

“Crime, and violent crime, is higher in South Africa than in most of the other countries of the world. This includes the rates of murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, other property crime, and vehicle hijackings. Violent crime, therefore, presents a major challenge for policy makers and those responsible for making South Africa a country in which “all people in South Africa are and feel safe.” Office of the Presidency, 2010

In this issue of **From Evidence to Action**, we focus on the issue of violent crime in South Africa. Through a review of the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) on *Why is crime in South Africa so violent?* and the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSV) report on *The Violent Nature of Crime in South Africa* (see Resources) we explore the value of evidence in the policy-making process – and why the way in which this evidence is presented is so important. According to the REA, there seems to be some consensus in the research evidence that the reasons for violent crime are multiple and interconnected. We take a closer look at these reasons and reveal the challenges facing researchers in ensuring that their findings are taken up by policy-makers.

We highlight the role of knowledge brokers in *Spotlight on the I-K-Mediary Network* and examine an example of how resources like the South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS) datasets and the *Age of hope or anxiety? Dynamics of the fear of crime in South Africa* policy brief can be drawn on to produce more accessible evidence.

From Evidence to Action aims to stimulate debate around evidence-based policy-making. If you have anything to contribute towards getting research into policy, and policy into action, whether successful or unsuccessful, please send your submissions to pan@hsrc.ac.za.



Why is crime in South Africa so violent?

In issue 2 of *From Evidence to Action*, we took a look at Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs) as highly effective research synthesis tools for consolidating evidence from various studies on a particular issue and drawing out key findings. This makes them an excellent method for policy-makers to access research needed to formulate appropriate

policy responses as part of the evidence-based policy-making process.

The issue of violent crime in South Africa was the subject of a recent REA, which was commissioned by the Presidency with the objective of answering the question “why is crime in South Africa so

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violent?” South Africa has one of the highest rates of crime and violence in the world – and it is an issue that does not discriminate, touching all race and income groups across the country. To address this question, the REA examined a number of existing research studies on crime and violence, including the much referred to and well-cited Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) report on *The Violent Nature of Crime in South Africa*, which we take a look at in the case study below. The REA highlighted the fact that research in the area has shown that the reasons for violent crime are multiple and interconnected. These reasons are not unique to South Africa, but they have combined here to form a deadly cocktail which has led to a violent culture. This is not a new phenomenon either; in fact, according to the CSVR report, “it appears that South Africa has been distinguished by high levels of violence for most of the last century... and that from as early as the 1920s South Africa (Johannesburg) appears to have been affected by a serious problem of violent crime.”

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“The reviewed evidence suggests that the reasons for violence and violent crime in South Africa are a combination of political-historical, environmental and individual factors,” explains the REA. “Poverty, unemployment inequality and social exclusion also contribute to South Africa’s burden of violence, but are inseparably related to (these) key factors.” The REA unpacks these factors in depth, but a summary of some of the findings is that:

- The political-historical factors are related to South Africa’s colonial and apartheid

legacy, which is said to have given way to the ‘normalisation’ of violence, in which violence is seen as an acceptable means of problem solving and resolving conflict.

- The policing and justice systems operate in an environment where there is a mistrust of the rule of law and authorities, sometimes resulting in vigilantism and summary justice.
- Environmental factors – such as fractured families and poor socialisation, the prevalence of gangs that use violence, the availability and use of guns and other weapons (amongst the highest in the world), the misuse of alcohol and drugs, and social attitudes and cultural values about gender, which condone and reinforce abusive practices against women – all contribute to the violent nature of crime.
- Individual factors also play a role with age (younger), gender (males) and educational background (low achievement) of criminals being strongly associated with violent behaviour and violent crime. So too are certain psychological profiles and some psychiatric conditions.

The REA also revealed that research evidence shows that the social distribution of violence in South Africa is not uniform across the country. The Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal have the highest rates of homicides, and Gauteng has the highest rates of car and truck hijacking and robberies. Affluent areas of South Africa experience more violent property crime, whilst poorer communities have more domestic violence, male-male assaults, murder and rape. Violent crime is a concern for black and white South Africans alike, and the concerns of poorer communities about violence and violent crime need to be given greater attention. The REA highlighted that these contextual factors are important as they “provide a more nuanced view of violence and violent crime than is sometimes offered by only looking at violent crime in South Africa overall.”

Because the REA was primarily undertaken to address the very specific question of why crime in

South Africa is so violent, it did not explicitly and systematically search the evaluation literature on the effectiveness of interventions to prevent and/or reduce violence and violent crime in South Africa. It did, however, provide a brief assessment of some of the promising interventions, noting they require actions that are inter-sectoral, strategic, and evidence-based. It suggested that interventions to reduce poverty, increase educational participation and completion, develop work-based skills and job opportunities, and support programmes that seek to change social attitudes and norms are needed. Better control of guns, weapons, alcohol and other drugs are also called for. Multi-modal programmes for violent behaviour seem to be more effective than single component interventions and inter-personal and social skills training, along with parenting skills training, seem to offer considerable opportunity to reduce violent and other antisocial behaviour.

Understanding what causes violent crime is essential in formulating appropriate policy responses to it and the REA is a way of doing this because it synthesises research from a variety of individual studies. Because REAs can be used to communicate research on sensitive issues in a way which does not focus on the results of a specific study, they may be more acceptable to policy-makers than reports which are perceived as subjective. But REAs should not be seen as the solution to all the challenges in the uptake of evidence into policy either – any research evidence needs to be presented in a way that takes into account not only the beliefs, perceptions and interests of the policy-makers, but the political environment in which they operate as well. This is an issue for the research-policy interface the world over – read *The challenges of communicating research* (on the following page) for more about what researchers need to consider when presenting evidence to policy-makers.

In the end, we need to remember that REAs are part of a process and should not be viewed in isolation. They are demand-led and need a knowledge broker, such as the I-K-Medary Network which we feature in the *Spotlight on* below, to identify what questions need to be

asked and how to share the information coming out of the process. This REA dealt with the “what” (the causes of violent crime are) – the next step is to understand the “how” (to deal

with it). This is the subject of the forthcoming REA which will focus on the interventions and the effectiveness of those interventions. This is in line with the recommendation made in this REA which

proposes that “such a review of evidence certainly seems warranted, and is suggested as a possible focus of a separate rapid evidence assessment.”

Some of the interventions highlighted in the REA were:

- Actions need to be inter-sectoral, strategic, and evidence-based.
- Interventions are needed to reduce poverty, increase educational participation and completion, develop work-based skills and job opportunities, and support programmes that seek to change social attitudes and norms.
- Better control of guns, weapons, alcohol and other drugs are called for.
- Multi-modal programmes for violent behaviour seem to be more effective than single component interventions and inter-personal and social skills training, along with parenting skills training, seem to offer considerable opportunity to reduce violent and other antisocial behaviour.

The challenges of communicating research

Dr Phil Davies, head of *Oxford Evidencia* (<http://www.oxfordevidencia.co.uk/>), has experience in both the academic and policy-making environments and therefore has unique insight into the challenges on both sides of the research-policy gap. We asked him a few questions about the challenges faced in getting research evidence taken up in the policy-making process – and how these can be tackled.

Davies points out that in the UK, while there has been a lot of progress in “pushing” research to policy-makers, not much progress has been made on the “pull” aspect where research evidence can have a far greater impact as a result of being requested by policy-makers. It is therefore important to build capacity within government to call for research evidence – through, for example, research synthesis tools like systematic reviews and Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs) – rather than relying on other sources which are often biased, such as think tanks and lobby groups. The Presidency’s Programme to Support Pro-poor Policy Development (PSPPD) REA training, which is run jointly with the HSRC, aims to address this need for capacity-building within both the research as well as the policy environment because the research-policy interface is, after all, a two-way street.

Another challenge for successful policy-making, as Davies highlights, is making sure any research which aims to influence policy takes into account the implementation of those policies. This can result in a longer research process, but in the end produces better research which is more likely to be successful in practice. Davies also mentioned the importance of moving away from “just in time” evidence, to evidence which anticipates the research needs of the future.

Raising the issue that lobby groups are generally far more successful in having their voices heard in the policy-making process than researchers, Davies further recommends that researchers not only learn lobbying skills, but also work with lobby groups to get research into evidence. In fact, in the UK, many of the lobby groups actually use research evidence in their work as well. But, cautions Davies, researchers and lobby groups must also understand that governments need to be careful about the use of evidence, particularly when there are competing views in the research field. Researchers should be aware of government challenges and respect the political sensitivity of issues.

In the UK, the use of evidence in the policy-making process has increased, but it has taken a long



and concerted effort on the part of people like Dr Davies to get to this point. South Africa can build on the UK experience and make progress in the evidence-based policy-making (EBPM) field if research institutions and donor organisations realise the importance of using research synthesis tools such as REAs to make their research more accessible to policy-makers.

Spotlight on the I-K-Mediary Network

Founded in 2007, the I-K-Mediary Network is a global network of organisations which aim to increase access to and use of research in development contexts. In recent years, opportunities for organisations to play a knowledge brokering role have increased significantly with the increasing affordability and accessibility of information communication technology (ICT) tools. But services offered by information and knowledge intermediaries (ikmediaries), such as gateways, portals and reporting services, come in a plethora of shapes and sizes – and not always with a clear idea of how they are bringing about change and if they are reaching the right people. With this in mind, the I-K-Mediary Network aims to support collaboration and maximise efficiencies between its members; and build a greater understanding of the role and value of ikmediaries.

Two principle activities of the network include an annual workshop for network members to improve good practice and share learning, and the running of the Knowledge Brokers Forum (KBF), an interactive community for knowledge intermediaries, brokers and interested stakeholders to share experiences and practical information on the role of intermediaries. The KBF supports lively discussions, document exchanges and an opportunity to network with other knowledge brokers all over the world. More information on these can be found on the I-K-Mediary Network website (<http://www.ikmediarynetwork.org/activities.html>) and Knowledge Brokers Forum website www.knowledgebrokersforum.org.



Case study: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation report on ‘*The Violent Nature of Crime in South Africa*’

In this issue, P>AN continues with its focus on evidence-based policy-making in South Africa, looking at examples of where evidence has, or has not, influenced policy. This case study examines an example of where research evidence was not successfully taken up by policy-makers and how the process unfolded in the case of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVr) report on ‘*The Violent Nature of Crime in South Africa*’.

P>AN went to meet with David Bruce, who led the CSVr research team, to discuss the interactions between the CSVr and the Ministry of Police, which commissioned the report; how they went about communicating the research results; and what challenges they faced in this process.

Research was conducted over a two-year period and involved the production of seven reports. The study was presented to the Portfolio Committee on Police in November 2010 but was roundly dismissed by members of the Secretariat for Police. This was despite the fact that the report was submitted to, and accepted by, the Ministry of Police early in 2009, and there was no further engagement with the CSVr on the report thereafter. Portfolio Committee members seemed to take the view that the research had not fulfilled their expectations and in effect “stated the obvious”, without answering the required questions.

In discussing some of the possible reasons for the failure of those who commissioned the report to engage with it and its recommendations, Bruce noted that the process of communicating the research findings both to and within the ministry was ad hoc. The process was possibly guarded by a few individuals, and there did not seem to be a strategy in place to ensure that the report was considered from the perspective of evidence-based policy-making. He says the portfolio committee was also ill at ease with the concept of “a culture of violence”, and there may have been sensitivities around other key findings, including that crime prevention strategies are not focused on the most vulnerable, but rather on protecting the middle and wealthier classes who can afford private security protection. It also emerged later that most members had only reviewed the executive summary rather than the full report.

The jury may still be out on exactly why this report failed to influence the ministry, but extensive references have nevertheless been made to it in the *Why is crime in South Africa so violent?* Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), featured above. The REA has assessed 28 other research projects along with the CSVr report and presents a short and easy-to-navigate overview of the causes of violent crime in South Africa. It will be interesting to see how the REA is received in contrast to the CSVr report, but whatever the outcome, the lessons learned from this experience will contribute to our knowledge base about getting research into policy, and policy into practice.

Tools and methodology for policy analysis

How to write a policy brief

Policy briefs are useful tools for synthesising research into short and easy to read documents which focus on the policy implications of that research. They are aimed at policy-makers who often have limited time to read lengthy reports and are overloaded with information, but need to make practical decisions with that research in mind.

A policy brief is usually not longer than four pages and should consist of a short executive summary and introduction to the background or context of the research, an explanation of why the research is important and which current policies it links to, an outline of the key research findings and the policy implications of these findings, and finally, in the conclusion, recommendations. It is also important that you choose a title which is catchy and that your executive summary is clear and links to the conclusion.

When writing a policy brief, always use plain language and avoid technical terms and jargon that only experts in that area will be familiar with. Develop one clear message and make sure you only include research relevant to that message in the brief; in many cases you will find that one research project will need several policy briefs breaking down the various messages.

Identify who the target audience of the brief will be, in other words the relevant stakeholders, as well as the best way to introduce the brief to them, whether it be at a one-on-one meeting or at a seminar or workshop. Finally, decide who should present the brief – it is usually the person who conducted the research, but if the decision-maker is a senior member of government, you may need to also have an executive staff member available as well.

Resources

Reports

Gentlemen or Villains, Thugs or Heroes? The Social Economy of Crime in South Africa

(<http://www.saiia.org.za/books/gentlemen-or-villains-thugs-or-heroes-the-social-economy-of-crime-in-south-africa.html>)

This paper discusses the issues related to the exponential growth in various crime in South Africa over the last decade and explains that to combat it, it is critical to understand the relationship between criminal networks, the state and society.

Perspectives on how research and evidence can influence decision making in public services: Evidence for social policy and practice (http://www.nesta.org.uk/library/documents/Experts_Essays_webv1.pdf)

A selection of essays on a range of issues including criminal justice, from organisations using different methodologies and approaches to generate evidence and influence policy and practice.

The violent nature of crime in South Africa: A concept paper for the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster(http://www.csvr.org.za/docs/crime/compatibility_mode.pdf)

This concept paper represents the first component of a project on the violent nature of crime commissioned by the Department of Safety and Security acting on behalf of the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster.

Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime? Supplement to the final report of the study on the violent nature of crime in South Africa(http://www.csvr.org.za/docs/study/7.unique_about_SA.pdf)

A supplementary document to the 2007 study by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation on the violent nature of crime in South Africa (see below) which addresses what makes levels of violent crime in South Africa so high.



crime

Policy briefs

Age of hope or anxiety? Dynamics of the fear of crime in South Africa – shows that the scope of fear of crime extends beyond a minority of the population and that urban, informal settlement dwellers are most concerned about crime. It recommends that reducing the fear of crime should be recognised as a priority alongside that of reducing crime itself.

Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), March 2008

(<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/Document-2718.phtml>)

Preventing rape and violence in South Africa: Call for leadership in a new agenda for action – argues that preventing and reducing levels of violence has been a missing piece in the national transformation agenda and now needs to be addressed as a cross-cutting national priority.

Medical Research Council (MRC), November 2009

(http://www.mrc.ac.za/gender/prev_rapedd041209.pdf)

The criminal justice system in Zambia

– discusses the legacy of Zambia's criminal justice system by focusing primarily on crime, policing, prosecution, the judiciary, prison service, customary justice and international instruments.

Institute for Security Studies (ISS), July 2009

(<http://www.africanreview.org/docs/zambia/polbrf6.pdf>)



Rapid Evidence Assessments (REAs)

Rapid Evidence Assessment of the evidence on the effectiveness of interventions with persistent/prolific offenders in reducing re-offending (<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=2454&language=en-US>)

The Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre) has conducted a number of REAs on crime which question whether criminal justice interventions for persistent/prolific offenders lead to a reduction in offending.

Rapid evidence assessment on public information about crime and policing

(<http://archive.matrixevidence.com/project/Name/3.aspx>)

This REA synthesised literature on police communication and its impact on public perceptions. It was found that there are gaps in the evidence base, and several of the studies were of low quality. Related REAs can be downloaded here (<http://archive.matrixevidence.com/projects/>).

Why is crime in South Africa so violent? Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) (<http://www.pan.org.za/index.php?module=Pagesetter&func=viewpub&tid=2&pid=613>)

Having assessed 29 research projects, this REA presents a short and easy-to-navigate overview of the causes of violent crime in South Africa.



Statistics and data

Crime and justice information and analysis hub

(http://www.issafrica.org/crimehub/?gclid=COi9_-q-qKkCFYfAodKX7XNQ)

A comprehensive source of information and analysis on crime, criminal justice and crime prevention in South Africa which aims to contribute towards transparency, accountability, good governance and public awareness in relation to crime, its prevention and criminal justice.

South African Social Attitudes Survey (SASAS)

(<http://www.hsrc.ac.za/SASAS.phtml>)

A nationally representative, repeated cross-sectional survey conducted annually by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) since 2003, the survey series charts and explains the interaction between the country's changing institutions, its political and economic structures, and the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of its diverse populations. The publications include chapters on crime and partner violence in South Africa.

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Organisations

Centre for Evidence Based Crime Policy (CEBCP) (<http://gunston.gmu.edu/cebcp/>)

Housed in the Department of Criminology, Law and Society at George Mason University, the CEBCP seeks to make scientific research a key component in decisions about crime and justice policies by advancing rigorous studies in criminal justice and criminology through research-practice collaborations, and serving as an information link to practitioners and the policy community.

Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) (<http://www.cjcp.org.za/>)

A Section 21 Company that works to develop, inform and promote evidence-based crime prevention practice, with a particular focus on children and youth. The organisation has three primary programmatic areas: research, training and projects.

Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) (<http://www.csvr.org.za/>)

A multi-disciplinary institute involved in research, policy formation, community interventions, service delivery, education and training, as well as providing consultancy services.

Institute for Security Studies (ISS) (<http://www.iss.co.za/>)

The ISS contributes to policy formulation and implementation across an identified spectrum of human security issues to achieve its mission, and to meet its obligations to Africa and the international community.



NICRO (<http://www.nicro.org.za/Home/>)

NICRO is a national crime prevention non-profit organisation working towards a safer South Africa through offender reintegration, community victim support, diversion and youth development and economic opportunities projects.

Safety and Peace Promotion Research Unit (SAPPRU) (<http://www.mrc.ac.za/crime/crime.htm>)

SAPPRU focuses on data driven prevention initiatives and transferable solutions for priority injury and violence issues, including safety and peace promotion.

UK Home Office

(<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/>)

The Home Office is the lead UK government department for immigration and passports, drugs policy, crime, counter-terrorism and police. Read the recently published New approach to fighting crime.

Events

CEBCP-Campbell Collaboration joint symposium on evidence-based policy (<http://gunston.gmu.edu/cebcp/CEBCPSymposium.html>)

15-16 August 2011, George Mason University

This symposium in the fields of crime and justice, education, social welfare, international development, and evaluation methodology will offer an array of panels, special workshops and plenaries to discuss the development, use, and improvement of evaluation research for decision-making in public policy.

Institute for Security Studies 2nd International conference

(<http://www.iss.co.za/eventitem.php?EID=721>)
1-2 December 2011, conference venue to be announced

This forum will bring together policy researchers, academics and practitioners to share data and insights about innovative research methods and effective policies related to crime reduction and the effective functioning of the criminal justice system.

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