



# media

ad hoc publications about the work of crisp

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## **"The Fear and terror we live in will never end?"**

### **A preliminary report on young people's experiences of crime.**

#### **Background**

This research, originally titled "Crimes I have seen," was commissioned by the Crime Reduction in Schools Project (CRISP). Ted Leggett of the University of Natal, Durban, collected the data. It was commissioned in order to gather a clearer understanding of young people's experiences of crime and in this way to inform interventions that address their needs.

Learners between the ages of 10 - 19 from a range of urban schools were invited to compose and submit accounts of the crimes they had witnessed. Few of the learners however can be regarded as being purely witnesses of crime. A great majority were either directly or indirectly involved as victims, survivors, and/or perpetrators of criminal activities.

The preliminary report carries an analysis of a random 100 submissions. A final report will become available once the other 300 submissions have been worked through. The content of the submissions provide incredible depth of understanding into how the innocence of young children has been assaulted by crime. Their writing

portrays vivid accounts of harsh experiences.

#### **Profile**

Children hailed from 15 different communities including; Umlazi, Sea View, Kwa Mashu, Ntuzuma, Newlands East, Westville, Lamontville, Hillary, Kwa Ndengezi, Inkanyezi-Kwa Zimele, Phoenix, Umbilo, Inanda, Bluff and Yellowwood Park.

Some express contention about their place of residence stating that it is ridden by crime, violence, swearing, and that it is "not conducive for them to grow up in".

Ninety-seven of the 100 young people indicated whom they reside with. Of these 97 only 43 indicated that they were living with both parents. Most others lived with guardians, aunts, uncles, friends, single parents and grandparents. Some accounts are vociferous about their unhappiness with their living arrangements especially where parents are absent and they have to assume adult roles. It is becoming increasingly important that single parents, guardians, grandparents and significant others be brought on board to keep them abreast with new developments occurring with children under their care and within the Education System per sé.

#### **Statements Made About Crime**

There is a growing awareness among young children about crime as a 'social ill' and their feelings are that people must band together "without looking at the colour of each others skin" to fight crime.

Pertinent statements, lifted directly from their submissions, include:

- Crime affects me in lots of ways, my father was hijacked, it was very scary
- I think crime is the root of all evil
- Crime is like a disease we are trying to fight
- The fear and terror we live in will never end
- Crime is nasty
- Hope no one robs my work when I'm big
- Poor commit crimes because of economic necessity
- Old grannies are getting raped, we will never be free.

### **Nature of Crimes**

The types of crimes witnessed range across a wide spectrum. These included:

- Hijacking,
- alcohol related crimes,
- domestic violence,
- drug trafficking,
- house breaking,
- drunken driving,
- murder,
- robbery,
- rape,
- attempted rape,
- jack rolling, (gang rape),
- shoplifting,
- cruelty to animals,
- politically motivated incidents,
- racial violence and intolerance,
- gang activity and
- corporal punishment.

More focused attention has been given to each of the above mentioned crimes in the remainder of this report. The number next to the heading of each type of crime indicates the frequency at which the crime was witnessed.

Gang Activity (5). Children who hail from households faced with unemployment and the ongoing crises

in education use these as a reason for dropping out of school. These children are also easy targets for gang membership. School aged youth are being preyed upon to distribute drugs such as Mandrax at schools where there seems to be a ready market for such a commodity.

Gangs are on the lookout for opportunistic information, for example the recent security guard strike created an opportunity for gang related warfare.

### **Domestic Violence (8)**

Many have witnessed domestic violence that spills onto the streets. One child lived within an abusive relationship, while another thought that it was right for her parents to be divorced since all they did when together was fight. There is also an account of a son stabbing his mother on Christmas Day.

Children and families would benefit greatly from the dissemination of information relating to the Family Violence Act. This could help to curb the disintegration of families and communities and this information dissemination could take place at school level.

### **Corporal Punishment (2)**

The instances reported point to the fact that creative alternatives to discipline are also necessary at parent level. The administering of corporal punishment by school staff and parents are clearly a violation of regulation. In the two reported cases of excessive punishment parents were the perpetrators.

### **Animal Cruelty (1)**

The witness wrote...."two men shot a cat which landed in the river, police arrested men, cat was taken to the hospital (veterinarian)".

### Car/Vehicle Hijacking (9)

Three accounts included mention of the type of weapon used in car hijackings – a gun. With regard to the timing, four speak of the incidents occurring in the early part of the morning and one occurring in the evening.

### House-Breaking (13)

Families are terrorised by thugs who burst into their homes and demand expensive items.

### Rape (7)

Of the seven cases of rape mentioned, six involved females as the target. Three cases were related to gang rape. In two cases a family member (uncle) of the survivors were perpetrators while one case involved a brother's friend who is known to be HIV positive. In one case a male was raped by a man known in the neighbourhood.

### Murder (10)

Extreme violence and aggression accompanied these acts. Six cases mention the use of guns. The nature of the murders included;

- grandparents shot dead,
- grandmother of a friend shot two days before Christmas,
- two taxi drivers shot dead in separate incidents,
- a man shot on street,
- a father killed by gunrunning men,
- a man pelted by rocks,
- a brother stabbed to death,
- an old woman accosted and hit to death with an iron pole, and
- a child giving a distressing account of the murder of her father, she says "they slaughtered him like a cow".

### Robbery (33)

Victims of robbery included a blind man and essential service workers. In

one account, workmen from essential services working in a township were held at gunpoint and robbed of their belongings. One was shot dead and the other severely injured. In the child's words "...they were left lying on the street while neighbours shut their doors for they were too scared of getting involved."

### Accidents (9)

A child wrote - "I have seen some of the most terrible things in the world."

One of the incidents reported was a situation where a school child was knocked over by a bus in which the writer was a passenger. She suspected the driver of being drunk. Passengers were asked to remove their belongings from the bus and the driver drove off. The case was reported to police by a member of the public.

Most accidents were attributed to drunken driving, speeding and disobeying traffic rules with children the most frequent victims. Stemming from this finding detailed talks with the Road Traffic Inspectorate would be of value to input into the curriculum for new driver's licences and a training focus on the legal consequences of traffic violations and road etiquette.

### **Feelings Associated With Crimes Witnessed**

A range of intense feelings emerged from the participants. These included:

#### Fear

"Children grow up in the world of fear and grow with amiss memories." This statement portrays the concise way in which children are impacted upon. Families live in fear of losing their children and belongings to criminals in their communities.

Children are expressing that there is great fear in being implicated, or being seen, as a witness. A learner who witnesses an incident where peers were involved in shoplifting is drenched with fear. They asked her to 'keep her mouth shut', she asked 'what's in it' for her and they calmly showed her a bullet to silence her. A child who witnessed a racial attack on the train left the coach and moved to the next, both the perpetrator and the victim were school learners.

Community members were fearful of being seen or assumed to be witnesses - the repercussions are considered too great. Their lives are invaluable as opposed to monetary compensation to bring the perpetrators to book or be under witness protection to divulge information. "We live in constant fear", "I keep asking myself why did this happen to me?" are some of the questions that they raise.

#### Doubt

A young child aged ten, mentioned that he does not live with his mother because she died when he was young. He says "That is what my father tells me". This child clearly, is very unsettled by this explanation. Children are curious and perceptive.

#### Confusion

The submissions point to the way in which children are confused about how the world is operating contrary to the way they know it is supposed to, viz. One that is safe and secure. Their understanding that playing in the park and feeding fish at a pond is safe is often assaulted by the harsh realities of violence and crime. They are suddenly aware that their context is not safe. They are stalked by a strange man who follows them and hastens his pace as they do. Energy that could be spent in a positive way has to be curtailed or

may be misdirected because the park is unsafe. Caregivers will have to seek other creative and constructive ways of utilising this energy.

They are confused about why innocent families have to fall victims to thugs who burst into their homes, harass and terrorise them. One child spoke of men who demanded her older sister but, fortunately, did not get her. Parents and siblings are in constant fear. They question, 'why my child, why my father and why my sister?'

#### Disappointment

Disappointment has been expressed on a number of issues. These are the perceptions of children and we may want to look at ways of changing these perceptions.

Disappointment around issues such as having to relocate due to crime, the unhappiness and disruption within the family, school disruption and readjustment to new surroundings were all expressed.

Other disappointments expressed included the lack of freedom of speech, that women did not seem to have the right to say 'no' and that children were being sold as sex objects.

"I have seen parents selling their children for money. Do you think selling your child will give you the world?" This account was written with immense undertones of resentment for parents and adults who abuse their children's rights.

Police procedures and conduct are also questioned. The image of the police has been tainted by what these young eyes have witnessed. The ability of police to maintain law and order in the country was under serious question by our young people. Great contention

surrounded the inefficiency with which cases were processed. At one gruesome crime scene a child reported "nobody called the cops fearing disappointment".

Police have been seen smoking dagga (cannabis) with gang members in the area. There was a feeling that nobody would investigate police brutality and that the police were above the law. The following statements support this notion;

"It tears my heart to pieces to know that people in the Townships will always be victims of police"

"They don't break the law (they) only twist it."

The questions being asked of the police included:

"What are they doing to improve our communities? Is it wise to have police if they are not doing their jobs properly? What is the Government paying them for?"

#### Police Involvement

Credit to police with regard their involvement was rare in the responses. Their experiences of police intervention in the crimes they have seen generally revolved around:

- non-delivery,
- non-response,
- late-response,
- drunk on duty,
- no feedback on investigations,
- condescending attitudes, and
- excuses such as "no vans" and "nothing we can do".

#### Thankfulness and Appreciation

Thanks are expressed to patrol officers at a railway station who were extra vigilant on Friday afternoons. There was a request for increased visibility of

patrol officers on the last days of school terms which seemed to be more problematic as it was these times when the young people felt most vulnerable to criminals.

Participation in the written submissions had been in some ways an avenue to give vent to some pent-up feelings. This was gauged from the following remarks "thanks for listening" and "thanks for reading, I feel much better now" .

#### Perpetrator (76)

In seventy-six submissions there was mention of a perpetrator. The gender bias in the perpetration of crime moved heavily towards males. Except for one case which involved school girls in a shoplifting incident all others involved males. The serious crimes were perpetrated by adolescent males advancing into early adulthood. Mention is made of ages ranging from 15 to 25. Women seemed to be easy targets but equally men were also victims of more serious assault and violence.

The accounts suggest that there is an alarming awareness of the neglect and the need for focused education of boys in particular. Intervention programmes and education of boys per sé has to come under intense scrutiny. A few critical aspects that come to the fore as a result of close scrutiny of the data include; socialisation, discipline, control from within as opposed to control from outside, values, morality, issues of 'maleness', developmental difficulties, gangs and gang membership, civic responsibility, sex and sexuality and HIV/AIDS.

#### Weapon Most Frequently Used

Guns were the most frequently used weapons, followed by knives.

### Underreporting Of Crime

The underreporting of crime must not be underestimated and can be attributed to the lack of confidence expressed in the ability of police to resolve cases and provide feedback.

Children are explicit in their submissions with regard the need not to divulge personal information. Great fear and threat accompanies the status of witness. Indeed, many have indicated a preference for death rather than being a witness called to testify. They see 'witness-hood' as placing their lives in serious jeopardy. One student who witnessed a shoplifting incident was shown a bullet to silence her, yet another stated "I've made a decision of rather dying softly than physically get beaten to open my mouth."

### Counselling

There is sufficient data to indicate that an array of intense feelings is evoked in children who have in some way experienced crime. Children are left to their own devices to manage and deal with these feelings, personal conflicts and dilemmas. The life stage they find themselves in already has its own challenges and difficulties so additional unresolved and intense issues may impact further on their ability to cope.

Thus far there has been no mention of any form of counselling in the reports analysed. Within the education system the often lacking formally trained guidance counsellor at schools leaves children with little or no supportive structures they can turn to. Given the nature of their experiences and the fact that less than half of the respondents lived with both parents, the need for some form of supportive and nurturing person or context may become all the more pertinent.

### Recommendations

The analysis of these submissions begs a few questions. These questions include:

- In what way are school authorities and children critically evaluating their development or non-development?
- In what way are we modifying our approach to deal with the complexities that face the youth?
- How interconnected are all the organisations that deal with youth issues?

### Parents and the Community

One cannot overemphasise the need for the collaboration of school personnel, parents, members of the community (both private and business) and Governmental and non-governmental organisations, all of whom need to work together to provide educational opportunities that promote knowledge, responsibility and caring.

For complex reasons parental involvement in school related matters is low. At a National level one would like to see a formal Participation Plan for Parents, Guardians and Caregivers entrenched in the Schools Act in order to create links and build relationships between home, community and school life.

Context based parent meetings might be a way of building the links, since relating to people within their own contexts are less intimidating. Visits to the areas that children hail from would give a clearer and different understanding of various issues. This is particularly the case where schools exist in neighbourhoods that differ from the learner 'source' community.

The varied living conditions, life spaces and community contexts of children must be taken cognisance of

since these place varying demands and challenges.

#### Education about the Consequences of Crime

Special efforts must be made to educate youth against choosing crime as an alternative. Concomitant efforts must be made to steer our young people towards more constructive ways of engaging themselves in society.

Some aspects that could receive special attention would include:

- Disrepute and Criminal Record
- Court appearances, warnings and implications thereof, and
- Information about the legal system to correct misconceptions and inaccuracies in understanding.

One child had a first hand experience of court procedures having been charged with shoplifting. His comprehension of the process is fraught with inaccuracies that could impact on the likelihood of his continued potential criminal behaviour. For him, his "free lawyer proved he was under age and not supposed to be imprisoned." Little attention is paid to the fact that he may indeed have been guilty of a crime.

The question arises as to whether youth who are summoned to court are briefed about legal procedures, and then debriefed after sentencing to ensure they fully understand their actions and the decisions taken in court. These may include limited options with respect to opportunities for future employment, status in the community, and the long term implication of a criminal record.

## Conclusion

The submissions are indicative of the extensive and intensive nature of the cruelty inflicted by humans on other humans and animals with no sign of abatement of violence, selfishness and self-centredness.

The overall impression from the submissions is that there is an increasing awareness of self-centred principles at play which underlie most criminal behaviour. The integration of principles of altruism which involve deeds done out of genuine concern for other human beings, rather than self, must reverberate throughout curricula and society at large.

Empathy, listening, mediation, conflict resolution, respect and problem solving are skills that are obviously lacking among adults and children alike and need urgent attention.

According to the Children's Rights Resource Handbook, 44% of South Africans are legally children. As adults, whether professionals or non professionals, we have an obligation and responsibility which is often not taken seriously enough. This is the obligation to protect the emotional, physical, social, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing of our children. Our efforts in thoroughly understanding youth issues are in question. We must be cautious of non-involvement because we are creating rods that will return and beat us on the back. We must work with intense vigour to respond to a child's statement that...

"young children are left with scary memories that will be forever in their minds, this prevents them from developing to their full potential because they are scared."

## **Youth and Firearms**

Firearms and their use have become something of a political 'hotbed' in contemporary South Africa. With recent, and controversial legislation, and with lobby groups working at their own specific focus points, it is clear that the issue of firearms and their control will dominate debate for some time to come.

Young people are increasingly becoming victims, survivors and perpetrators of crime, many of which directly involve violent acts and the use of firearms. Surveys of primary school children's experiences of crime through the use of pictures show regular images of firearms. The impact of gun on young people extends beyond their immediate physical self, to family and friends, and to their emotional being.

This study was conceptualised and conducted in order to begin to understand young people's attitudes towards, and exposure to, firearms. The rationale was that we need baseline data if we are to educate youth around these issues.

## **Methodology**

During 2000 a survey was conducted among 530 young people between the ages of 12 and 25, living primarily in the Umlazi area of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. A total of 530 responses were used in the analysis of the data reported on here.

## **Results**

Profile : Both the mean and modal age was 17 years, with 18.5% of the respondents within this category. Almost 68% of the respondents were between the ages of 15 - 18 years. The respondents were all attending school and were within Grades 8 to 12, with the largest group being in grade 11

(29.1%). A bias in gender existed, with 56% of the respondents being female. The extent to which this could impact on the responses has not been established.

With regard household size, the modal category was six people (mean 6.5), with 58% of the sample living in households of between 4 and 7 members.

## **Use of firearms**

Ten percent of the respondents claimed to have used a firearm. Of these, the majority (41 respondents) was male. In addition, a small percentage admitted to owning a firearm (4.8%). These results are particularly interesting given that the respondents are still of school going age, and that under-reporting is particularly possible with regard these questions.

With regard potential firearm acquisition, 37.2% indicated that they planned to own a firearm at some point in the future. Interestingly, a link between previous use of a firearm and the plan to own one existed, with 83% of those who had used a firearm indicating their ownership intention. Also of interest was the fact that 51% of the sub-set of respondents who claimed never to have used a firearm, indicated that they did however plan to own one in the future.

## **Exposure to firearms**

The vast majority (68.6%) of the respondents indicated that no firearms were kept in their households. However, 18.1% of the respondents claimed that at least one firearm was kept in their home, and a quarter of the respondents (including those mentioned above) had between one and three firearms in their homes.

Some confirmation of the high level of violent firearm use in our society was indicated by the fact that 30.7% of the respondents noted that a family member had sustained firearm-related injuries.

#### Gender issues

Gender appeared to be a variable in the decision as to whether individuals should carry firearms or not. Interestingly, a quarter of the respondents (25.9%) felt that all women should carry firearms, while 19.3% felt that all men should carry firearms.

#### Emotional reactions

In response to the emotional reactions to firearms the following results were recorded :

- 32.6% indicated that firearms made them feel afraid,
- 12.5% felt nervous,
- 19.5% felt safe,
- 14% unhappy,
- 8.1% secure
- 4.7% confident
- 6.1% happy, and
- 5.7% brave.

#### Gun free country

Although by only a slight majority, most of the respondents (53.4%) felt that South Africa should not be a 'gun free' society.

### Discussion

It is clear that young people are experiencing firearms as part of their daily lives. Their experience of them goes beyond the passive, to active use, with 10% having used a firearm, despite the fact that the use would have been illegal for people of their age. While most did not have a firearm in their household, around a third of the young people surveyed indicated their intention to own one, this too despite increasingly stringent legislation on

firearm availability and use, and lobbies for a 'gun free South Africa'.

A reflection of the rate of violent, firearm related crime that prevails in much of South Africa was the fact that almost a third of the respondents had experienced a family member being injured by a firearm, and that their emotional response to firearms was often a feeling of fear.

Young citizens must become the focus of firearm education. This education must focus on sharing with young people the dangers of firearm use, the legislation around firearm acquisition and use, and guidance in decision making about firearms. Attention should also be paid to the potential emotional trauma experienced by young people, when many of their family members have been injured in firearm related incidents.

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These reports originally appeared in *insight@ipt*.

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### About crisp

The Crime Reduction in Schools Project (CRISP) has been recognised by the National Impumelelo Awards Programme for innovative and creative projects that address pressing issues in South Africa.

CRISP began as a pilot project funded by the Innovation Fund of the National Department of Arts, Culture, Science & Technology (DACST), and was initially housed within the Faculty of Community & Development Disciplines at the University of Natal's Durban campus. The project evolved in partnership with schools, businesses, community organizations and a range of other role players.

In May 2001, being the end of CRISP's two-year pilot phase, it joined with the Independent Projects Trust, with a strong focus on school based interventions.

A year later in May 2002, CRISP became an independent organisation which offers training in areas such as character building, HIV/AIDS and sexuality, trauma debriefing and HIV/AIDS counselling upgrades all with the aim of creating a better educated, healthier and emotionally stronger environment for our citizens.

In addition CRISP's skilled team of staff and associates have expertise in social and evaluative research methods. This expertise is applied to a range of research projects and project evaluations.

### **Trauma Debriefing**

Trauma, left unchecked, can result in individuals and groups responding in a range of negative ways. These include becoming de-motivated, insecure, physically ill, emotionally fragile, aggressive and generally less productive. Increased absenteeism too is a common response.

Traumatic events are different from every-day stressors and could include; physical assault, hijackings, robberies, motor vehicle accidents or witnessing any of the above.

An appropriate response to trauma involves the provision of short-term focussed debriefing. This is not therapy or long-term intervention, neither is it the domain of highly trained experts. This debriefing process is focussed on the particular incident and ways in which to normalise the situation for the person/group involved as soon as possible. The result is that they are

able to recognise the impact of the event, deal with its immediate and potential long term impact, and return to normal levels of functioning and productivity as soon as possible.

### **HIV AIDS counselling and upgrade**

CRISP supports the upgrading of HIV/AIDS Counsellors in Kwa-Zulu Natal and aims to offer responsive and creative approaches to ensuring quality HIV/AIDS counselling. We are aware of, and work within emerging approaches to minimum standards in HIV/AIDS counselling and training.

Through partnerships with AIDS service organisations we are able to offer comprehensive and specialised up-grading courses aimed at equipping existing counsellors with the skills they need to address the ever changing challenges of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

### **Other courses**

- Principles of working with groups
- Principles of working with children
- Introduction to play therapy
- Principles of Basic Counselling
- Teenagers Action AIDS Programme
- Character Building in the Classroom
- Junior Primary Self Esteem programme

### **Contact crisp at:**

crisp  
2 brentley  
100 bulwer road  
glenwood durban 4001  
south africa  
tel +27-31-2028081  
fax +27-31-2028071  
email janine@crispcc.co.za  
© crisp 2002