

## Identification of Causes of Criminal Behaviour among Youth of Muledane Village, Vhembe District Municipality

K. E. Semise<sup>1\*</sup>, M. Radzilani-Makatu<sup>1</sup> and S.E. Nkoana<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Psychology, School of Health Sciences, University of Venda, Thohoyandou, South Africa*

*\*E-mail: khathutshelo.semise@univen.ac.za*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Psychology, University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus), Private Bag x1106, Sovenga, 0727 South Africa*

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**ABSTRACT** Crime is one of the major problems in South Africa. It is popular to associate criminal behaviour with the poor physical and social conditions of the impoverished segment of the population. This study was conducted with the purpose of identifying the causes of youth criminal behaviour at Muledane village. A quantitative design was utilised for the study. The research population included Tshivenda - speaking youth residing at Muledane village under Thulamela Municipality. Participants comprised of 60 youth at Muledane village male and female who were selected by means of simple random sampling method. Data were collected using a self administered questionnaire. Results were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings indicated that peer pressure, family problems, poverty and unemployment were major causes of criminal behaviour among the youth.

### INTRODUCTION

Crime is the most difficult of the many challenges facing South Africa in the post-apartheid era. South Africa as a country has high rates of violence (Souverein et al. 2015) The country's crime rates are among the highest in the world and no South African is insulated from its effects (Demombynes et al. 2005). Investigating the determinant of crime is important not only because crime is a serious challenge but also for policy implications (Lauridsen et al. 2015). At least 140 studies conducted internationally looking at a range of offences and using a variety of methodologies found that people are most likely to commit crime between the ages of 12 and 30; no known study has ever failed to find this relationship (United Nations office on Drugs and Crime 2005). This shows that youth are mainly involved in crime. In a study conducted by Butchart et al. (2001) about non-natural deaths in South Africa it is indicated that injuries resulting from Violence, traffic collisions and other accidents are the leading causes of death in South Africa and homicide being the leading manner of death by 45.7 percent. Even though crime fighting authorities are moving towards more proactive strategies for combating crime (Rostami and Mondani 2015) the youth are most likely to involve themselves in criminal behaviour which may sometimes result in them killing

their victims or getting killed in the process of committing crime. The present study aimed to find out what causes the youth at Muledane village to commit crime.

According to official records, male youth offenders are more likely to be arrested for serious offences such as possession of stolen property, vandalism, possession of illegal firearms and assault (Bezuidenhout et al. 2003). In 2013 the total number of Murder cases in South Africa was 29, attempted murder 50, total sexual crime 527, common robbery 121, theft of motor vehicle and motorcycle 31, burglary at residential premises 1027, robbery at non-residential premises 70, shoplifting 288 (Crime Stats South Africa 2013). Bug and Meier (2015) in their study talked about the 'dark figures' to refer to criminal activities that are not reported. According to Bug and Meier (2015), statistics do not show the 'dark figures' indicating that crime rates may be higher than the number reported on the statistics. House robberies are reported when people are attacked by armed gangs while they are in their homes. This crimes increased by 7.1 percent to 17 950 incidents representing an additional 1 184 households being attacked when compared to the previous year. On average 49 households were attacked each day in 2012/13. At Muledane village there seems to be a high rate of house robberies as well. Business robberies increased

by 2.7 percent to 16 377 incidents. This crime type has consistently increased in the past eight years so it is 345 percent higher than in 2004/05. There were an additional 426 armed attacks on businesses in 2012/13 as compared to the previous year (Institute for security studies for Africa check 2013). This indicates that there is a high rate of crime in South Africa. However the present study focused on the youth in Limpopo Province under the Vhembe district municipality at Muledane village near the Thohoyandou town.

According to Tshikhudo (2008), criminals in Thohoyandou and Sibasa have intensified their onslaught on businesses and homes mostly owned by Indians. In the period from May 2008, more than 20 people and households have become the target of robberies that have left one person dead and some critically injured (Tshikhudo 2008). The other incident happened at Thohoyandou Block F, when an old woman was shot in the leg and seriously injured before the robbers ransacked the house and left with an undisclosed amount of cash and a cell phone. This has caused anger amongst community members who are now threaten to take the law into their own hands as a way of solving the problem (Tshikhudo 2008).

Primary prevention of crime should be targeted at dealing with violence at home and school through the promotion of school attendance (Souverein 2015). Delinquency, along with adolescent involvement in a variety of problem behaviour such as using illicit substances and joining gangs, are more likely to occur in neighbourhoods that are socially disorganised (Elliot et al. 1996).

Reasons for committing a crime include among others greed, anger, jealous, revenge, or pride. Some people decide to commit a crime and carefully plan everything in advance to increase gain and decrease risk. Some even consider a life of crime as better than a regular job, believing that crime brings in greater rewards, admiration, and excitement, at least until they are caught. Others get an adrenaline rush when they successfully carry out a dangerous crime. Others commit crimes on impulse, out of rage or fear (Bettman 2010).

Family factors associated with criminality are poor home discipline, neglect, alcoholism of parents, absence of one or both parents, and an unhappy home life. Parental criminality and parental transmission of criminogenic attitudes may influence criminal behaviour (Hagan 2002). Children exposed to severe, perhaps even violent

conflict between adults in their homes, often vent their anger, confusion, and frustration in delinquent behaviour (Hagan 2002). Young people are being exposed to violence not only as direct victims, but are also being made to witness acts of violence perpetrated against others, exposure to violence within families and communities appears to have a significant influence on the behaviour of young people in South Africa (Clark 2012).

South Africa's transition from apartheid to a truly multi-racial democracy stands as one of the significant political events of the last century (Inman 2013). Twenty years after the end of apartheid, South Africa is home of the highest rates of violent crime (Powers 2015). High and rising levels of crime plague post-apartheid South Africa. A common explanation for the high violent crimes in post-apartheid South Africa links the country's unique socio-political past to a system of ineffective social control mechanisms existing within certain communities, notably on the periphery of metropolitan areas (Breetzke 2010). Since the end of apartheid, crime has migrated and is no longer confined to the country's townships. Crime has also become increasingly violent. The result is that today crime can be considered 'among the most difficult of many challenges facing South Africa' (Clark 2012).

South Africa's violent history has left the country with a "culture of violence", which contributes to the high levels of violence associated with criminal activity in South Africa. Violence in South Africa has come to be regarded as an acceptable means of resolving social, political and even domestic conflicts. According to Dawes (2007), children are exposed to structural, political and interpersonal violence, he also emphasized that in South Africa, and thousands of children who had been exposed to political violence were not able to attend school because of the loss of their family members. The researcher observed that there is a high rate of crime at Muledane Village especially among the youth. This scientific study was conducted in order to avoid speculative knowledge about what causes youth crime.

## RESEARCH METHODS

A quantitative approach was used in this study because it is more highly formalised and explicitly controlled than the qualitative approach (Delpont 2005). Quantification made it easier for

the researcher to aggregate, compare and summarize data (Babbie 2014). The purpose of using a quantitative approach is to test predictive and cause-effect hypotheses about social reality (Delpont 2005). This study employed a descriptive design since the aim of a descriptive study is to provide a picture of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs (Gray 2009).

### Participants

The research population consisted of Tshivenda speaking youth, both males and females, residing at Muledane village between the ages of 15 and 35 who are well known for and suspected of committing crime. Simple random sampling was used. Random sample/blind selection means that it is impossible to predict ahead of time which units will be selected (McClendon 2004). All the youth at Muledane who are well known for and suspected of committing crime were identified, a list of their names was made. The names were cut into separate pieces and put into a container then from the container sixty names were selected for participation in the study. The size of the sample that the researchers selected consisted of 60 youths, comprising both males and females.

### Data Collection Procedure

Arrangements were made with the participants for the researchers to administer the self-administered questionnaire to each one of them at their homes. The researchers made appointments to go and administer the questionnaire to the participants at the time when they will be free. However some of the participants were not comfortable with filling the questionnaire at their homes because of the presence of family members who may judge them. Arrangements were made to administer the questionnaire at places such as a friend's house or in the researchers' car. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. The researcher explained the aim of the study to the participants before they signed the consent form. The researcher also explained that their participation in the study will remain anonymous and confidential. The advantage of using self-administered questionnaire was that the researcher was available to offer assistance to the participants when they needed clarity or help with completing the questionnaire. The participants then completed the questionnaire.

### Data Analysis

In the present study, data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Response frequencies and percentages were calculated. According to Kruger et al. (2005) descriptive statistics involves the categorizing, ordering, manipulation and summarization of data to obtain answers to research questions. The data were summarised and categorised in order to get the understanding about what causes the youth at Muledane to commit crime.

### Validity and Reliability of study

Validity of the measuring instrument was established through piloting. This process allowed the researcher to check whether the responses that were given by the participants during pilot testing were relevant and if they provide answers to the objectives of the study. The instrument is believed to be reliable in terms of measuring the causes of criminal behaviour because the questionnaire effectively measures the causes of criminal behaviour and would do so consistently every time it could be administered in order to identify these objectives.

### Ethical Considerations

The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the University of Venda before the study was carried out. Permission was also obtained from the chief before conducting the study at Muledane village. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and about what will happen to the data that will be obtained from them. The issue of avoidance of harm and informed consent were taken into consideration when this study was conducted. Informed consent was obtained from the participants and in the case of minors their parents were consulted so that they can grant permission for their children to participate in the study and they were asked to sign the informed consent form.

## RESULTS

The results of the study will be presented in this section; the results will include the participants' biographical information, their gender, and information about cause of crime.

### Participants' Biographical Information

Table 1 shows that most of the participants (33) were in the age group 21 to 30 years, whilst other groups fell in the ages of 10-15, 16- 20 and 31- 35. Table 1 also shows that 44 of the participants were male and 16 were female. This shows that more males than females participated in the present study.

**Table 1: Participants by age and gender**

Age	Number of participants	Gender	Number of participants
10-15 years	5	Females	16
16- 20 years	12	Males	44
21 -30 years	33		
31- 35 years	10		

### Participants by Personal Experience with Crime

Participants were asked whether they had ever committed a crime. Table 2 shows that the majority 32 of the participants had engaged themselves in some criminal activities, However 28 of the participants had never committed a crime. This table shows that there is prevalence of crime committing by the youth.

**Table 2: Participants by personal experience with crime**

Total number of participants	Number of participants who have no personal experience of crime	Number of participants who have had personal experience of crime
60	28	32

**Table 3: Participants by cause of criminal**

Cause	CD	D	N	A	CA
Criminal is caused by poverty	3	5	10	15	27
Criminal is a result of unemployment	2	5	11	21	21
Peer pressure causes people to commit crime	0	3	9	34	14
Family problems can influence a person to engage in criminal	1	3	10	35	11
Media plays an important role in motivating criminal	0	9	16	25	10
Abuse of substances can lead to criminal	3	4	8	32	13
Psychological disorders lead a person to behave in a criminal way	1	6	16	32	5
Stress leads to criminal	9	9	10	28	4
Criminal is inherited	24	13	10	8	6
Personality determines criminal	5	12	17	21	5

### Participants by Cause of Criminal

In Table 3, CD stands for completely disagree, D = disagree, N= neutral, A= agree, CA= completely agree. The table indicates that 42 of the participants agrees that crime is caused by poverty, 42 thinks it is caused by unemployment, 48 completely agree that the cause of crime is peer pressure, while 46 believes that family problems cause crime. The media and substance abuse are also seen as major causes, psychological disorders, such as stress, are also seen as a causal factor. However, only 37 of the participants agree that crime can be inherited.

### DISCUSSION

The findings shows that peer pressure play a major role in determining youth crime at Muledane. Forty-eight of the participants indicated that peer pressure is a major cause of criminal behaviour. This finding is in accordance with Siegel's (2004) who stated that 'adolescents are exposed to powerful influences from their peers'. Criminal activity can be learned through social interaction with peers (Lauridsen et al. 2015). Youth feel persistent pressure to conform to group values. When the individual is among friends who share negative influences, he can find himself taking part in adolescent criminal activity initiated by the group. This is in line with a study done by Adewuyi et al. (2013) about peer influence in substance abuse; the findings indicated that adolescent of the same age range get involved in substance abuse through peer influence and interaction. There is a significant relationship between peer influence and criminal behaviour.

In a study conducted by Hargovan (2013) of South African children who were diverted to a

diversion programme, at least ten children admitted to falling prey to negative peer influences. Due to the fear of rejection, or the desire for peer approval, the children will be indirectly influenced by his or her peers. The peer group can be enormously powerful in transmitting culture, values, and norms that influence behaviour (Hargovan 2013). In a study by Cronley et al. (2015) participants who reported to have experienced homelessness by age 26 were 1.6 times more likely to commit violent crimes as adults. Rewards such as respect within peer group, feeling of power and admiration by peers can be a cause of crime, this is supported by a study done by Davis (2001) wherein participants who hijacked cars indicated that the decision to hijack a vehicle were influenced by friends having respect and admiration for them. It is without doubt that the youth who have friend that engage themselves in criminal activities may be pressured into committing crime as a way of maintaining the friendship.

Employment is one of the most significant determinants of the welfare of any nation (Kyei et al. 2011). An increase in unemployment has an effect on crime as more people stay at home doing nothing (Andresen, 2015). It is evident from the findings that unemployment is also one of the major causes of youth crime at Muledane village. In June 2009, 48.1 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 24 was unemployed. Exacerbating the problem is that due to the vastly inferior 'Bantu education delivered during the apartheid era and to some extent to this day still- many black and coloured people are ill equipped for the job market (Aliber 2003). In a study done by Kyei et al. (2011) Africans face an unemployment rate of 41 percent compared to 23.3 percent, 17.1 percent, 6 percent of coloureds, Indians and whites respectively. This indicates that Africans are more likely than any other race to be unemployed. If an unemployed person believes that illicit money gained by criminal activities is worth the liability after breaking the law, that person is more likely to commit crime (Lauridsen et al. 2015).

Unemployment is clearly another major cause of criminal behaviour among the youth at Muledane. However 46 of the participants indicated that family problems can be another cause of crime whereas 42 believed that poverty would influence one to commit crime. The family envi-

ronment is one of the most important influences on the psychosocial development of young people (Hargovan 2013). Family factors associated with criminality are poor home discipline, neglect, alcoholism of parents, absence of one or both parents, and an unhappy home life. Parental criminality and parental transmission of criminogenic attitudes may influence criminal behaviour (Hagan 2002). It is clear that family problems also play a role in youth criminality. Family structure and child-rearing practices appear to be important causes of crime, but they are, in all likelihood, themselves genetically determined, implying that modification of family structure or practice would have little or no effect on the crime rate (Wilson 1995). The findings from the study clearly indicate that most of the youth at Muledane village involve themselves in criminal behaviour because of peer influence, unemployment, family problems and poverty. There is little indication that other factors like media and genetic inheritance cause crime. Thirty seven of the participants indicated that they did not believe that criminality can be inherited.

However it seemed from the study that fewer females commit crime as compared to males. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice (2004) indicate that females commit fewer violent crimes than males (Mooney et al. 2007). According to McLeod (2015) female offenders are underrepresented in literature due to failure of society to recognise women as offenders. In the present study only 27 percent of females volunteered to participate in the study. It is clear that there are substantial differences between the sexes for both blacks and whites in the incidence and prevalence of crime, particularly for more serious offences. Any diminution of the male-female gap in the past two decades is relatively small (Feldman 1993). The most dramatic differences, however, occur in more serious crimes such as robbery. In recidivism rates, women tend to commit less serious crimes and do so less often. Sex is, therefore, a crucial variable, in predicting criminality (Wilson 1995). Statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice (2004) indicate that females commit fewer violent crimes than males (Mooney et al. 2007). It is evident from the study that peer pressure, unemployment and family problems are the major causes of youth crime at Muledane especially among the male youth.

## CONCLUSION

Although there were other causes of crime in this village, one can conclude that peer pressure plays a major role as a cause of crime. This might be age related since youth are easily influenced in order to fit well into the peer community.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study an increase in police visibility and community patrols is recommended as a way of reducing the prevalence of crime by the youth at Muledane. The researcher also recommends that there must be provision of youth campaigns and workshops by the government and community developers to educate youth about crime and how to resist negative peer pressure. This recommendation is made because peer pressure among others has been found to be a major cause of crime and it should be dealt with in order to reduce youth crime at Muledane. Since the study shows that crime seems to be mostly committed by young males at Muledane, the researcher also recommends that further studies be conducted in the area to identify what causes young females to commit lesser crime than males.

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