

The Legacy of Gangsterism in Present Day Springtown

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ABSTRACT Whilst a wide range of factors influences the shaping of a community, a history of gangsterism could be said to be a major contributor to ongoing crime. Springtown in the precinct of Sydenham, in the province of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa, is a poor socio-economic community buried amongst affluent suburbs like Asherville and Overport. Gangsters ruled it in the 3 decades from the 60s to the 90s. Its legacy of gangsterism and ongoing violent crime, both domestic and public, has given Springtown a reputation of violence and lawlessness. The authors used semi-structured interviews with members of gangs and community leaders both past and present, to provide insights into the impact that decades of being ruled by gangsters has had on the community. They argue that within a context of poverty and unemployment, present day Springtonians show gangster proclivities and that unless some radical social engineering is undertaken, gangsterism will be the inheritance of the future.

INTRODUCTION

February 2012 edition of the Daily News, led with the following article (Nair 2012):

“Shot in front of his young son, a wealthy Durban businessman who allegedly refused to give in to extortion demands from drug lords was gunned down in front of his seven-year-old son when he went to fetch him from school on Friday afternoon. Desmond Govender, 38, the owner of Roadstar Towing and Roadstar Bus Tours, was shot more than four times as he and his son walked towards his car, parked inside the premises of NPS Primary, in Springtown, near Asherville. Govender had just watched his son play a cricket match when the killers struck. It was the third attempt on Govender’s life in the past year. But friends and family close to him said he had refused to hide from the drug lords who threatened his life. Drug lords allegedly living in Springtown demanded that Govender pay a monthly protection fee to them to ensure that he and his family did not come to any harm.”

The newspaper went on to report the burning of a Ford Bantam utility vehicle at Govender’s funeral; a rite which is allegedly observed by hijackers to honour their dead. A year later, the same media outlet gave a report on an anniversary ‘revenge’ killing of a gangster and drug lord that was thought to be a retaliatory attack for the death of Govender (Wicks 2013). The reports highlight that gangsterism is still very much of an issue for the Springtown community. In fact, this culture has elevated Sydenham to the dubious distinction of being - within the province of KwaZulu-Natal - the second worst precinct for public violence, the sixth worst for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and the seventh worst for carjacking (Crime Stats SA 2015). This paper explores the culture of gangsterism in Springtown through semi-structured interviews with members of gangs and community leaders both past and present, the effects that growing up in Springtown had on the lives of these individuals, and how this has contributed to the current conditions. It reviews some of the relevant literature on gangsterism and community impacts to contextualise this exploration and through this process, attempts to add valuable insights that could be used to support the management of an issue that the South African Police Services in a recent press release called, “the scourge of gangsterism” (Potelwa 2015).

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Gangsterism and the Community: Literature Review

There is a considerable body of literature that investigates the reasons young people become

gangsters. Not all of the studies are completely in accord with each other, but most of them look critically at the social and family context within which the young person exists for explanations. A study published in the International Review of the Red Cross, identifies the formation of youth gangs as primarily a result of 'street socialization' and social exclusion. It states that gang members often have unemployment and lack of prospects in common. Consequently, it claims, gang culture with its rituals and symbols imparts a sense of identity, status, and solidarity to them. It goes on to assert that the use of violence and turf wars often serve to further strengthen this (Hauck and Sven 2010). Venkatesh (1997) has done a significant amount of work on the 'corporatization' of gangs. The gangs that he investigated showed very sophisticated structures and practices as they seemingly morphed into big businesses. He later theorises that this allows for the "fulfilment of entrepreneurial ambitions for persons with limited other opportunities to participate in the economy" (Venkatesh 2001).

However, Taylor (2013) concludes that an individual's inner conflicts and frustrations makes them susceptible to the attraction of the gangs and deviant gang behaviors. That they are able to find "release from, and/or expression of; frustrations and bad feelings, protection from hostilities in the neighborhood, a peer group, and ways to make money, especially during the recruitment and socialization phases of gang membership" within gangs. He identifies that the reasons why individuals are susceptible to the lure of gang membership is a combination of "a child's neurotic predispositions due to family problems" and a "gang populated, pathogenic neighborhood environment". The family problems that he identifies as creating neurotic predispositions include; parental anxiety, depression, inability to deal effectively with substance abuse, fatherless homes, mother-headed households with inadequate supervision, and other similar factors present in low income communities (Taylor 2013). Barnes et al. (2010), reference the theory that link a child's propensity to becoming a gang member to factors such as those already identified and a few more, namely; inadequate parental monitoring, lack of self-control, contact with delinquent peer groups, victimization experiences, the presence of neuropsychological deficits, prior delinquency, poor attach-

ment to parents, gender, race, age and exposure to neighborhood disadvantage. What has clearly emerged from the theory is that amongst a number of other factors, a low income community where gangsterism is present and where high levels of violence already exists is definitely one of the significant factors that encourage gangsterism. A considerable amount of investigation has also been undertaken into how communities are negatively impacted by gangsterism.

A paper published as a collaborative effort between the National Youth Gang Center (NYGC) and Institute for Inter governmental Research, summarises the current research by drawing reference from the impacts of gangs in US communities in several context categories. The first context of these categories which has relevance to this paper is: the impact of gang members' criminal activity. The research indicates that gang members living in high-crime areas are responsible for more violent offenses than all other adolescent crime within the community, and for up to seven times higher than the violent crime rates of adolescents who are not in gangs. It also proves that these gang members are significantly more criminally active during periods of active gang membership, particularly in serious and violent offenses, and that the influence of gang membership on delinquency and violence is long-lasting. The second context is; general community impact. Here, the research indicates that the community suffered from a fear of gangs and of becoming victims of gang crime. They suffered from intimidation, vandalism, graffiti, drug sales, the risk of being caught in gang cross fire, and from the threat of illegally obtained firearms. The third context is; violent gang criminal activity. It indicates specifically in this context, that gangs are responsible for a disproportionate number of homicides. The fourth context is; gang members returning from prison. The indications here are that nearly two-thirds of returning members contributed to an increase in violent crime among local gangs. The fifth context is; gangs in schools. These are linked with serious delinquency problems in elementary and secondary schools. There appears to be a strong correlation between gang presence in schools and both guns in schools and availability of drugs in school. Furthermore, gangs seem to create fear among students but also increase the level of violence in schools and are an important contributor to overall lev-

els of student victimization at school. The sixth context; is; the economic impact of gangs. Although it is acknowledged that this would be impossible to quantify, it is expected that it would certainly be substantial since it would include all law enforcement activities and infrastructure required to combat gang activities from policing, to trials, to incarcerations etcetera, and this is even before medical and financial consequences are included in the calculation (Howell 2006).

Interestingly, the presentation of the research results is done in such a manner that would present the gangs and the community as two distinct identities interacting and impacting each on the other. At no point in the paper is the gang member or gangs seen as being indistinguishable from or fundamentally networked into the community. Another US study which is quite different in nature, explored domestic violence among teen and young adult women and gang culture and gang members as abusers. The study admitted that no standard or easy connection can be made, but nonetheless went on to include observations such as; gangs are notoriously violent, victims of abuse become perpetrators of abuse, female victimization can be part of female gang initiation, and gender ideologies are reinforced by gang members. The paper goes on to discuss the horrific degree and prevalence of domestic violence in gangs (Brown 2007). Although it is acknowledged that community stereotypes of gender violence is exacerbated within gangs in this paper, the paper offers no insights into the impact or influence of this heightened gang violence back on community beliefs and prejudices. In fact, there is a paucity of information whether, or the degree to which, the existence of gangs criminalises communities or leads to any erosion of the communities' social values or redefinition of its social norms. Yet, these assumptions remain implicit.

Tita and Ridgeway (2007), cite studies where gangs offer protection and shield the community members against physical attack; they protect the community from the property crimes of "outsiders," and prevent them from being exploited financially by shopkeepers and loan sharks. They cite other studies that point to gangs as community benefactors, "providing protection in the absence of the police" and even others where a gang community linkage is evident in "the community's tolerance of the fencing of stolen property and the distribution of

drugs". They also state that if there is recognition that the members of a gang are usually members of the larger community, there should be an expectation that these relationships would evolve over time (Tita and Ridgeway 2007). Certainly, 'such symbiotic relationships and 'tolerances'² would suggest that the evolution might lead to a repositioning or realignment of the communities' values and norms'. Similarly, Alleyne and Wood (2010) in their investigation in the UK into psychological and behavioural characteristics, defining gang, non-gang and peripheral members, acknowledge that; 'varying levels of gang involvement'² exists within communities'. This again suggests that the impact of gang activity on community values is both more prevalent and far-reaching in communities than how the current research makes it explicit. If we look at domestic research, we will find similar indications of the ambivalence and mutual interconnectedness of relationships between gangs and communities.

Kynoch (1999) notes that even though gangs in South Africa were predatory "they often engaged in activities and represented ideals that were appreciated and applauded by significant members of township residents". Cooper (2009) writes that amongst those of his interviewees who were Western-Cape-awaiting-trial-prisoners, those who were not gang members described themselves as 'walked' with gangsters, stating that their involvement with gangs was 'largely unofficial'. A stronger link is made by authors such as Petrus (2015) who represent gangs as being 'critical institutions of provision' and as 'symbols of resistance to state authority in South Africa'. Cooper's (2009) research also suggests that gangsterism offered his respondents 'power' and hence respect and "a life of drugs, parties, women, a sense of belonging and a set of shared codes and rituals", consistent with the findings of Hauck and Sven above. Noonan (2012) who draws on other studies contends that gang membership is a rebellion against structural violence and a proactive measure toward survival. That it is an attempt within an environment that has left the gang member feeling powerless, to forcibly claim and assert power and acquire money, goods, status, and sexual partners. He argues that "South Africa's high rates of crime and gang activity are not merely a criminal issue but a social one," and that these "can be ameliorated through socio-economic

development — through the reduction of poverty and childhood exposure to violence, and the improvement of career opportunities for youth” (Noonan 2012). Essentially, he makes the case for the introduction of a radical social re-engineering program.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The impact of decades of gangsterism on the Springtown community in KwaZulu-Natal was explored in this investigation, using a review of the literature on gangs, and face-to-face qualitative interviews with gangmembers, community leaders within Springtown and law enforcement personnel. Altogether, 17 persons were interviewed as part of this investigation. Most were born in Springtown and remained resident there. Interviewees in this investigation included two teachers; a school principal; two community leaders: one sporting personality, and the other a prominent businessman both current residents, three local residents, one of whom is a self proclaimed gangster; two ex-residents, a former gang member who is now a reborn Christian and lay preacher; an ex-policeman who resides in Springtown and policed the area previously; a current serving policeman who is posted locally; and four gang members. Rama, a businessman and community leader who was the first person to be interviewed brokered the remaining interviews. The gang members saw him as a trusted member. Of the gang members interviewed, four were identified as known gangsters within the community in the first instance by Rama and thereafter, they identified themselves at the beginning of their interview. The fifth was being interviewed as a resident when he self identified as a gangster. Pseudonyms have been used to mask interviewees’ identities even for cases where the interviewee was comfortable with full disclosure. Interviews were held either at the person’s home, the community hall or at schools. Interviews were semi-structured qualitative interviews consisting of open and closed-ended questions. The interviews were face-to-face and generally lasted for about an hour. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Notes were also taken during the interview to assist the interviewer with transcription.

Data Analysis

The transcriptions of each interview were coded and categorised according to topic and

subject matter. The answers of each interviewee was then compared and contrasted with the answers of the other interviewees. Common answers were noted, as well as the differences. The discussion section of this paper analyses these answers in terms of how they resonate with findings in the literature review and with those of other interviewees.

INTERVIEWS, OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

Some of the interviewees were disinclined to provide too much personal information as they wished to preserve their anonymity. However, for those participants who agreed to be profiled, profiles have been reproduced below as they provide relevant context for the interpretation of observations and opinions proffered.

Profiles of Interviewees

Rama (Interviewed at his home)

A long-term resident of Springtown who was born in Springtown and is still living in the same house 58 years later. He is a well-known community leader and a successful businessman. He and his family lived through pre- and post-apartheid periods in Springtown. All 11 siblings together with his parents lived in the two-bedroom home. His mother died when he was very young and he was raised by his sisters. His father was a bus driver who died at the age of 103. His father’s brother was also more than 100 years old before he died.

Bandy (Interviewed at his home)

This is another long-term resident of Springtown, and a well known local sporting personality who was 14 years old when his family moved into Springtown. He is now 64 years old and lives in the same house in which he spent his teenage and bachelor years. When he married, he moved away from his family home because the house was too small for him to start his own family. He returned to his family home when his other siblings moved out and there was no one to take care of his aged mother. Bandy experienced gang fighting at first hand when one of

the gangsters wrongfully accused him of picking on them. A fight broke out outside his house and he got no assistance from any of the others within the community because they feared reprisals from the gangsters. Bandy also witnessed the killing of his friend by gangsters outside his house in broad day light. No one was ever apprehended for the murder.

Siven (Interviewed at his home on 16/03/2015)

Born in Springtown, he has lived there for 50 years. He grew up in a stable family and both his parents were teachers. He is an attorney and has two children; a boy and a girl. He has defended numerous gang members who have participated in gang related activities. Around the corner from the house in which he grew up was a drug den where the gangsters used to set up station. Whilst growing up, he knew that this was a 'no go' corner. Police cars, hooting, loud music and violence were a part of his daily life.

Anne (Interviewed at her school)

A local secondary school teacher, and guidance counsellor, who is approximately 50 years old. She was the only female interviewed as part of this investigation. She has been teaching for 20 years. The families of most of her students still live in the same houses that their parent lived in, and they come from middle to lower income groups. They face the same hardships that their grandparents did all those years ago. She finds that her job has changed over the years with a greater need to provide support for more and more kids from broken homes and she feels ill equipped to deal adequately with these.

Freddie (Interviewed at his home)

A former gang member and now a 'reborn christian' and lay preacher who is 60 years old. He has lived in the area for over 35 years and went to the local junior school, but dropped out after Standard 7 (Grade 9). He lives in the original family home and now owns the home after the death of his parents. He owns his own taxi service.

Mannie (Interviewed at the Community Hall in Springtown)

A resident of Springtown and an ex- policeman. He was born in Springtown and is still liv-

ing in the area 63 years later. Criminals in the area did not like him. He and his family were brought up in this community and experienced life both in pre- and post- apartheid Springtown. His father and mother were disciplined individuals and instilled discipline in their children. Whilst still in high school, he decided to become a policeman because on a daily basis he witnessed the crime that was taking place in his community. He was a keen sportsman and played for a number of years for the local community soccer team. On becoming a policeman, he served in the local police station at Sydenham that had his community of Springtown and the surrounding area of Asherville under its jurisdiction.

Prakash (Interviewed at Sydenham Police Station)

A policeman currently serving at Sydenham police station who has been associated with the Springtown area for over 15 years, and knows the residents well.

Alan (Interviewed at School in Springtown)

A teacher for more than 20 years, and most of it spent in Springtown.

Aleck (Interviewed at School in Springtown)

A principal of a primary school in Springtown.

Trevor (Interviewed at Home in Springtown)

Describes himself as a 60-year-old working class resident of Springtown who lived all his life in the area. His parents told him that their home was one of the earliest built in the area. He went to the local school down the road and left school when he was in Standard 6 (Grade 8) in order to supplement the family income because they were very poor. He says that he chose to work because he wanted to 'make something' of his life. Some of his friends joined gangs instead.

Vishnu (Interviewed Telephonically)

A 60-year-old, who grew up in Springtown but is no longer resident there. The family home

is still in Springtown. His mother, his married brother and the brother's family and his married sisters and their families are still residents of Springtown. Vishnu's wife is also from Springtown and they have three daughters. Vishnu is a successful administrator in a government institution and his wife is a teacher with a masters' degree in education. Their three daughters all have university qualifications and have made a success of their lives. Vishnu grew up in a poor family and lost his father at a very early age. He admits to being naughty and being involved in numerous fights with the older boys in the area. At the age of 16 he dropped out of school. Fortunately, he found a job in a government institution. He credits his wife and the church for his success.

Bruce (Interviewed at Rama's Business Premises)

Bruce grew up in the heart of Springtown in the 1950s. He left South Africa in the 1980s for a better future and an opportunity to pursue a career which he could not pursue in South Africa because of the lack of opportunities provided for persons of colour. In his early years, Bruce was friendly with gangsters and even accompanied them on some of their exploits.

Dash (Interviewed at Home in Springtown)

A 50-year-old resident of Springtown, who self identified as a gangster when being interviewed.

Denny (Interviewed at the Community Hall in Springtown)

A 30-year-old gangster who lost his father at the age of 10, and was cared for by his uncles who were gangsters.

Prem (Interviewed at Home in Springtown)

A 50-year-old gangster who dropped out of school in Standard 4(Grade 6).

Dees (Interviewed at the Community Hall in Springtown)

A 57-year-old gangster who was abandoned by his mother. His father was a petty criminal. He was convicted of rape that he said was; "for

having sex with a girl who was my friend from school days" and served 7 years in prison.

Lawrence (Interviewed at the Community Hall in Springtown)

A 40-year-old gangster born in Springtown.

Early Springtown

Rama recollected that Springtown had its first Indian resident families in the 1930s with the original families still there more than 70 years later. The men worked as bus and taxi drivers, railway workers and Durban Corporation workers. They were low-income workers who qualified for subsidised housing. The houses were mainly two-bedroom with a lounge cum dining room and a kitchen. The kitchens were extremely tiny with a built-in coal stove that necessitated a coal shed. A common result of the coal shed was the black soot that covered the garden plants and anything that was in sight especially the people who shovelled the coal daily. The homes had a small back yard where families grew vegetables and kept poultry to supplement the family meals. His earliest memories are that most families were poor, knew each other well and shared in each other's successes and failures. The closeness of the community was evident when you noticed neighbours' children running in and out of each other's homes resulting in children in the neighbourhood having many "foster" parents. There were many primary schools that were either state-aided or community built that catered for the children of the neighbourhood (Rama 2015).

A Culture of Gangsterism

All interviewees spoke of gangs that operated in Springtown, not only from the time of their earliest memories, but even in their fathers' time. Since the older interviewees are in their 60s, that would suggest that by the 1950s an established culture of gangsterism existed in Springtown. Rama remembers that gangs would form at different street corners and monitor and control their 'territory'. The first gangs were formed around gambling schools which fought to protect these lucrative interests (Rama 2015). Bandy remembers shebeens as being part of this

early gangster scene. “We lived in an area where gangsterism was part of our lives. In our daily lives there was violence, fighting, stabbings and shooting. Shebeens were a stone throw from home. We never bothered the gangsters because we knew what they did to people who messed with them. We just lived amongst them because we had no other choice” (Bandy 2015). Others, like Bruce, tell stories of how gangsters protected the community. “On one occasion I accompanied two brothers who were gangsters. They entered a bus and were confronted by six female passengers who were mostly old women (aunties) who were crying. One of the brothers proceeded to ask the aunties why they were crying. They informed him that the person seated at the back of the bus had just robbed them. On hearing this, the brother asked his sibling to stand guard at the front of bus while he went to the back of the bus where he confronted this passenger who had interfered with the aunties. At the next stop the two brothers and I jumped off the bus. It was later discovered that the passenger was stabbed to death at the back of the bus” (Bruce 2015).

Certainly by the 1980s, the gangs were heavily into drugs (Freddie 2015). Throughout this period, a high degree of violence was present (Mannie 2015). Freddie speaks of his period as a gangster in the 80s; “Drugs, alcohol and crime were our way of life... It gave us money and we were the leaders... I carried a knife to school and no one tried to mess with me. It was the survival of the fittest. We owned our territory and never backed away from a fight. People feared me because I was very good with a knife, and I am not afraid to say that some of the gangsters we targeted came to an untimely end. Carrying weapons to schools was a norm. People were too scared to report us to the teachers” (Freddie 2015).

Anne speaks despairingly of the situation that she deals with now; “By the time the kids come to our schools they are already gangsters. Some are so violent that the teachers are scared to punish them in case they retaliated against us. The female teachers are even more scared. We sometimes have to contact the police to come to our schools to keep the peace between rival groups. Some of our youngsters are on drugs, but the parents are not supportive of us when we want to help. They see it as a phase that the youngsters will come out of. But we have been

teachers long enough to know that these youngsters will drop out of school sooner rather than later. Young kids have their own following, like mini gangs and have already adopted a gang culture and instil fear in the other kids. We know some kids sell drugs but it’s hard to catch them... maybe we don’t try hard enough” (Anne 2015). Prakash says that he has seen the inevitability of the progress of young children towards gangsterism and the inability of the policing system to cope with the issue. “I have encountered numerous teenage gangsters who initially were delinquent school kids but now are gangsters in their late 20s and early 30s. Many of these gangsters are now into drugs. So, in their lives nothing has changed. They progressed from delinquents as petty criminals to full-fledged gangsters. We have done our job by arresting them on numerous occasions but for some reason or the other, they are back on the streets. The system seems to fail us. We put in effort to arrest these criminals, but nothing is done to change their behaviour. Some of them have spent time in jail but they come out as worse criminals than before. Soon these gangs will break into smaller gangs and attract newer members and this cycle will continue as it has done from days gone by. I can’t see a solution in the foreseeable future, and if no properly planned effort is made then more and more youngsters will get sucked into this life” (Prakash 2015).

The Gangsters’ Perspectives

The reasons given by the gangsters for why they resorted to gangsterism align closely with those mentioned in the literature review above. They spoke of the possibility of gaining respect, having fun, being fashionable and cool and ‘getting the girls they wanted’, wearing cool clothes, driving fancy cars and having big houses. “I liked the way gangsters looked. They were the tough guys. I liked the gangster language. My friends were already called gangsters; it was cool to be known as a gangster. They had nice cool clothes; cars and all the chicks were with them. They also had a nice place where we all could meet” (Lawrence 2015). Also, correlating with the research cited earlier was the idea of the gang functioning as a family or loyal group of friends creating a ‘home’; “They were like family coming in and out of my house which was very small but we managed” (Dees 2015). Some of them

spoke of following in the footsteps of relatives; “My uncles who were members of a famous gang influenced me” (Denny 2015), and “In our family, it is normal to be part of a gang and we copied the behaviour of my dad and his brothers” (Dash 2015). None of them referred to poverty or financial need as a driver except for Dees obliquely; “I had to serve 7 years in prison and when I came out I had to earn a living. I tried several jobs but nothing worked, so my friends and I formed our own gang. Can you blame me? I tried several jobs even as a waiter in a restaurant and hotel but these jobs didn’t pay enough to support my family” (Dees 2015). However, poverty was given as an explanation for the previous generation joining gangs; “We were very poor. My father couldn’t get a job. My mother left us and my father had to take care of us” (Dees 2015).

None of the gangsters saw their behaviour as undesirable when speaking directly of themselves, the stance they held, and the positions they occupied in the community. In fact, a gangster saw himself either as a: “Protector of the community,” “someone who is respected in the community” (Denny 2015). However, with the exception of Lawrence none of them wanted the next generation to become gangsters and spoke quite articulately about the ways in which the community should go about eradicating gangsterism in Springtown; “No. Look at me this is the only thing I can do, being a gangster. I will prevent them from becoming gangsters or joining gangs” (Prem 2015). “We should start with the parents to teach their kids about what is right and wrong. We should also look at schools to educate kids against gangs and we should make the elders in the community also tell the kids and youngsters about the evils of gangs and gangsterism” (Dash 2015).

The Other Interviewees’ Perspectives

Just as in the Red Cross report already cited, many of the interviewees pointed to violence, dysfunctional families and the poor socio-economic climate of Springtown, as the reason gangsterism took root there. “In houses where there was domestic violence the children, as a form of rebellion against what was happening at home, found comfort by joining gangs. The home violence experienced by these youngsters quickly found expression in street violence and sub-

stance abuse” (Siven 2015). “Poverty also contributes to some of these behaviours” (Aleck 2015). However, most of them were of the opinion that in recent times poverty has not been the reason young people have gone into gangsterism. Instead, they assert, that the promise of rich rewards and a belief that there are few risks, is what makes young people see gangsterism as an attractive career choice. “Our children were exposed to the gang culture from an early age, fancy designer clothes, sporty cars, and nice big houses. It seemed ok to sell drugs or run gambling schools. Children saw this as a fancy way of life and only the silly people got caught” (Bandy 2015).

Vishnu actually goes on to speak about the corporatization of gangs and the legitimising of their business interests echoing Venkatesh’s findings quoted above. “In the old days because of the lifestyle you led, and community you belonged to, the money exchange was low because most of the people in these areas came from the same poverty background and as such, the stakes were low. Gangs nowadays treat gangsterism as a business. Running a gambling school generates huge amounts of cash that is tax-free. In addition, selling drugs is hard core (no longer the cheap grass of the old days) like cocaine, crack, ice, etc., you name it, and someone is selling it! This is far more lucrative than the old days. These drug lords are driving fancy cars and living in fancy houses and making this life more attractive to follow and youngsters graduate from delinquents to full time gangsters very easily. And also because these gangsters don’t pay tax on their ill-gotten gains they diversify into other areas. A glaring example is the tow truck business with drug lords behind the funding of these businesses. Just looking at the appearance of most of the tow trucks clearly show you the amount of capital that is injected into that business. The recent violent incidence where one of the tow truck owners was shot dead in front of his son, and the subsequent mysterious killing of a drug lord does not require a rocket scientist to explain the reason for this violence” (Vishnu 2015). He argues that a change in community attitude has resulted. “Growing up, we feared the gangsters because the gangsters were older and were seen as gangsters. Now we don’t fear the gangsters because the youngsters are seen as delinquents. The older ones are seen not as gangsters, but more

as business men, because, crime has become big money. These days the gangsters, more especially the drug lords, are quick to support the community whenever help is needed. In cases of funerals or hardship in a poor family, they readily help the family in their time of need. So in a way you don't see them as being a plague" (Vishnu 2015).

This theme of the embedded nature of gangsterism in Springtown and a softening of community attitudes to gangsterism is present in most of the interviewees' feedback. "Some of the youngsters who had dropped off from my school are now gangsters. A common thread now with these gangsters is that they have a healthy degree of respect for their former teachers. This is not only accorded to me, but to the other teachers as well. In fact, in the shopping centres or car parks or anywhere for that matter when these known gangsters are around you feel safe. You feel a strange kind of protection which makes you see them as former pupils of your schools rather than gangsters or hardened criminals. Some of these gangsters also know my wife (she is also a teacher), and whenever they see her they ask about me and how I am keeping" (Alan 2015). Trevor also spoke of attitudinal change from one generation to the next; "As an older person, we know of the crimes in our areas but do not exactly know who the gangster are unless we are shown or told but if you ask my sons who are in their late 20s they will even know the gangsters by name" (Trevor 2015).

The interviewees also made frequent reference to the escalation in the levels of violence in the community and most of them spoke of this as being the most distressing element of gangsterism in Springtown. "Then even the fights that broke out were insular. More often, the disagreement that resulted in fights or violence was among the people in that area. These fights often were fist fights and stabbing. It was very rare for these fights which were insular to take any other form. Nowadays guns have taken over from fistfights and knives. It is easier to obtain a gun these days and it has become a common sight to see gangsters wearing a gun under their shirts or on their shins. The bulge of the gun is easily identifiable" (Vishnu 2015).

In November 2013 a policeman was arrested for attempted murder after shooting a friend in the chest over an argument about soccer (Dawood 2014), and has since been convicted of

homicide (Charles 2015). Even if it is accepted that he did not intend harm, the fact that he came armed to a neighbourhood function and could so casually loose off a firearm in a backgarden speaks volumes about the tolerance for violence in Springtown.

CONCLUSION

Generally, the interviewees corroborated the findings in the literature review. They felt that poverty and family dysfunction create the right climate for gangs to form. That gangs form as a result of 'street socialization' and social exclusion where gang culture imparts a sense of identity, status, and solidarity to gang members. They believed, and provided anecdotal evidence, that gang members who had been imprisoned re-offend on release, that childhood delinquency all too frequently ended up as gangsterism, and that the community currently suffers from a fear of gangs and of becoming victims of gang crime. Gang violence was frequently raised; particularly with the notions that with the passage of time the levels of violence have increased. Most alarming was the commonly held view by almost all persons interviewed that notwithstanding all the current effort expended by police; and schools, little improvement has resulted. A strong theme that did come through, and where the literature is mostly silent as was noted earlier, is the extent to which Springtown gangsters have managed to 'mainstream' themselves into the community. This and the ensuing community ambivalence towards gangsterism it is felt, allows current young people to see gangsterism no longer as an undesirable career choice, but potentially one that grants not just a lucrative and even luxurious lifestyle but one that brings standing in the community.

This study indicates that the gangsters of Springtown are not just the product of a dysfunctional community. But that they continue - as sons, brothers, husbands and fathers who are deeply embedded and influential in the community - to shape the attitudes and beliefs of current and future generations and create a culture of tolerance for gangsterism. Based on the interviewees' comments on how decades of being ruled by gangsters has impacted the community, it is reasonable to conclude that in a context of poverty and unemployment where ambiguous values and moral ambivalences have

now permeated the community itself, gangsterism has become part of the fabric of the Springtown community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Setting aside the issue of the more deeply rooted psychological aspects that cause certain persons to become gangsters, the authors believe like Noonan, that the issue is not just a criminal but a social one. Like him, they are of the view that a major social reengineering program is needed if gangsterism is to be uprooted in the community. Such a program should also include, as a necessary requirement, the re-educating of the community around the undesirability of gangster behaviour for any real change to be effective.

There is also a need for more research to be done, with a view to investigating the symbiotic relationship between gangsters and the community. Future research in this area will prove invaluable to those agencies within society who are tasked with either reforming gangsters or with protecting the public from their depredations.

LIST OF SUBJECTS INTERVIEWED

- Alan 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Teacher's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 6, 2015.
- Aleck 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Teacher's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 6, 2015.
- Anne 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Teacher's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 20, 2015.
- Bandy 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Community Leader's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. February 23, 2015.
- Bruce 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. An Ex-resident's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. April 9, 2015.
- Dash 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Self-Proclaimed Gangster's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 7, 2015.
- Dees 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Gangster's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 21, 2015.
- Denny 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Gangster's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 21, 2015.
- Freddie 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Reformed Gangsters View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 16, 2015.
- Lawrence 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Gangster's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 21, 2015.
- Mannie 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. An Ex-Policeman's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 21, 2015.
- Prakash 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Policeman's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 28, 2015.
- Prem 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Gangster's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 7, 2015.
- Rama 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Community Leader's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. February 23, 2015.
- Siven 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Resident and Legal Practitioner's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 16, 2015.
- Trevor 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. A Resident's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. March 16, 2015.
- Vishnu 2015. Interviewed by Naidoo LD. An Ex-resident's View of Gangsterism in Springtown. Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. April 4, 2015.

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