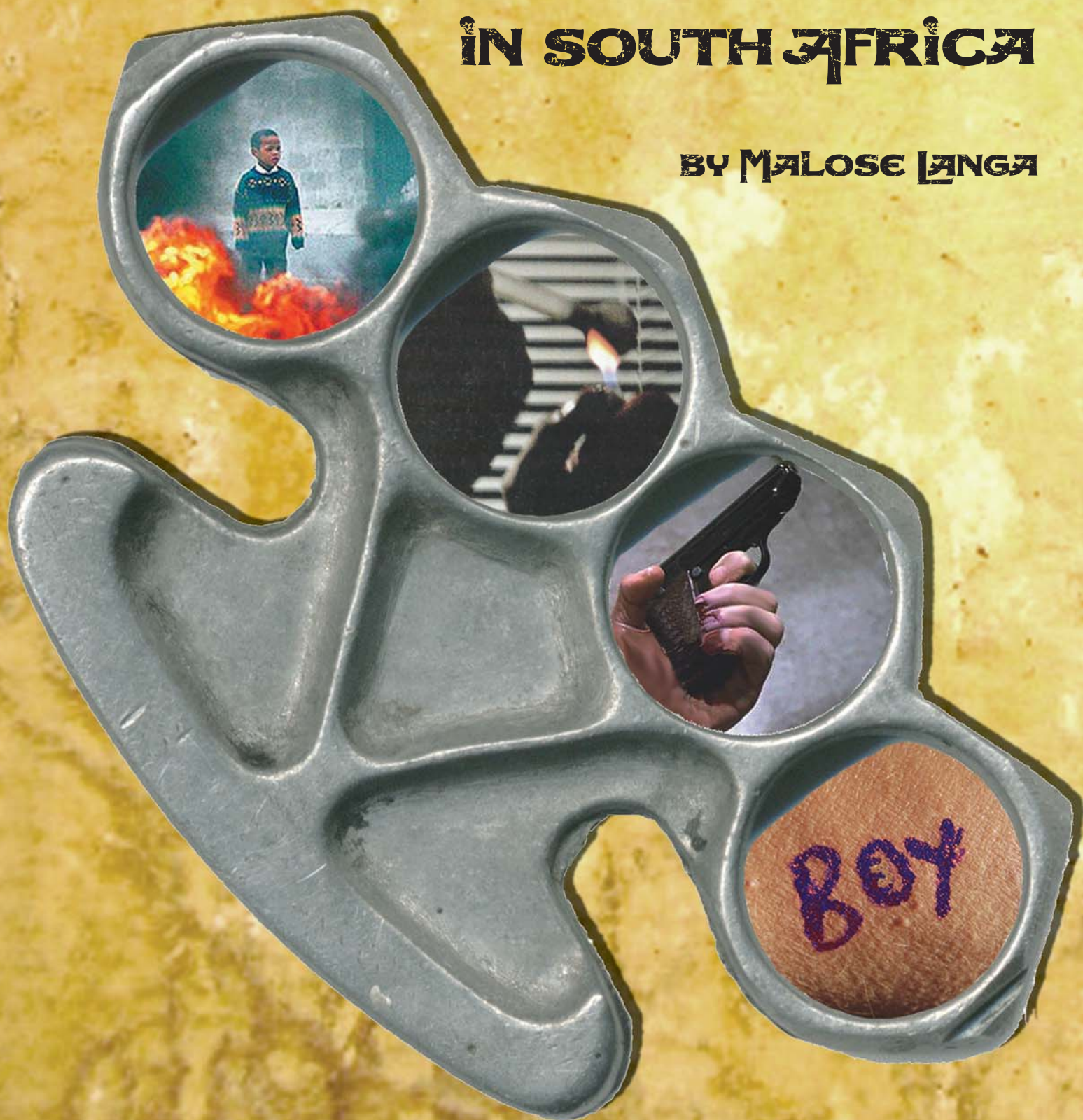# The role of childhood trauma and adversity in youth offending in South Africa

by Malose Langa

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CSVR

The role of childhood trauma and adversity in youth offending in South Africa

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This report discusses factors that contribute to the levels of crime in South Africa with its focus being young perpetrators of crime. Drawing on research linking the experience of childhood trauma to youth offending, the research involved both male and female inmates of Johannesburg Prison. The participants were able to share their childhood experiences of family neglect, abuse and violence in discussion groups with the researchers. While South African prisons are considered 'universities of crime', these discussions were lessons in the development of criminal psychologies, and the start of rehabilitative therapy for many of those involved.

The role of childhood trauma and adversity in youth offending in South Africa

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TRAUMA AND TRANSITION PROGRAMME at the CSVR
(TTP, formerly known as Trauma Clinic)

Vision and mission statement

Vision

"A functional democracy where violence is contained and people and communities thrive in a peaceful, caring and safe society".

Mission statement

To sustain democracy we will address the issues of unresolved trauma, torture, criminal violence and forced migration through psycho-social support, research and advocacy in South Africa and the continent.

TTP's strategic focus areas

Torture

- Capacity building for service providers and health professionals working with torture survivors
- Psychosocial interventions with survivors of torture
- Start a national reference group on monitoring and evaluation of torture cases

Unresolved trauma

- Impact on unresolved trauma on the country (violence, crime and reconciliation)
- Working with ex-combatants including psychosocial interventions
- Trauma and memorialisation
- Intergenerational trauma

Forced migration

- Psychosocial interventions with forced migrants including refugees and asylum seekers
- Institutional for government structures working with forced migrants
- Capacity building with service providers

Criminal violence

- Profiling victims voices in the debate around crime and violence
- Bringing trauma perspectives in the national and international debates around violence and crime

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Notes on the author

Malose Langa completed his Masters Degree in Community-Counselling Psychology at the University of Witwatersrand. Currently, he is a lecturer at Wits University Psychology Department, teaching both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Malose is a registered counselling psychologist and works with victims of violence at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) Trauma Clinic. He was part of the research team that conducted a study in the East Rand to explore challenges facing former combatants after 13 years of democracy. His research interests include risk-taking behaviours among the youth, suicide, substance abuse, trauma and the psychology of men (masculinity).

Malose is a PhD candidate at Wits University and his thesis is entitled: *Becoming a Man, Exploring multiple voices of masculinity amongst adolescent boys in Alexandra Township, South Africa*.

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Crime is a major concern in South Africa today. This report discusses factors that contribute to the crime levels in this country. These include the history of political violence, easy access to illegal firearms, violent neighbourhoods, poverty, unemployment, peer pressure, drug abuse, poor parenting skills, and childhood trauma. The main focus of this report is on youth offenders. One of the attempts in the report is to understand the link between trauma and youth offending in South Africa. An understanding of the relationship between trauma and youth offending has evolved over many years. The understanding is that some young people who have been exposed to trauma are more likely to become violent later in life. These young people use aggression or violence as a coping mechanism to deal with trauma symptoms such as low self-esteem, shame, guilt, anger, and depression. Some end up committing serious violent crimes and they are now serving long prison sentences. The prevalence rate of trauma amongst youth offenders is estimated to be 24% to 51% (Greenwald, 2005). Currently, despite the high rates of trauma exposure among youth offenders, prison rehabilitation initiatives tend to ignore psychological trauma. Trauma interventions need to be integrated into prisoners' rehabilitation. Today the problem of recidivism (re-offending) is linked to unresolved traumas due to lack of effective rehabilitation programmes in many South African prisons (Gaum, Hoffman & Venter, 2006).

This report also discusses youth offenders' experiences of childhood adversity and trauma. These include experiences of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, as well as witnessing family violence and being involved in gang violence. Although trauma is a key component in the development of youth offending, socio-economic and political factors also appear to be playing a significant role in the development of youth offending. Specifically, some youth offenders reported growing up in dysfunctional families characterized by high level of violence, divorce, poverty, alcoholism, single parenting and absent father figures. This report highlights the pain which continues to be evident in the life stories of youth offenders. Some youth offenders want to deal with their own traumas before leaving prison, but the prison environment does not provide effective rehabilitation services (Gaum, Hoffman & Venter, 2006). As a result, many prisoners leave prison without any form of rehabilitation and the risk of re-offending becomes very high with this population (Gaum, Hoffman & Venter, 2006).

In 2005, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), Trauma Clinic, piloted a trauma intervention project with thirty youth offenders at the Johannesburg Prison. In the project, youth offenders talked to social workers and psychologists in group therapy about their

own traumatic stories and learned more about trauma-related symptoms. As part of the project, youth offenders were also equipped with necessary self-awareness skills, anger management skills, communication skills, and coping mechanisms to resolve personal traumas.

The report also highlights challenges of working in a prison environment where group meetings are cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances such as roll-call, the lack of rooms, and inadequate support from other prison officials.

In conclusion, the report gives recommendations that could be implemented in dealing with crime in South Africa. It is important to note that crime prevention is not a simple task. Crime is a complex individual, community, economic, religious, political, legal, health, and social problem. Our crime prevention strategies need to take all these factors into consideration. In this report, the recommendations for crime prevention for youth offending are divided into primary, secondary and tertiary intervention programmes.

Primary intervention programmes

Primary intervention programmes aim to prevent crime before it occurs. These programmes focus mainly on early prevention of circumstances that give rise to youth offending. The fact that many research studies link youth offending to early experiences of childhood trauma and poor parenting skills, means primary intervention programmes are needed to target children and parents. Firstly, the report recommends the provision of Early Childhood Services to protect all children against all forms of early childhood traumas such as abuse and neglect. Secondly, parenting workshops are also recommended for parents to discuss effective parenting skills. Lastly, socio-environmental interventions are recommended to provide young people with opportunities to achieve their dreams and ambitions.

Secondary intervention programmes

Secondary intervention programmes tend to focus mainly on reducing the likelihood of high-risk youth becoming lifetime offenders. School-based crime prevention programmes should be included in the school curricula to empower young people with assertiveness skills to resist peer pressures to engage in risk-taking behaviours such as crime, substance use and gangsterism.

Tertiary intervention programmes

Tertiary intervention programmes focus on those young people who have already committed crime. Tertiary intervention programmes aim to address prison factors that contribute to re-offending. Effective counselling services are recommended to rehabilitate prisoners before they leave prison. The sentencing of first-time youth offenders should be aimed at reducing risk factors that increase the chances of young people committing more serious crimes. Effective prison rehabilitation programmes might help to break the cycle of violence in South Africa.

1. Theoretical background to crime in South Africa

1.1 Statistics on crime in South Africa

Crime statistics reveal that roughly 2.5 million people were victims of different types of crime in the past six years (Altebeker, 2005).

Crime statistics for 2001 to 2006

Crime category	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006
Murder	21,405	21,553	19,824	18,793	18,545
Rape	54,293	52,733	52,733	55,114	54,926
Attempted murder	31,293	35,861	30,076	24,516	20,553
Robbery with aggravating circumstances	116,736	126,905	133,658	126,789	119,726
Assault with the inflict grievous bodily harm	264,012	266,321	260,082	249,369	226,942
Car hijacking	15,846	14,691	13,789	12,434	12,825
Robbery of cash in transit	238	127	54	58	59

Source: South Africa Police Service (SAPS, 2006)

According to these statistics, crime levels in South Africa fluctuate. Between 2001 and 2003, it seems crimes such as murder, attempted murder, rape, assault, and car hijacking were comparatively high, and between 2004 and 2006, other crimes (e.g. murder, car hijacking, and robbery of cash in transit) decreased or remained stable. Existing official crime statistics should be read with caution as they may be underestimating or overestimating, for socio-political reasons, the levels of crime in South Africa. It is also difficult to measure crime accurately over sustained periods of time (Schonteich & Louw, 2001). Many victims or witnesses of crime do not report their crimes to the police and as a result, their incidents are not included in the crime statistics released by the Department of Safety and Security. In addition to this, some crime statistics are more accurate than others. For example, rape statistics are skewed by the fact that many victims do not report their cases. Murder, however, is thought to be much more accurate as there is a dead body to be counted. A comprehensive plan on the reporting of crime statistics is needed to ensure that accurate figures are released annually. For example, victims or witnesses of crime should report all incidents of crime, and the police must record and

investigate all crime incidents (Schonteich & Louw, 2001). Despite the limitations of existing statistics, the significance of crime levels in South Africa cannot be disputed.

Reasons for high crime in South Africa

"There is no single satisfactory explanation for South Africa's high levels of crime" (Schonteich & Louw, 2001, p. 4). A number of explanations are given in this report to explain South Africa's high levels of crime. These include explaining the link between crime and South Africa's history of political violence, the availability of illegal firearms, and socio-economic factors. The report also provides the psychological understanding of crime in South Africa. Major psychological theories such as family systems, psychodynamic views, social learning theory, and psychosocial perspectives are used to explain the relationship between youth offending, poor parenting skills and childhood trauma. Lastly, the report discusses overcrowding in South African prisons and how it impacts negatively on counselling services aimed at rehabilitating youth offenders, reducing recidivism and breaking the cycle of violence among youth offenders.

1.2   The history of violence in SA

South Africa has a long history of political violence. During the apartheid years the state maintained its position of power and control over the majority of South Africans through the use of repressive and violent methods. Violence was perpetrated through the policies of institutionalized racism and high levels of deprivation and poverty (Bornman, van Eeden & Wentzel, 1998; Emmett & Butchart, 2000). On the other hand, violence became sanctioned by the liberation movements as a means of resisting apartheid and bringing democratic change. From the 1960s onwards *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) were formed as military structures of the liberation movements to fight apartheid. In the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, large numbers of people (including many young people) left the country to join the above-mentioned liberation movements in exile (for example, in Angola, Uganda, and Tanzania), so as to train as soldiers. In the townships, young boys also actively organized themselves into defence structures responsible for patrolling and protecting their communities against state security forces. Many authors (see for example, Mokwena, 1991; Simpson, 1996) argue that, violence became so much a part of people's everyday life that a "*culture of violence*" developed in South Africa. That is, people began to see violence as an acceptable way to resolve social, political, and even domestic problems (Bornman, van Eeden & Wentzel, 1998; Simpson, 1996). The distinction between political and criminal violence became blurred and more violent crimes were also committed under this period.

Post 1994: Democratic dispensation

Between 1994 and 1999, violent crime (such as murder, attempted murder, rape, and all forms of robbery and assault) increased (Kristen, Cock & Mashike, 2002; Schonteich & Louw, 2001). Many factors are perceived to have contributed to the increasing levels of crime in the new South Africa. These include inequality or the increasing wealth gap between the rich and the poor (Kristen, Cock & Mashike, 2002; Schonteich & Louw, 2001; Terre Blanche, 2006). Other factors are blamed on government. Criticisms of government include poor policing, poor police management, nepotism, and corruption. There is also a growing perception that our criminal justice system is too lenient on sentencing criminals. "Criminals operate with impunity and they are not afraid of the police" (Bornman, van Eeden & Wentzel, 1998, p.48). The easy availability of firearms has also been identified as one of the major causes of crime in the new South Africa.

1.3   Illegal firearms

Post-1994, the high incidence of crime in South Africa has been linked to the easy availability of and access to firearms. According to a United Nations Survey of 69 countries, South Africa has one of the highest firearm-related homicide rates in the world, second only to Columbia (Schonteich & Louw, 2001). In 2000, there were an estimated 9 million firearms in South Africa, of which only 5 million were legally owned (Schonteich & Louw, 2001). Illegal firearms are used in most violent crimes such as murder, armed robbery and car hijacking. The question is, from where do all these illegal firearms come? Various answers have been given to this question. One is that during the struggle against apartheid, there was an influx of guns into South Africa to be used by various liberation armed formations. After 1994, a call was made by *Gun Free South Africa* for all illegal firearms to be returned, but only a total of 900 firearms were handed in across the country (Meek, 1998, in Kristen, Cock & Mashike, 2002). As a result, some of the illegal firearms fell into the hands of criminals who are now using them to commit violent crimes in post-apartheid South Africa.

Moreover, theft of guns from police stations has also increased the number of illegal guns in circulation. For example, between January and March 1999, six assault rifles, six shotguns and twenty three 9mm pistols were stolen from police stations in the Western Cape. It is believed that gangs and vigilante groups in the Western Cape use these stolen guns to commit crimes in the Cape (Hennopp, 1999). Members of the police have also been targeted, both on and off duty, for the stealing of their firearms. Other weapons are also lost by members of the security forces through negligence. A total of 1,775 firearms were either lost or stolen from members of the police force (Hennopp, 1999). Many of these illegal firearms are used in violent crimes that South Africans witness on a daily basis.

1.4   Socio-economic factors

Statistics South Africa (2005) estimates unemployment in South Africa to be in the region of 40%. However, the accuracy of this estimate is disputed by some. For example, Swanepoel and de Beer (2006) argue that unemployment in South Africa may in fact be as high as 48%. The majority of poor people in South Africa are black. Statistically, 61% of Africans and 38% of coloureds are poor, compared with 5% of Indians and 1% of whites (May, in Terre Blanche, 2006). Some researchers have argued that poverty is strongly associated with crime in South Africa. The argument here is supported by previous studies conducted by the researchers from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR). According to Dissel (1999) and Segal, Pelo, and Rampa (1999) many young offenders interviewed in Boksburg, Leeuwkop, Krugersdorp and Johannesburg prisons came from deprived, poor families. Many juvenile offenders reported that they commit crime in order to survive harsh conditions of poverty (Mkhondo, 2005; Tyson & Stone, 2002). This result is similar to that of Pfetter (in Tyson and Stone, 2002) who found that poverty was the most frequently occurring response given by Nigerian and British adolescents about the causes of youth crime.

Police statistics and victim surveys conducted in South Africa also suggest a strong link between poverty, social deprivation, race, class, and risk of victimization (Schonteich & Louw, 2001). Victim surveys conducted from 1999 to 2001 show that poor people in the townships or informal settlements are more at risk of being victims of interpersonal violent crime such as assault, murder and rape. By comparison, wealthy people living in the suburbs are most at risk of property crimes, in particular car hijacking, armed robbery and burglary (Schonteich & Louw, 2001).

1.5   Substance abuse and crime

Drugs and alcohol are easily available for South African youth. In their study, Leoschunt and Burton (2006) found that one in five South African youth knew people in their communities who sell (21%) and buy (28%) drugs. Currently, studies indicate a strong link between substance abuse and crime in South Africa. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and Medical Research Council (in Pluddemann, Parry, Louw & Burton, 2002) found that 58% of youth offenders reported being under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time they committed their crimes. Also in the study conducted by Segal, Palmary and Rampa, (1999, p.5) many young offenders said "they relied on drugs to carry out their criminal acts." It seems drugs give young offenders the courage to commit their crimes. Another study conducted by the South African Police Service (SAPS) revealed the link between alcohol abuse and the prevalence of certain types of violent crime such as assault (Leggett, 2002). According to the National Injury Mortality

Surveillance System, 56% of 2,469 arrested suspects tested positive in blood/alcohol tests (Pluddemann, Parry, Louw & Burton, 2002).

1.6   Psychological understandings of crime

The psychological understanding of crime explores the relationships between crime, poor parenting skills and childhood trauma.

Family system theory

Family is an important system in facilitating the emotional, physical, cognitive, and moral development of the child. Parents are generally seen as the primary agents of socialization in the early years of a child's life. They teach the child about what is right and wrong. Developmental psychologists have investigated how dysfunctional family systems contribute to conduct problems and offending. Dysfunctional families are characterized by violence, neglect and abuse. In the three studies conducted in prisons around Gauteng by Wedge, Boswell and Dissel (2000), Mkhondo (2005), and Segal, et al. (1999), young juveniles mentioned that they came from homes where both parents together no longer lived with the child. Their parents were very physically abusive. Many of them were kicked out of their homes, and others decided to leave their homes to go and live with their friends, some of whom were involved in criminal activities. In these studies, juveniles described "their families as riddled with tensions and conflict,… remembering experiences of their parents getting divorced at an early age and having to live with abusive stepfathers or mothers who rejected them" (Wedge et al. 2000, p. 13). Coming from unloving, broken homes was the most frequently mentioned factor by youth offenders for their involvement in crime. Similarly in Australia, an unloving home environment was cited as the most important factor influencing young people to use violence and commit crime (Tyson & Hubert, 2000).

Psychodynamic perspective

Psychodynamic theory focuses on how childhood history shapes the adult personality (Hook, Cockcroft & Watts, 2002). This perspective argues that there is a strong relationship between childhood trauma and youth offending (Pistorious, 2000). Numerous other studies have pointed to the involvement of childhood abuse/neglect in the formation of criminal behaviour. For example, Seltzer (1998) studied hundreds of convicted criminals and found that all his subjects had been abused either physically or emotionally as children. He cites other research studies that have shown conclusively that child abuse begets criminal behaviour. He concludes that severe parental rejection and lack of parental affection are primary causes of antisocial personality structures and criminal behaviour.

Child abuse may be classified into four categories, namely, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect. All these forms of abuse have negative long-term psychological effects such as low self-esteem, shame, anger, hatred, and aggression. Abused children also lose trust in others, making it difficult for the child to relate to others. Many children develop feelings of self-blame and guilt while others grow up with the anger of abuse bottled up inside them. Later in life the anger may be displaced on to others, that is, future victims of crime. The displacement of anger happens on an unconscious level. In the act of committing crime, there is a dynamic that occurs between the perpetrator and the victim. Eagle and Watts (2002) call this dynamic "psychic spillage", which refers to the exchange of feelings between the perpetrator and the victim. The perpetrator leaves the victim with his/her own feelings of emptiness, anger and helplessness, while taking away victims' feelings of contentment and happiness. Eagle and Watts (2002) argue that violent crime often serves to calm the perpetrator's sense of worthlessness, powerlessness and emptiness, and to establish a psychic (mental) balance. The violent act also helps the perpetrator to release unwanted and unbearable feelings of childhood trauma. Violent crime generally gives the perpetrator a sense of power and authority. For example, rape research has often emphasized that rapists are boys or men who feel disempowered. They may have strongly suppressed feelings of violence and are desperate to reaffirm their masculinity through power, control and intimidation (Seltzer, 1998). The perpetrator feels a sense of triumph on seeing their victim as helpless and crying for help. This is what Pistorious (2000) calls "reversal of roles". The perpetrator who was once a victim of child abuse has now reversed the role to be in the position of power to control and abuse his/her victim. According to Pistorious (2000), perpetrators act out their fantasies at the crime scene. There is a fantasy of wanting to undo the past, especially the pain of abuse and neglect. Again all this happens on an unconscious level.

For other perpetrators, killing, raping and committing crime becomes repetitive and compulsive. Pistorious (2000) mentions that perpetrators feel compelled to repeat acts of violence to satisfy their fantasies, but that this satisfaction does not last long. Two days after committing a violent act, perpetrators still feel unsatisfied and are compelled, therefore, to go out and find another victim. It is hoped that the new victim will be the 'right' one in order that the compulsion can be satisfied. This never happens and the crime becomes even more repetitive and compulsive (Seltzer, 1998).

The psychodynamic understanding of violent crime raises a pertinent question, does childhood trauma beget violence or does violence beget trauma? Every child is born innocent, with a sense that the world is a safe place providing experiences of love, care and nurturing. But the world may instead abuse and neglect the child. The child takes in the pain of trauma and releases it

later in life in the form of violence. This confirms Pistorious's (2000) statistics that 90% of perpetrators have a history of child abuse, rejection and neglect. Similarly, Wedge et al. (2000) and Mkhondo (2005) found that juvenile offenders had experienced some form of abuse. Thirty-six percent experienced emotional abuse; 16% experienced sexual abuse, and 44% experienced physical abuse (Mkhondo, 2005; Wedge et al. 2000). It seems many young violent offenders are suffering from unresolved childhood trauma. Mkhondo's (2005) work with juvenile offenders also supports the link between early childhood traumatic experiences and violence later in adolescence. In conclusion, it seems we are all responsible for dealing with causes of violent crime, including preventing all forms of child abuse. Other writers argue that "helping children to grow in safe communities represents an investment in South Africa's future" (Wedge, et al. 2000, p. 15).

Social learning perspective

Social learning perspective argues that behaviour is learned from others (Bandura, in Berk, 2002). From a social learning perspective, children learn to be aggressive through observation of parents, peers, neighbours, community leaders, and role models. Today, South African youth are growing up in social environments characterized by high levels of violence. More than one in five (21.8%) South African youth have reported being exposed to family or community violence in the National Youth Victimization survey conducted by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (Leoschunt, 2006). In terms of the social learning perspective, children imitate what they see from their parents and other community members. They view violence as an acceptable means of communication to solve problems. The increasing levels of violence in schools is also linked with cultures of violence in the community (Burton, 2006). For example, many South African parents and teachers still use corporal punishment to discipline children, despite this being against the law.

Today children are exposed to media violence, modelling their own behaviour on the violence that they see in the mass media. Society and representations in the media gives violent children social rewards and this reinforces the behaviour. For example, violent boys are seen as 'real boys', while, non-violent boys are called derogatory names such as 'sissies' or 'mommy's boys'. Status is associated with willingness to use violence. Social approval by peers also encourages an attraction to violence and aggression. Gangs commonly model and reward certain kinds of violent behaviour. For example, new gang members are rewarded for 'spilling the blood' – killing or committing a violent crime – as part of their initiation (Steinberg, 2004). The more brutal and daring the crime, the more positive reinforcement or reward the new gang member receives (Steinberg, 2004). In some communities, gang members enjoy respect and status. They more often drive expensive cars, wear expensive clothing, and are also able to attract many sexual

partners (Kinnes, 2000). Because gang members are seen as role models, other young people also commit crimes in order to be like their gang heroes. This confirms the social learning perspective that children learn about violence from others in the community (e.g. parents, teachers and gang members).

Psychosocial development

In terms of Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1968), adolescence is a critical period of development where the individual may be more vulnerable to social or peer pressure than at any other stage of development. It is during this stage that the youth form their adolescent identities. The period of adolescent identity formation is characterized by both emotional and physical changes. For adolescents, this period is marked by a conflict between peer and parental influences, as young people are flooded with a host of choices regarding sex, drugs, friends, and school work (Erikson, 1968). Peers and others outside of the immediate family become the main facilitators of identity formation and development. Young people need a sense of belonging to a group. As a result, other young people join gangs because of the need to identify with peers. Having friends who are gang members is associated with crime in young people (Farrington, 1998). In their study, Elliot and Menard (1996) concluded that young people's offending is caused by peer pressure. They affirm and approve one another's involvement in criminal activities.

1.7   Rehabilitation of youth offenders

This section discusses issues of overcrowding and lack of rehabilitation services in South African prisons.

Overcrowding

The Department of Correctional Services' (DCS) 2006 annual report states that 61,325 prisoners were between the ages of 14 and 25 years (52% of all prisoners). These numbers show that many young people commit crime in South Africa. The Department of Correctional Services collects statistics according to five general categories of crime (aggressive, sexual, economic, narcotic and others), and the statistics from the Judicial Inspectorate of Prisons reveal that 60% of young offenders were sentenced for aggressive, sexual and economic crimes (Fagan, 2005).

There are 240 prisons in South Africa, not enough to accommodate an increasing number of prisoners. South African prisons are 124% full (Fagan, 2005). Prison overcrowding is a crisis as it interferes negatively with rehabilitation initiatives set up by prisons. A prison cell that was designed to hold only 38 prisoners holds more than 100 youth offenders (Fagan, 2005). As a

result, many youth offenders are forced to join gangs and have no access to education or rehabilitation services (Fagan, 2004). According to Haralambos and Holborn (in Gaum, Hoffman & Venter, 2006), prisons often do more harm than good. While prisons are supposed to rehabilitate they often perpetuate the same aggressive behaviour that led to the offender being arrested in the first place. Overcrowding has turned our prisons into crime promoting institutions (Fagan, 2005). Dissel (1999) found that gangsterism, sexual violence and drug trafficking are prevalent in South African prisons. Sexual violence is also rife in our prisons, which aside from the trauma of rape, puts many inmates at a high risk of HIV infection (Gear & Ngubeni, 2002). Reliable statistics are not available on the number of HIV-positive prisoners. The high incidence of forced or consensual sexual intercourse is a common reality of prison life, and this is considerably increased by gang activities (Gear & Ngubeni, 2002).

Rehabilitation

Does rehabilitation really work in prison? Rehabilitation is defined as a voluntary process aimed to get an offender to assume responsibility for his/her life through active participation in the rehabilitation process. Effective corrections require meaningful intervention that entails, not exclusively, a multi-disciplinary offender assessment system, scientific-based rehabilitation programmes, and individualized sentence planning of offenders (Hoffman, 2005). According to Gaum, Hoffman and Venter (2006) rehabilitation does work, but our prisons presently are not positive environments in which to rehabilitate prisoners. Due to shortages of staff, many prisoners are unable to receive any form of treatment or rehabilitation. Currently, only twenty-eight psychologists are hired by the National Department of Correctional Services to provide psychological care for approximately 18,000 prisoners (Gaum et al., 2006). It is difficult for mental health professionals to see so many prisoners for individual and group therapy. Many prisoners leave prison without ever having seen a mental health professional or attended any rehabilitation programme. Prisons are now seen as universities of crime. It is in prison where some youth offenders join gangs and learn how to commit more serious crimes. Effective rehabilitation services are needed in our prisons to break the cycle of crime and help prisoners deal with their own emotional difficulties before leaving prison.

2. Methodology

In order to understand factors that influence youth offenders to commit crime in South Africa, CSVR and the Trauma Clinic designed a trauma intervention project to explore the links between trauma and youth offending. The proposal to pilot this project was approved by the Johannesburg Prison Authorities. Following approval, the CSVR Trauma Clinic staff selected thirty youth offenders (15 males and 15 females).

2.1 Demographic details of participants

The characteristics of youth offenders who participated in this project are as follows:

Table 1: Breakdown of sample by gender and age

Gender	19 years	20 years	21 years	22 years	Total
Male	4	7	2	2	15
Female	5	1	6	3	15

Table 2: Educational level

Grades	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Male	0	6	3	3	1	2
Female	0	1	3	7	2	2

Table 3: Nature of crimes

Crimes	Car hijacking/ armed robbery	Drug trafficking	Murder	Sexual offences	Kidnapping	Shoplifting
Male	5		4	6		
Female	3	5	2		1	4

Table 4: Length of sentences

Sentences	10 years	15 years	20 years+	Life sentences
Male	4	4	5	2
Female	10	3	2	0

2.2 Group therapy with youth offenders

All thirty participants participated in twenty group therapy sessions aimed at helping youth offenders talk about their upbringing, family relations, early experiences of loss, abuse and neglect, history of substance abuse, reasons for committing crime, imprisonment, and lastly, dealing with the symptoms of trauma and depression. Two rooms were booked respectively in the female and male sections of the prison to facilitate group therapy sessions. Two facilitators (a

social worker and a psychologist) were allocated to each group. The groups met every Wednesday from 10h00 to 12h00. English, Sotho and Zulu were used interchangeably in the group meetings.

The therapy group sessions were based on Corey's theory on group processes and practice. Corey (2000) argues that group therapy moves through several stages, namely: initial stage, transition stage, working stage and termination stage.

The **initial phase** with youth offenders was aimed at creating a trusting group environment. One of the limitations with group therapy is lack of trust. Thus, it was normal during this phase for youth offenders to feel scared and reluctant to talk about their personal issues and feelings. Facilitators played a significant role in fostering trust among the group members. Less intrusive group activities were quite effective in building trust among the group members. This was done through the NAME GAME, in which youth offenders were asked to tell others about the meanings of their names.

Outcomes of this activity:
- Getting to know each other.
- Getting to know the meanings of their names.
- Building trust amongst by sharing something personal but not threatening.

The initial stage of the groups also involved developing rules to govern the groups. The groups set ground rules such as starting sessions on time, respecting one another, active participation, and maintaining confidentiality. The initial stage of the groups also involved members clarifying expectations and setting goals for the project. The goals involved learning about trauma, improving communication skills, learning to share skills, learning how to control anger, learning about the causes of violence, and learning how to deal with difficult situations in jail.

The goal of the **transition phase** was for youth offenders to share their own family history and life experiences, which lasted for six sessions. This was done through an activity called the Tree of Life. Instructions for the activity were that the participants were asked to think of themselves as a tree. Then the participants were given materials (flipchart, pencil, rubber, and crayons) to draw a Tree of Life. The tree starts with the roots, which represent important family members, family genogram and family relations. This helped the participants to trace their family roots and also reflect about their family dynamics. The stem represented their strengths and weaknesses, the kind of person they are. The branches represented their future goals.

Outcomes of this activity:
- To encourage self-awareness;
- To trace family roots and;
- To build group trust;
- To develop future goals.

The River of Life was another activity used in the transition phase of the groups. In this activity, the participants were instructed to draw a river on a blank flipchart sheet, which represented their life journeys. Participants were encouraged to indicate both the good and the bad moments they have had in their lives. This activity also lasted for six sessions. Both these activities (Tree of Life and the River of Life) lasted for twelve sessions in total. The participants found these activities to be therapeutic as they were able to reflect on their life journeys, including family backgrounds, early experiences of abuse, neglect, rejection, peer pressure, history of substance abuse, gangs, reasons for committing crime, and imprisonment.

The goal of the **working phase** was for each member to learn coping skills to manage trauma-related symptoms**.** In this phase, the participants mainly talked about their personal traumatic experiences and how these impacted on them. These traumatic experiences included physical or sexual abuse, neglect, witnessing family violence, and gang violence. The facilitation of this phase was guided by an integration of cognitive-behavioural and psychodynamic frameworks. Facilitators concentrated on reframing, gaining cognitive mastery over trauma symptoms, decreasing avoidance, altering attributions, and facilitating integration of the self. Due to time constraints, this phase lasted for four sessions.

Outcomes for this activity:
- To raise awareness about trauma and its symptoms;
- To allow the participants to share painful feelings;
- To help the participants heal from past traumatic experiences;
- To understand their anger and underlying sources; and,
- To develop positive coping strategies.

The goal of the **termination phase** was to terminate the group and consolidate learned skills. The termination stage was characterized by a mixture of feelings, among them sadness, and a sense of loss. The feelings of separation were dealt with and members were encouraged to continue supporting each other and practicing new skills. This phase lasted for two sessions.

Data collection and analysis

Facilitators collected process notes for all group meetings. Group meetings were not tape recorded (because of prison policy), but facilitators were encouraged to write their process notes verbatim. The narratives were analysed using thematic content analysis. Thematic content analysis involved reading and re-reading of process notes to extract significant themes regarding factors that influence youth offenders to commit crime. Youth offenders gave their own subjective accounts of what was important to them and how they understood their involvement in crime, its impact on their lives and others.

3.   Results and discussion

Based on group activities, multiple themes emerged which indicate factors that influence youth offenders to commit crime in South Africa. These include family backgrounds, abuse, absent father figures, poor role models, peer pressure, and joining gangs. This report suggests that youth offending behaviour occurs as a result of a combination of external socio-economic and internal psychological factors.

3.1   Family backgrounds

Most of the youth offenders in this project indicated that they were born into families where only one parent was present, though some participants shared positive experiences of being raised by single parents. In cases where both parents were absent, grandparents provided care for grandchildren. Grandparents relied on their old age pension grants to support their grandchildren.

> *Lazarus[1]: I grew up in the care of my grandmother. She died in 1995. I miss her. She was the most important person in my life. My grandmother was supporting all of us financially with her old age pension grant. After her death the whole family became dysfunctional. I then left home to stay with friends who influenced me to do crime until I was arrested (male participant).*

> *Thandi: I also grew up under the care of grandparents and uncle. They were also supporting us (female participant).*

Many of the participants grew up in poverty-stricken homes, wherein only one member of the family was working or not working at all.

> *Themba: At home my mother and father were not working. We spent some days without anything to eat. I felt I had to make money and doing crime was the only way (male participant).*

> *Norman: My parents were not working. I felt committing crime was a solution to my family's financial problems (male participant).*

It is apparent that certain social environments may also make it difficult for individuals to resist engaging in crime. This is particularly likely to occur in social contexts with high rates of unemployment and poverty, and where crime is directed towards alleviating hunger and other basic needs. This confirms the existing literature covered in this report that there is a strong

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[1] All the names in the report have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants.

relationship between poverty and crime. In the fight against crime, we also need to eradicate the increasing level of poverty and unemployment.

Despite the economic hardships, some parents tried very hard to meet the needs of their children. In these cases the children still continued on the criminal path.

> Thembi: Everything was right in the house. I had everything I wanted. My parents warned me against bad friends but I did not listen to them. They were always telling me about my friends: that they were a bad influence. I have disappointed my mother (female participant).

> Papa: I feel like I have disappointed my parents. They supported me. They gave me everything I needed but because I was greedy I wanted more. I started committing crime. Here I am feeling very bad that I have let them down. I do not want to blame any person for the crimes I have committed but myself (male participant).

These responses here challenge the notion that all youth offenders were rejected and come from poor families. Other youth offenders were given good care and love, but it seems that peer pressure played a significant role for them to commit crime.

3.2   Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse takes different forms, but generally it affects the child socially and psychologically. Some of the youth offenders mentioned that their parents were over controlling. One of the participants in the female group provided a good illustration of emotional abuse and over controlling:

> Mapule: My mother was always grounding me for petty things like not washing dishes. She would not allow me to go and play with other kids for a period of a month. She was too controlling (female participant).

For other youth offenders emotional abuse was coupled with parental rejection.

> Maureen: I think I was always rejected. I think that more often my parents would say all the bad things about me even if I did something good. So I have never felt loved. I don't remember doing anything good enough for them (female participant).

> Lizo: My mother was always shouting at me but she would not shout at my brothers even if they had done something wrong. I felt so unloved and rejected that sometimes she would take my clothes and other belongings as a form of punishment (male participant).

Parental rejection is harmful as it involves labelling, putdowns and name-calling. This seems to have damaged the self-esteem of some participants. Garbarino (1999, p.16) concluded that parental rejection leads to "hostility, aggression, negative self-evaluation, and emotional unresponsiveness". Some parents rejected their children to the extent that they threw them out of the house.

> China: I had no choice but to leave the house. My stepfather pushed me out of the house. He said to me, 'leave my house and go and live with your friends'. He said, 'I don't care because you are not my child'. I was very hurt to hear him saying he is not my father. I was very hurt (male participant).

Garbarino (1999) argues that many of these teenagers, while known as runaways or street children, are really "throwaways". Participants who left their homes had many problems of mistreatment at home. A hostile home environment left them with no place to go but to join friends involved in crime and drugs.

3.3   Witnessing family violence

Some participants described their families as riddled with conflict, which negatively affected them. Witnessing family violence has left permanent psychological scars on their psychological functioning.

> Lily: In my family we were not happy due to a lot of fights. My father was always drunk and physically abusing my mother (female participant).

> John: It was in 1995 when I started feeling sad when I saw my father beating my mother and forcing us to leave the house. We left the house with nowhere to go. It was a painful experience of my life. It still hurts when talking about it (crying) (male participant).

3.4   Sexual abuse:

Female participants reported experiences of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse has also been linked with other psychological effects such as low self-esteem, isolation, inability to trust, and conflict within relationships. It is also associated with depression and anxiety. In the stories below, a history of sexual abuse is more often associated with feelings of deep emotional pain and anger. Other female participants were forced into sex by their male partners.

> Nomza: I was born in 1986. In 1996 my parents got divorced. My mother re-married. We were staying with our stepfather. In 1998 my stepfather repeatedly raped me (crying). I left home and stayed with friends. In 2004 I was involved in an armed robbery (female participant).

Felicia: I left home to stay with my boyfriend. He was very abusive. Sometimes he would force me to have sex with him (female participant).

3.5   Lack of father figures

Many of the participants mentioned that their fathers were emotionally absent, indifferent and unresponsive to their needs. Many participants saw their father figures as uncaring and unloving.

Chris: My father never played any significant role in my life. He never provided any meaningful support to the family. I see him as broken roots on my tree (male participant).

Tshepo: My father was always drinking. He refused to buy me things. He was spending all his money on alcohol (male participant).

The results in this report confirm Garbarino's (1999) observation that the fathers of aggressive boys are typically hostile and rejecting of their sons. They express little warmth in interaction with them during the boy's childhood. Later in life these boys may become involved in criminal activities. Other fathers were also poor role models to their children, often being involved in criminal activities themselves.

Tate: My father was involved in criminal activities and cash-in-transit heists. I thought this was cool because he was making a lot of money and I also got involved in crime until I was arrested (male participant).

Oupa: My father was a gang member. He was involved in cash-in-transit heists and the police were always coming to our place searching for him. They would sometimes harass or beat my mother while searching for him. My father used to hide guns under the bed (male participant).

"I don't know my father"

Another striking phenomenon is that many participants did not know their own biological fathers and this has left them not knowing their roots.

Luma: I don't know my father but I would like to meet him (female participant).

Brenda: Only my mother supported us. I don't know my father. I don't even know whether he is alive or dead because he left when I was still a child. I miss him (female participant).

Some indicated that they only got to know their fathers later in life and they were angry about that.

> *Sima: I also did not know my father for so many years. When I was still very young, people used to say I look like the boys nextdoor but I took that for granted. Eventually, as a teenager my grandmother told me that the man who lives next-door to our house is my biological father. I was quite upset to hear that because the guy lived three houses away from my house. I was so angry with him that he never bothered to support me despite being aware of the financial circumstances of my family. The way I was so angry I even called my friends that we need to go and kill him but unfortunately when we got there he was not in the house (male participant).*

The story here reflects that some mothers found it very difficult to tell their children about who their fathers were. It is also clear that some participants have little experience of a caring male figure in their lives. This suggests that they have had little opportunity to identify with a stable male figure. A father's role in parenting children is important. Children need positive male role models. Fathers cannot only define their roles in terms of material support, but they also need to provide emotional support to their children.

3.6 Joining gangs and violence

Many participants in this report indicated that life on the streets with their gang friends provided respect and a sense of belonging that they had not obtained at home. This confirms the literature review that some boys join gangs due to a lack of connectedness to parents. Gangs then provide a new sense of home, love and care. The story of Titus reflects reasons why boys join gangs, rituals that gangs perform and the prestige associated with being a gang member.

> *Titus: I grew up in an environment where one needed to be a member of a gang in order to survive. Also, some of my family members were involved in gangs. I remember my family members engaging in gang fights and killing other people, and they would always make jokes and have fun about what happened during the fight (male participant).*

Furthermore, being gang members gave some participants status derived from the nature of the crimes committed. With status and relative wealth came access to girls, fast cars and expensive lifestyles. The "spilling of blood" ritual is also confirmed by the participant below.

> *Titus: I joined a gang where one needed to kill someone with a knife at a close range before I could qualify to carry a gun. I gained a lot of respect from gang members since I was very fast in stabbing. This is the lifestyle that I enjoyed. I always wanted to be the biggest and best criminal, doing things differently and being popular. Also, women gain confidence in you when you are well known by protecting them, and also the people in your community will not want to take chances (male participant).*

It seems being a gang member influences masculine identity around toughness, smartness and excitement.

> *Titus: We were killing people like flies and I did not want to die like one. I therefore joined gangs as a means of protecting myself from being killed by other thugs. I have been involved in various fights as a gang member, and I enjoyed fighting as a group rather than one-on-one. After fighting one feels heroic and like a real man (male participant).*

Territoriality is also common to all youth gangs. Gangs attempt to establish territorial rights over a particular area in order to secure access to local facilities. In this report, many participants mentioned having been involved in gang fights, killing others and seeing their friends being killed.

> *Gavin: I have been involved in many gang wars. Our gang the 'niggers' were fighting with a rival gang. I was shot several times in my leg. I was taken to hospital for a few weeks. I stayed home until I recovered. After I mobilized my friends and went around searching for the gang members who shot me. We found one. We killed him. We took his private parts to a traditional healer to strengthen ourselves (male participant).*

It seems other group members are also part of gangs in prison and this is because gangs also exist within the prison and provide status and protection.

> *Titus: I'm also a 26-gang member in prison and serving a life sentence. This will give me recognition to the thugs in a sense that I'm serving the longest sentence (male participant).*

Female participants did not say much about their involvement in gang structures. This confirms Vetten's (2000) assertion that although women are drawn into gang structures, they wield no power. Female gangsters' main role is to be couriers of firearms or drugs. This report confirms this as some of female participants were arrested for drug trafficking and possession of illegal firearms used in an armed robbery. In addition, female gangsters normally engage in shoplifting, but more research studies are needed to understand female gangsters.

3.7   "I blame myself"

Some youth offenders heard while in prison that their loved ones had passed away. This left them feeling guilty that they had caused their loved one's death.

> *Keke: I blame myself for my mother's death. She died of a heart attack during my trial. I feel like I have caused her death. (Crying uncontrollably) (female participant).*

> *Nomsa: My grandmother passed away three weeks ago but I could not attend her funeral because of prison policy (female participant).*

> *Naomi: I was so hurt to hear that my grandmother passed away. She was my everything. I heard she died of a heart attack after my sentencing. I can't forgive myself because I feel like I have caused her death. I cry a lot when I think about this (female participant).*

The above narratives indicate the need for bereavement counselling services in prison to help prisoners deal with the loss of their loved ones. The fact that most prisoners feel guilty about their loved one's death seems to contribute to prolonged, unresolved grief. This also adds to other mental health problems such as depression, leading to suicide ideation or attempts.

3.8   Suicide attempts

Three suicide attempts were admitted by members of the groups. A member in the female group, Martha, was admitted to the prison hospital after an attempted suicide. She tried to kill herself by drinking a detergent used in the prison laundry. Facilitators were not sure whether group sessions might have triggered suicidal ideations amongst some of these participants. It is possible that talking about traumatic events might evoke old painful memories. As a result, some participants might become more suicidal. Therapists working with prisoners need to be aware of this and be prepared to deal with these reactive emotions. In talking to Martha and other group members, it seems that many prisoners have significant emotional problems and are in dire need of counselling. For example, Lucas mentioned he finds it difficult to sleep at night. He spends lots of time thinking about the crimes he has committed. At times he has nightmares about the people he has killed. It seems Lucas and many other prisoners are experiencing post traumatic stress syndrome-related symptoms. Lucas mentioned that at times he feels suicidal. He finds it difficult to cope with these feelings. It is important to rehabilitate perpetrators of violence like Lucas to help them understand the extent of their wrongdoing, the consequences of their actions on victims, to acknowledge full responsibility for their crimes, to take active steps to prevent re-offending, and to embark on new paths to rebuild their lives (Schmidt, 1999).

"I feel abandoned"

It seems the lack of visitors also makes prisoners feel rejected and abandoned by close family members.

> *Peter: I feel so sad when I see other kids getting visitors but I do not get any. I have not seen my mother for a long time. I miss her. I wish she could just come because I only want to see her face. I feel abandoned. The more I think about it there more I feel the pain. To deal with the pain I started cutting myself with the razor and bleeding (male participant).*

Other participants mentioned feelings of loneliness and boredom in prison as there are no activities to stimulate their minds. It seems these feelings may also contribute to suicide ideation.

> *Lucky: Before joining the group I had been thinking a lot about killing myself. For example, you sit in your cell the whole day and you start thinking about your life. It gets into you that you think and think. The group meetings have brought a lot of relief for me. I feel free now (male participant).*

3.9 "I'm so worried about my little child"

Female participants were very worried about their children back at home.

> *Lizzy: I'm so worried about my little child. Everyday when I eat here in prison I think about him. I'm eating, what is he eating? Who's taking care of him? (female participant).*

> *Tandi: I have not seen my child for the past three years. Every time when I think of my child I just cry. It is painful. I don't even know how to explain this pain (female participant).*

3.10 Talking cures

Participants found the process of talking about their experiences very helpful. Some participants were surprised that they were able to express their feelings and emotions. In fact, the group meetings helped some prisoners realize that talking cures.

> *Lucky: I have learnt not to keep painful stuff inside, but rather discuss them with someone you trust, because if you do not you will end up doing wrong things. You keep things inside you end up hurting yourself. Talking about painful stuff helps me to relieve tension (male participant).*

> *David: I have always had bad thoughts, but the group helped me to be positive about life (male participant).*

> *Sima: I never thought I could express my feelings or communicate with others. The course has taught me to share with others (male participant).*

A formal evaluation is needed to assess the effectiveness of these group meetings on a long-term basis. Participants mentioned the benefits of group meetings in the last two meetings. It is possible that the participants might have been trying to please the facilitators and say things that they believed the facilitators wanted to hear (Mkhondo, 2005). Mkhondo (2005) argues facilitating group meetings with prisoners need a longer-term evaluation to determine whether the impact is sustainable. Of course participants were still in prison, so it is also impossible for

many prisoners to sustain their positive behaviours while still serving long sentences. In the group, David, who is serving a long prison sentence, was worried that the group is coming to an end. He acknowledged that the group has helped him know himself but he is not sure if he will be able to sustain his positive thinking. David mentioned that in prison, one needs to be tough, strong and violent. It is a survival strategy in prison. Currently, it seems our prisons are not positive environments to rehabilitate prisoners due to overcrowding, gangs and a lack of effective rehabilitation services. Effective rehabilitation services are needed to work with youth offenders.

3.11 Comments about the group sessions

Facilitators feel it has not been easy to facilitate all these group sessions with youth offenders. One of the main difficulties at the beginning of therapy sessions was that some prisoners (especially male prisoners) were taking pride and boasting about the nature of the crimes they had committed. Like the two participants below:

> Titus: I was a real gangster. I have always wanted to be the best criminal. People were dying like flies. We were mugging and robbing people. I was very quick in using a knife. I enjoyed fighting. We will stab one another, sometimes to death. After fighting I will feel like a hero (male participant).

> Gavin: I was in High School. I would miss classes with my friends to go and drink liquor during school hours. One particular teacher was always reprimanding me about my behaviour. One day I got angry. I had a gun. I shot him. I shot him dead in front of other pupils. Everyone was screaming. I ran away and the police were looking for me. One day my friend asked me to join them in an armed robbery because I had a gun. We went to a hotel, stole money and shot two people dead. In the event we were chased by the police. We were shooting each other. I was shot in the leg and arrested. I was sentenced in 2003 to life imprisonment (male participant).

It seems boasting about the nature of their crimes was a strategy for some participants to assert their sense of power over facilitators and other group members. In prison the nature of crime for which one is imprisoned can accord or refuse one's status among fellow inmates. So committing a violent, weapon assisted crime proves one's bravery and claim of manhood in the prison context (Gear & Ngubeni, 2002). It seems prison environment encourages inmates to hide their emotions, and those that express emotions are seen as sissies (Kupers, 2005). Being tough or aggressive is the key to survival in a prison environment.

3.12   Masking feelings of vulnerability and helplessness

It seems some group members were using grandiosity as a mask to avoid expressing feelings of vulnerability and helplessness. For example, Gavin bragged to the group about how he shot the schoolteacher and other crimes he committed. Gavin did not show feelings of remorse or regret. He was very proud of the crimes he committed. According to Kupers (2005) therapists working in prisons need to be aware that male prisoners usually resist talking about their emotions. Therapists need to respect this without pressuring a prisoner to express emotions in the group. At other times, if the prisoner feels the therapist cares enough about him to learn about his situation, the prisoner might be more trusting to engage in a therapeutic relationship. For example, in one group meeting later Gavin showed feelings of remorse.

> *Gavin: I regret. I regret all that I did (crying) (male participant).*

Other group members followed Gavin's footsteps in expressing their true feelings of helplessness, vulnerability, fear and remorse.

> *David: I was very playful during the early stages of the group, but as the time progressed I found value in the group. I'm able to express my true feelings now (male participant).*

> *Remember: I never thought I could express my feelings. I would like to thank the facilitators for helping me express my feelings in a constructive way (male participant).*

3.13   Trust about sharing feelings of vulnerability

Other participants were still worried about confidentiality in sharing personal material in the group, especially in the early phases of the group.

> *Pule: I'm not comfortable to share my story in the group (male participant).*

> *Thabo: I'm still undecided about sharing in the group (male participant)*

Facilitators indicated that participants should not feel pressured to share their stories in the group because no one is forced to. Creating a safe therapeutic environment helped others in the group to share their stories. For example, Thabo was undecided about sharing his story at the beginning of the group. After one of the group meetings he approached one facilitator to explain his fear about disclosing certain issues in the group. Thabo mentioned that he was anxious to disclose to the group that he is HIV-positive. He worried about how the group would react to hear his HIV status. Thabo knew about the stigma attached to HIV and the discrimination of people living with HIV. The facilitator asked Thabo to go and think about the consequences of

disclosing his HIV status and to be ready to deal with group's reaction. Thabo told the facilitator that he had been attending courses on HIV/AIDS and was ready to deal with the group's reactions. In one of the group sessions, Thabo disclosed his HIV status. After a moment of silence, one group member told Thabo that he is still his friend. Group members agreed that they should not treat Thabo differently because of his HIV status. Thabo said he felt relieved at the end of the meeting that he was able to talk about his HIV status. He plans to teach fellow inmates about HIV/AIDS because he is currently attending an HIV/AIDS training workshop.

Female participants also found it difficult to disclose experiences of sexual abuse in the group, especially in the early phases of the group. Group members were more concerned about confidentiality. Of course confidentiality in the group has limitations and it is not guaranteed. There have been three instances where group members broke confidentiality and discussed other group members' personal material outside the group. This negatively affected the level of trust in the groups. The facilitators reflected on the importance of abiding by group rules concerning confidentiality. With assurances on the confidentiality of the sessions, facilitators were able to re-create a safe therapeutic environment for group members to share their feelings and emotions.

4. Challenges encountered working in prison

4.1   Lack of venues

The lack of appropriate venues to facilitate groups has been the main challenge in this project. The female group was facilitated in the prison dining hall while the male group venue was changed from the hospital to other inappropriate places. Lack of appropriate venues interfered with the progress of the project as some venues were not conducive for sessions to run smoothly as other inmates were walking in and out. Some venues were too noisy to facilitate sessions. It is important to negotiate proper venues with the prison authorities, even though it seems likely that proper venues are not available in our prisons to facilitate rehabilitation activities. To deal with this challenge, facilitators had to be flexible and use the available spaces or venues.

4.2   Cancellation of sessions

On a number of occasions group sessions were cancelled due to other prison activities such as roll-call, memorial services and other functions including soccer, and netball games. It seems psychosocial rehabilitation programmes are not given priority within the prison environment.

4.3   Attendance

Attendance of sessions was very inconsistent, especially with the female members. Many females were attending school, and thus failed to attend group sessions.

Another reason for missing sessions was being locked up in their cells as punishment for the transgression of rules such as not waking up early in the morning or cleaning their rooms.

4.4   Drop-outs

We had a few participants leaving the group, especially in the female group. Initially, we had 15 participants and lost 5 participants due to an Early Release Programme announced by the Minister of Correctional Services. In the male group only one participant dropped out due to involvement in other prison activities.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the group therapy sessions and the literature review covered in this report about the causes of youth offending in South Africa. The recommendations for crime prevention for youth offending are divided into primary, secondary and tertiary intervention programmes.

Primary intervention programmes

Primary intervention programmes aim to prevent crime before it occurs. These include Early Childhood Centres, parenting workshops and poverty alleviation programmes.

5.1 Early Childhood Centres

The report has indicated the strong relationship between early childhood trauma and violent behaviour later in life. This means that as a country we need to protect children against all forms of child abuse. We also need to invest in our children and the best investment is to ensure that all children have access to Early Childhood Centres. In these centres, children should be provided with love, care and nurturance. Early Childhood Centres might help to instil a sense of trust and love in the minds of young children. The study conducted by Berk (2002) has proved that children who have attended Early Childhood Centres have high self-esteem. The self-confidence helps these children to resist any form of peer pressure to engage in risk-taking behaviours such as crime and violence. Peer pressure works easily on children who are in dire need of love and approval of others. Early Childhood Centres can also help to teach our children moral values and norms, and build capacity for empathy with others.

5.2 Parenting workshops

The report has clearly linked bad parenting with youth offending. Many parents find it difficult to deal with their teenage children. Parenting workshops should be organized for parents to discuss better ways to manage their children.

Father figures were also identified in the report as being poor role models and unloving. Special workshops should be arranged for fathers to discuss issues of fatherhood and the role that fathers can play in raising their children. These workshops might help fathers to change their views about fatherhood. Many fathers narrowly see their roles only as providers of material

resources. Children also need their fathers' love and care. It is argued that fathers' love and care contribute positively to children's emotional well-being (Richter & Morrell, 2006).

5.3   Poverty alleviation programmes

In the fight against crime, we also need to eradicate causes of poverty. We cannot isolate crime from poverty. This report and many other South African studies link poverty to crime. Poverty alleviation programmes should be implemented to close the growing gap between the rich and the poor.

Secondary intervention programmes

Secondary intervention programmes focus on reducing the likelihood of high-risk youth becoming lifetime offenders. This includes risk-reduction programmes in schools.

5.4   Risk-reduction programmes for youth at risk

We do not enough have programmes aimed at youth at risk. This report has identified peer pressure as one of the main factors pushing the youth to commit crime. We need to introduce risk-reduction programmes targeting both young people in schools and those who have dropped out of school to empower them with resistance and assertiveness skills in order to help them resist pressures to engage in risk-taking behaviours such as drug use, violence and gangs.

Tertiary intervention programmes

Tertiary intervention programmes focus on those young people who have already committed crime. These include counselling services for prisoners, training of prison staff and evaluation of rehabilitation programmes.

5.5   Counselling services for prisoners

The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) should make efforts to recruit competent psychologists and social workers to help prisoners deal with their emotional problems before leaving prison. In this way, our prisons will become centres of rehabilitation rather than being dubbed "universities of crime". Furthermore, the DCS should continue working with NGOs that work in the field of criminal justice, restorative justice, HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, trauma, and entrepreneurship. The support should also include the provision of proper venues to facilitate workshops and group therapy activities.

5.6   Training of prison staff

Prison staff are identified as key agents in implementing successful prison transformation and prisoner rehabilitation programmes. The training for prison social workers and warders is important for the rendering of treatment and rehabilitation of the offenders in order to prepare them for successful return to society.

5.7   Evaluation of rehabilitation programmes

Many prison rehabilitation programmes have not been evaluated and tested for their effectiveness. There is only limited evidence that they are effective (Gaum et al, 2006). More research studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of the work we do in prison. Our project has not been evaluated for its effectiveness due to time and financial constraints. A follow-up study is needed with all the participants who participated in the project to assess its effectiveness.

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