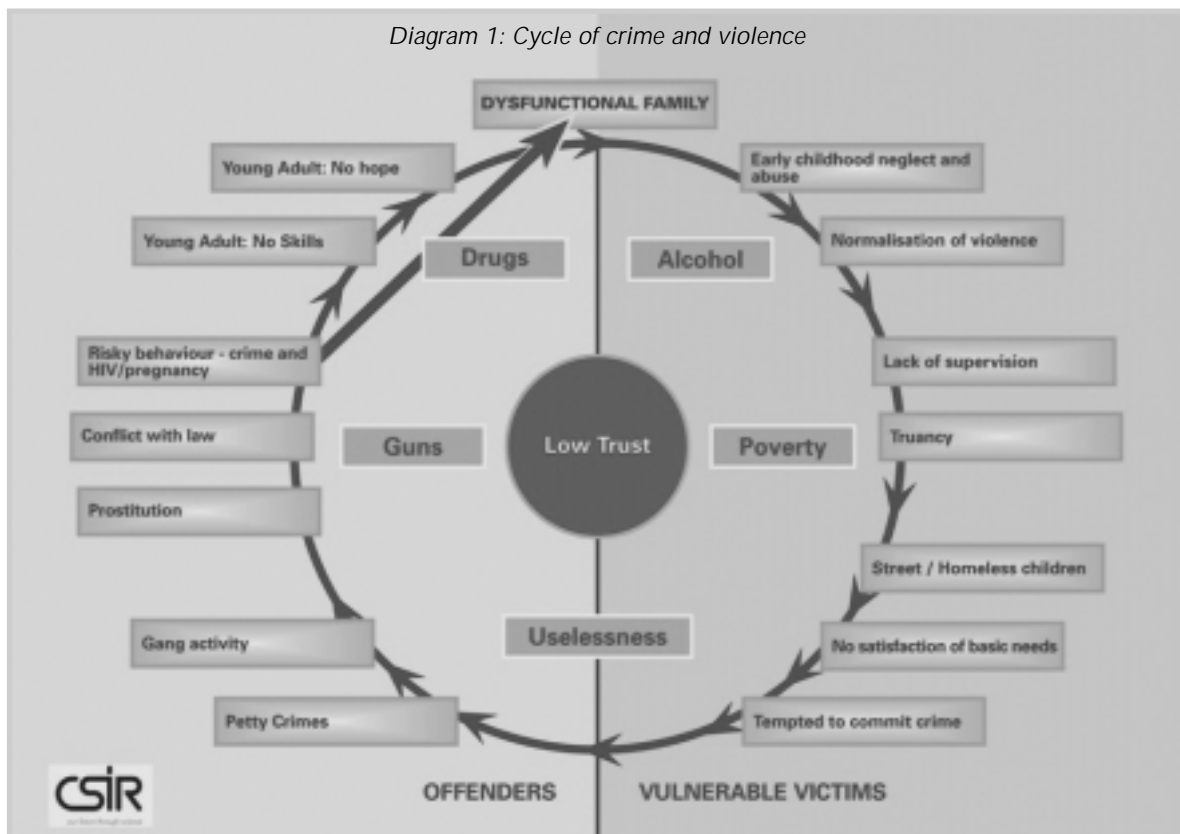
The study provided compelling insights into the need for a broad and inclusive strategy for safety, rather than a security based strategy, with each stakeholder responsible for interventions at different points in the cycle, each according to its mandate and focus. It is of course essential that the criminal justice system is transparent, fair and accessible – and the study offered recommendations in this regard.

However, the study also noted that to achieve a changed vision of a safe Central Karoo, the departments responsible for education, health and welfare would have to work together to break the toxic stranglehold that alcohol abuse holds over the community. The study also demonstrated that community involvement is essential in both understanding the problems and finding solutions.

Many recommendations coming out of the study have significance for communities beyond the Central Karoo. These include:

- Implement a local crime prevention partnership that includes all key department heads, local and provincial, as well as representatives of civil society, to set the agenda and monitor progress. (In some provinces this is being implemented as a Community Safety Forum – the name is not important, but the ability to work together in an integrated and cooperative way is essential).
- Start with a clear vision of 'what it looks like when it is fixed'; if people's vision of a safe place

Diagram 1: Cycle of crime and violence



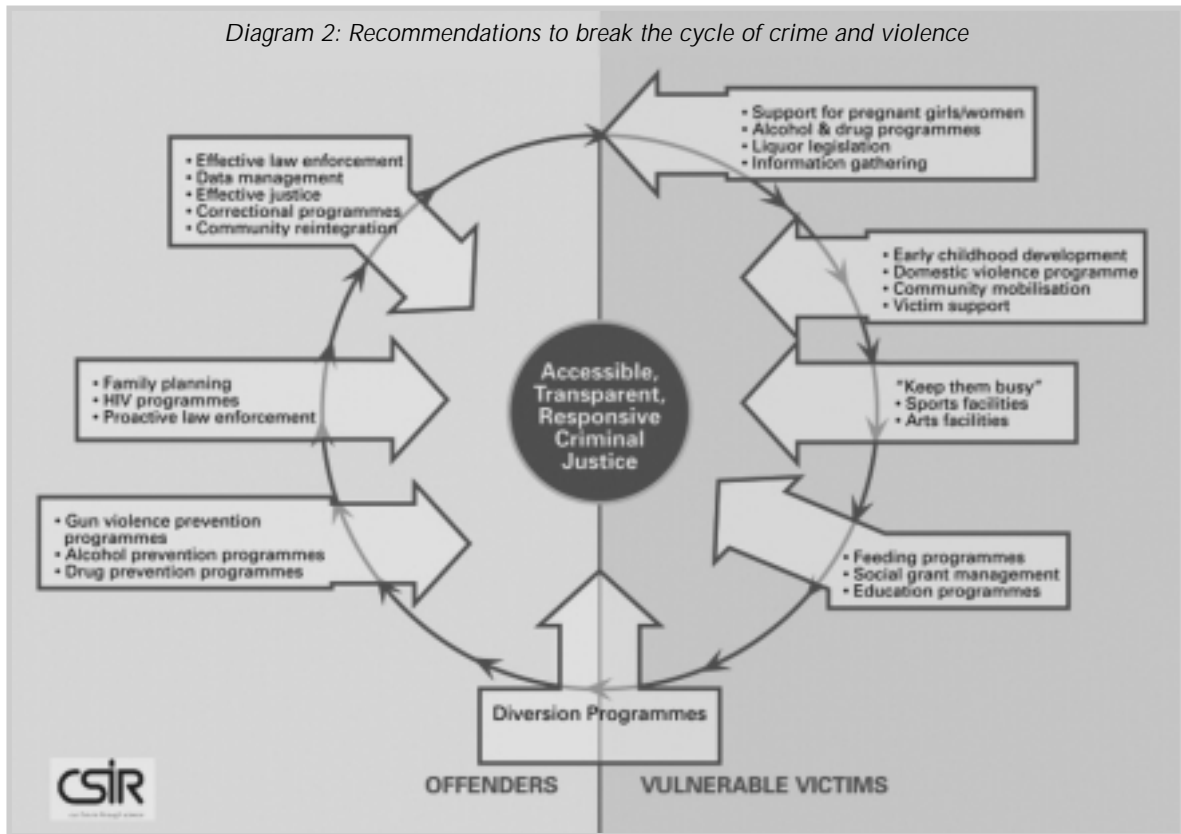
is not one of surveillance cameras, barbed wire, electric fences, alarms, and armed guards, then solutions need to move beyond these target hardening measures.

- Benchmark the lack of safety and agree indicators for progress towards safety.
- Understand as much as possible about what assets exist in the community to help establish and maintain interventions, particularly those aimed at keeping children busy, supervised and at school.
- Address the levels of post-traumatic stress in the community and build capacity for victim support. Simple, practical interventions will make a significant difference to the communal psyche.
- Alcohol abuse is a massive obstacle to a safe South Africa. We need to approach it from every perspective – so that social grants are used for poverty alleviation and not to buy alcohol, so that girls don't get pregnant because they are

drunk, so that mothers don't drink during pregnancy, and so that crime and violence are not an inevitable part of weekends in homes, neighbourhoods and communities. A range of strategies emerged from the study to address the problem of alcohol. These combine a moratorium on the public sale and consumption of alcohol on 'all-pay day', in-patient detoxification services for those dependent on alcohol, out-patient support for families, alternative economic and leisure opportunities, and consistent law enforcement to significantly reduce the number of liquor outlets and stem underage drinking.

- A support system for pregnant girls and mothers, providing information about the impact of alcohol, drugs and cigarette smoking on unborn children, as well as information about how to access and properly use social grants, and helping to prepare for motherhood and bonding. This is seen as primarily a long term intervention, but would undoubtedly have short term benefits for community building.

Diagram 2: Recommendations to break the cycle of crime and violence



- Celebrate partnerships and small successes; use every opportunity for optimism and affirmation.
- Invest more and spend less; interventions that prevent children from tipping over into offending behaviour will generate a return – spending on them once they are offending is money lost.

The models that have come from the study have been used in training SAPS members in crime prevention, and are constantly being refined through exposure to other environments and research. Everywhere we use them, service providers and community members recognise their own communities in these models and add learning and value to their ability to drive strategies that will help make South Africa safe.

Perhaps the key long term learning to emerge from the study is that if we intervene for our teenage pregnant girls today, there is a good chance that in 15 years time their daughters won't be pregnant and their sons won't be committing violent crime.

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