Research Bulletin

The Optimus Study on Child Abuse, Violence and Neglect in South Africa
Acknowledgements

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Contents

Executive Summary 2
Introduction 4
Sexual abuse 6
  Defining child sexual abuse 6
  Child sexual abuse 7
Non-sexual child maltreatment 14
  Child neglect 14
  Physical abuse 17
  Emotional abuse 18
Exposure to family violence 19
Exposure to other forms of violence 21
  Direct victimisation 21
  Indirect victimisation (witnessing violence) 23
Conclusion 25
The Optimus Study 26
Sources 27
Author biographies 28
Executive Summary

The Optimus Study provides the first-ever representative data in South Africa on child maltreatment and exposure to other forms of violence. This research bulletin addresses the lifetime prevalence of violence against children, as reported by 15–17 year old South Africans. These issues were explored both in a household survey and a school survey: in each setting, young people were interviewed about their experiences by trained enumerators, and were also given the opportunity to respond to a small set of questions on a more confidential questionnaire which they completed themselves. The highest reporting rates were obtained from these self-administered questionnaires, particularly in schools. Since violence and abuse are stigmatising and are typically under-reported, it seems that this was the situation in which young people felt most comfortable disclosing their experiences and these rates, therefore, may be the most trustworthy. The study explored several forms of maltreatment (abuse and neglect), and exposure to violence, and most of the figures below are based on the findings from the self-administered questionnaires completed in schools.

Sexual abuse

The study explored several forms of sexual abuse: whether adolescents had been exposed to coerced (unwanted or by force) and consensual sexual touching, exposure to intimate body parts or pornographic images, sexual harassment, penetrative and non-penetrative sexual intercourse (actual or attempted), by or with an adult or similar-aged peers. One in five young people reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lifetimes, and this was true of both boys and girls. This rate is higher than the global average, but no worse than the highest rates identified in studies from Australia and other countries in Africa. Although boys reported similar rates of having experienced some form of sexual abuse, girls were more likely to experience forced and penetrative sexual abuse, and other forms of sexual abuse that involve contact with the abuser, while boys were more likely to report forced exposure to sexual acts and material. Young people were more likely to report having been abused by adults they knew than by adult strangers, but they were most likely to have been abused by a fellow child or teen than by any adult.

Physical abuse

Young people were asked if they had ever been hit, beaten or kicked by an adult caregiver. One in three respondents reported experiencing this form of physical abuse, although it was more likely to be reported by girls, and by coloured and black respondents, than by boys, or white or Indian respondents.

Emotional abuse

The study included a single item exploring emotional abuse: ‘At any point in your lifetime, did you get scared or feel really bad because grown-ups (adults) in your life called you names, said mean things to you, or said they didn’t want you?’ A total of 16.1% of young people reported experiencing this, and girls reported higher rates than boys.

Child neglect

Two forms of neglect were explored in the self-administered questionnaires: whether the respondent had ever had to live in a home that was broken down, unsafe or unhealthy; and whether there was ever a time when his/her parents did not care if he/she was clean, wore clean clothes, or brushed their teeth or hair. One fifth of respondents reported experiencing any one of these forms of neglect. Girls reported higher rates of neglect than boys, and black and coloured respondents reported higher rates than Indian and white respondents.
Other forms of victimisation:

- 23.1% of young people reported exposure to family violence (violence perpetrated by an adult caregiver against a sibling or against another adult in the household).
- 44.5% of respondents had experienced theft.
- 26.2% of respondents had been robbed.
- 19.7% of young people reported persistent bullying.
- 21.4% of respondents reported having been threatened with violence.
- 19.2% of young people had been attacked without a weapon, and 15.9% had been attacked with a weapon.

Results of the Optimus Study in South Africa therefore makes it clear that, by the time they are 15–17 years old, many young South Africans have experienced sexual, physical or emotional abuse, neglect, or have been exposed to high rates of violence. Girls bear the brunt of abuse, neglect and bullying, while boys are more likely than girls to experience other forms of violence.

Consequences of these forms of abuse are serious, and have implications both for the young people who suffer them, and for national development. Children who have been abused are more likely to engage in risky sexual activity and substance misuse, and to develop mental and physical health problems. These, in turn, undermine their capacity to succeed at school, to work, and to maintain healthy relationships. These problems cost the country enormously, both in terms of the costs of treating these problems, and in lost economic productivity.

However, child maltreatment is not inevitable: it can be prevented. This requires a multi-pronged approach. South Africa’s various laws, such as the Domestic Violence Act (116 of 1998), the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (32 of 2007) and the Children’s Act (38 of 2005) as well other policies and protocols, such as the Service Charter for Victims of Crime in SA (2004), not only unambiguously define the nature of offences that should be criminalised, but provide for a range of mechanisms for the reporting and management of abuse of and maltreatment against children through positive legal duties prescribed within the substantive law as well as comprehensive regulations. Read together, these laws and regulations support preventative measures to address child abuse and maltreatment. However, for these laws to be effective, the following prevention and intervention measures need to be addressed and strengthened:

- Where a child has experienced abuse or neglect, services need to be put in place to ensure that the child is safe and can receive the necessary physical and mental health treatment, so that the child victim is able to recover.
- Services also need to be in place to ensure that if abuse or neglect has occurred, that it does not recur. This could mean removing a child from a dangerous situation permanently, it could mean removing the perpetrator, or it could mean working with parents so that they are able to keep their child safe in future.
- Parents and families also need support to ensure that they can do their jobs. Reducing poverty (and hence the stress on families) is a key part of reducing child maltreatment, as is equipping parents with the skills for non-violent forms of discipline.

Reducing violence against South African children is both a moral imperative (to protect our children) and an imperative for national development. It can and must be achieved.
Introduction

Addressing violence against children, in its many forms, has rightly been highlighted as a priority in all spheres of government in South Africa. Experiences of violence – physical, sexual, and emotional – negatively impact on positive developmental outcomes for children as they grow into adulthood, and often affect them throughout the life-course. Despite the prioritisation of addressing violence against children in the country, there has to date been no study that accurately provides data on the lifetime experiences of sexual abuse, and other forms of maltreatment (abuse and neglect) and violence that children experience, in South Africa.

The Optimus Study is set to fill this gap, providing the first-ever representative data in South Africa on both incidence and prevalence of different forms of violence and maltreatment (including sexual, physical and emotional abuse, and neglect) against children. The study is one of an international comparative series of studies, with previous studies conducted in Switzerland and China.

The study will provide information on three areas for the development of appropriate and targeted policy and interventions. These three areas are:

- The annual incidence and lifetime prevalence rates in respect of child sexual abuse, violence and maltreatment in South Africa;
- The relationship between child sexual abuse and other forms of maltreatment, neglect and violence; and
- The extent and nature of other forms of child abuse and violence, including physical abuse, emotional abuse, neglect, and exposure to other forms of violence, such as peer victimisation, criminal violence and witnessing violence.

Knowing which forms of maltreatment are most prevalent in the country is key to identifying where intervention resources should best be targeted, and whether intervening in one form of child maltreatment (e.g. neglect) might also have the potential to address other forms (e.g. child sexual abuse). In this research bulletin, we report the lifetime prevalence of each form of abuse and violence experienced by South African children.

The study collected information from 9730 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 years old, stratified between households and schools. Of these 5635 were interviewed in randomly selected households, while 4095 were interviewed in schools serving the same areas (see note on methods). Questionnaires used in the household and in the school interviews were identical, and in each setting the young person was also given the opportunity to fill in a private questionnaire on their own. It is clear from our data that these self-administered questionnaires (particularly in schools) yielded the highest rates of reporting, and we therefore regard them as the most trustworthy.

This research bulletin is not the final research report on the findings of this national study. A comprehensive publication of the research findings will follow that will also include information about incidence of child maltreatment, perpetrators, risk factors and child protection agency responses. This bulletin is instead a summary of the study’s key findings about prevalence (abuse and neglect) and violence, and thus highlights the critical need for a national (re) focus on both prevention and intervention services.
**Study Demographics**

The study sample was stratified by households and schools. Within households, a total of 5,635 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 years were interviewed, of whom four out of five (75%) were black, just over one in ten (13.7%) were coloured, 7.4% were white, and 3.9% were Indian. Males were slightly overrepresented, accounting for 55.7% of the sample, while females constituted 44.3%. Just over one-third (35.1%) of the young people lived in metropolitan areas, 35.1% in urban areas, and 31.6% in rural areas. Almost all (96.6%, or 5,444 individuals) were attending school.

In schools, a total of 4,095 young people were interviewed, of whom 87% were black, one in ten (10.1%) were coloured, 1.5% were white, and 1.3% were Indian. Just over half (51.7%) were male, while females constituted 48.3% of the schools sample. Almost half (46.8%) of those interviewed were in metropolitan areas, with just over one-quarter (27.9%) being in rural areas and one-quarter (25.3%) in urban areas.
Sexual abuse

Defining child sexual abuse
Child sexual abuse is defined variously in legal systems throughout the world, but, generally, tends to include any sexual acts, or attempts to commit sexual acts, with a child (as defined in the legal system concerned) with or without the child's consent. While staying close to the previous formulations of sexual offences in the Optimus Studies conducted in China and Switzerland, the definition of sexual offences – as defined in South Africa's Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007 (herein referred to as the 'Sexual Offences Act') – was the basis of how sexual offences were operationalised in the South African study. The statutory definition of rape in the 2007 Sexual Offences Act includes all forms of sexual penetration and is gender-neutral, meaning that ‘any person’ can commit an act of rape or be raped. Children under the age of 12 are viewed by the Act as incapable of consenting to sex. The Act separates sexual offences into acts of penetrative offences (rape) and non-penetrative offences (sexual assault).

In this study, we explored whether adolescents had been exposed to coerced (i.e. ‘unwanted’ or ‘by force’) and consensual sexual touching, exposure to intimate body parts or pornographic images, sexual harassment, and penetrative and non-penetrative sexual intercourse (actual or attempted) by or with an adult or peers of similar age.

Child and adolescent ‘sexuality’ and its development are highly contested both within child development literature and within legal systems the world over. Of particular concern is vulnerability to sexual abuse, as well as whether adolescents are capable of understanding the sexual, physical and psychological consequences of sexual activity that they engage in, albeit consensually. The ‘age of consent’ has caused serious dissonance in South Africa, to the extent that it was brought to the attention of the Constitutional Court and, subsequently, to Parliament, where the (de)criminalisation of consensual sexual activity between adolescents was intensely scrutinised. In the end, the age of consent remained 16, but the law more clearly decriminalises consensual sexual activity between adolescents of similar ages (12–16).

In this study, however, we draw on adolescents’ own experiences and perceptions of sexual abuse. This means that adolescents define for themselves how they experienced certain sexual events in their lives. Coercion and consent are therefore defined by the adolescent. Since sex (whether consensual or coerced) and expressions of sexuality are often difficult, or embarrassing, to discuss with a stranger, the adolescents in this study were also afforded the opportunity to complete a self-administered questionnaire in which they could more anonymously disclose their sexual experiences (as well as other experiences of abuse and neglect that might be difficult to discuss with a stranger).

It is critical to remember that section 54 of the Sexual Offences Act provides that:

Any person who has knowledge that a sexual offence has been committed against a child must report such knowledge immediately to a police official. If that person fails to report such knowledge, they will be guilty of an offence.
The Children’s Act of 2005 also covers reporting of sexual offences against children. For instance, section 110(1) states that, if there is a reasonable suspicion that a child is being abused in a way that causes physical injury, sexual abuse or neglect, that reasonable suspicion must be reported to a social worker, a designated child protection unit or organisation, or to the police. Young people participating in this study were made aware of our duty to report abuse or neglect and were immediately and appropriately referred if these had not yet been reported to an authority as defined in the aforementioned Acts.

Child sexual abuse
In this study, the following matters regarding abuse were explored through interviewer-administered questionnaires as well as much shorter self-administered questionnaires collected from both homes and schools:

- Sexual abuse by known or unknown adult(s);
- Sexual abuse by a child(ren) or teen(s);
- Forced sexual intercourse (actual or attempted);
- Sexual-exposure abuse;
- Written or verbal sexual harassment;
- Sexual experience with adult(s);
- Sexual abuse related to gang initiation; and
- Sexual abuse related to animal(s).

The questions in the sexual-experiences section of this study explored multiple types of sexual abuse, including variations with regard to abusers and contexts. Variation in the reporting of sexual abuse can be seen between provinces, between ages, between male and female respondents, and between the interviewer-administered and self-administered questionnaires.

Rates reported in the school survey
As can be seen in Figure 1, 12.8% of the 4 095 young people who completed the main administered questionnaires in the school study reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime. In comparison with the self-administered questionnaires conducted in schools, an increase of 7% is seen in the reporting on the same question, meaning that one in five young people (19.8%) have experienced sexual abuse in their lifetime. This is a theme throughout the data as reported rates are consistently higher in the self-administered questionnaires as opposed to the interviewer-administered questionnaires.

While slightly less than 1% of respondents (0.9%, n=35) in the schools interviews disclosed an unknown adult ever touching them without their consent, the self-administered questionnaires showed more than a sixfold increase in this rate of reporting of 5.5% (n=222). Rates from the self-administered questionnaires were also significantly higher for a known adult ever touching private parts and a peer group ever touching private parts, both of which are reported four times more in the self-administered questionnaires. The reporting of forced sex increases from 3.2% (n=129) in the main schools questionnaires to 11.7% (n=469) in the self-administered questionnaires, whereas disclosure of consensual sexual activity rose from 7.1% in the main schools questionnaires to 15.7% in the self-administered ones.
Figure 1: Lifetime exposure to sexual abuse, as reported in schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Self-administered</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever experienced ANY sexual abuse</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown adult ever touched respondents’ private parts or forced them to have sex</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any child or teen ever made respondents do sexual things against their will</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known adult ever touched respondents’ private parts or made respondents touch their private parts</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone ever tried to hurt respondents’ feelings by saying or writing something sexual about their bodies</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone ever tried to force respondents to have sex of any kind, even if it did not happen</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone ever made respondents look at their private parts by using force or surprise, or force respondents to watch them masturbate or view nude pictures or videos</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents ever do any sexual things with anyone 18 or older, even things they both wanted</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rates reported in the household survey
As with the schools data, lower rates of sexual abuse were observed in the household interview when compared with the self-administered questionnaires (see Figure 2), as 5% more adolescents reported ever experiencing any sexual abuse in the latter questionnaires. Furthermore, significant differences in reporting were identified when comparing the number of respondents who had sexual experiences with adults, either consensually or non-consensually. While only 2.2% of respondents reported forced sexual intercourse (actual or attempted) in the household interview, this figure increased to 6.6% in the self-administered questionnaires.

Figure 2: Lifetime exposure to sexual abuse, as reported in households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Self-administered</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever experienced ANY sexual abuse</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown adult ever touched respondents’ private parts or forced them to have sex</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Known adult ever touched respondents’ private parts or made respondents touch their private parts</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone ever try to hurt respondents’ feelings by saying or writing something sexual about their bodies</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone ever tried to force respondents to have sex of any kind, even if it did not happen</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any child or teen ever made respondents do sexual things against their will</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anyone ever made respondents look at their private parts by using force or surprise, or force respondents to watch them masturbate or view nude pictures or videos</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondents ever do any sexual things with anyone 18 or older, even things they both wanted</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th>Self-administered</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Differences in reported rates by gender, race and province

Rates of reported experiences of sexual abuse also differed by gender. There were large differences between the interviewer-administered and self-administered questionnaires, in both schools and households. In the schools questionnaires, male responses increased from 10.8% (n=228) in the interview to 20.3% (n=430) in the self-administered questionnaires, while female responses increased from 15% (n=296) in the interview to 19.2% (n=379) in the self-administered questionnaires. What is abundantly clear is that, in the self-administered questionnaires, more males than females were found to disclose sexual maltreatment. A similar pattern was true for the household sample. From the interview to the self-administered questionnaires, male responses had increased from 9.5% to 15.6%, while female responses had increased from 13.8% to 17.4% (see Figure 3).

Reporting of sexual abuse also varies slightly between young people of different races. In the interviews in schools, black (n=462) and coloured (n=54) adolescents had the highest prevalence of reporting sexual abuse (both 13%), followed by white (9.5%, n=6) adolescents. The lowest levels of sexual abuse were reported by Indian (3.8%, n=2) adolescents. The rates of sexual abuse increased significantly for all race groups in the schools self-administered questionnaires, with 21.2% (n=88) of coloured, 19.7% (n=701) of black, 17.5% (n=11) of white and 17% (n=9) of Indian adolescents disclosing experiences of sexual abuse.

Figure 3: Lifetime exposure to sexual abuse, by gender

The use of a provincial lens to examine this data shows stark differences in the percentages of adolescents reporting sexual abuse through the interview and through the self-administered questionnaires in schools.

The provinces with the highest reporting of sexual abuse were Mpumalanga and Gauteng. In the interviewer-administered schools questionnaires, 23% of all participants from Mpumalanga reported having experienced sexual abuse, while this figure jumped to 36.8% of all Mpumalanga participants in the self-administered questionnaires. Of the reports of sexual abuse in Gauteng, 20.2% reported experiencing sexual abuse in the main administered questionnaires, which increased slightly to 23% in the self-administered questionnaires. Following these two provinces, the North West (19.2%; 17.8%), the Eastern Cape (14.2%; 21.4%) and the Free State (13.6%; 20.8%) had the
third-, fourth- and fifth-highest rates of abuse in both interviewer-administered and self-administered questionnaires, respectively. Respondents from Limpopo province reported the lowest levels of sexual abuse in both the schools interviewer-administered (3.7%) and self-administered questionnaires (11.1%).

The household survey also showed significant differences between provinces in terms of reported sexual abuse. Relatively low rates were reported in KwaZulu-Natal, with 3.8% of adolescents reporting sexual abuse in the household interviewer-administered questionnaires and 6.9% reporting such abuse in the self-administered questionnaires. While Gauteng (18.1%) had the highest reported rates in the interviewer-administered questionnaires, Limpopo (24.2%) had the highest rates of reported sexual abuse in the self-administered questionnaires completed in adolescents’ homes. When considering only the household self-administered questionnaires, the data shows that the provinces with the highest reported rates of sexual abuse were Limpopo (24.2%), Mpumalanga (22.3%), and Gauteng (19.9%) – where at least a fifth of respondents disclosed sexual abuse.

Identity, age and knowledge of the abuser

Of 4 095 school respondents, 100 (n=2.4%) stated in the interview that a known adult had sexually abused them, while the vast majority, namely 97.5% (n=3 993), reported not having experienced abuse at the hands of an adult they knew. The number of young people who reported having been sexually abused by a known adult rose an incredible 5.7% in the self-administered questionnaires, with a total of 8.2% of school respondents (n=332) disclosing such an experience.

A similar increase in reporting sexual abuse by an adult is seen between the schools interview and self-administered questionnaires when the respondents were asked about adult abusers whom they did not know. While just less than 1% (0.9%) reported that they had been sexually abused by an adult stranger, in the interview, this number rose to 5.5% (n=222) when respondents were asked the same question in the self-administered questionnaires. Students reporting no abuse by strangers showed a proportional difference, dropping from 99.1% (n=4 060) to 94.5% (n=3 809).

Among the young people who were interviewed in their households, only 2.2% (n=110) reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse by a known adult. However, this figure rose to 5.1% in the self-administered questionnaires. Only 0.6% (n=37) reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse by an unknown adult. Of those

Risk factors for child maltreatment

Child maltreatment (abuse and neglect) is the result of a combination of multiple risk factors that operate at various levels (WHO, 1999).

Individual characteristics of a child that may increase his or her vulnerability to abuse include gender (female children usually experience higher levels of some forms of sexual abuse), age (as a child approaches puberty his/her risk in respect of abuse increases) and disability.

A significant number of risk factors for child maltreatment are located within the family. A lack of parental supervision, the absence of a father as a role model, marital conflict or an unhappy marriage, the presence of a stepfather, an emotionally unavailable mother, single parents, parental substance abuse, parental mental health issues, and parents who were themselves abused have all been associated with child maltreatment.

Societal risk factors for abuse and maltreatment include living in a dangerous community, poverty, patriarchal values, and a poorly functioning police service and criminal justice system.
who completed the self-administered questionnaires, 3.5% (n=191) reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse by an unknown adult.

The final question regarding the identity of the sexual abuser focused on abusers who were children or teenagers. An increase of 7.2% was seen between the schools interview and the self-administered questionnaires. Notably, in both questionnaires, the number of students who reported having been abused by a child or teen was more than the number of students who reported sexual abuse by adults. Of the 4 095 respondents in the schools interview, 2.1% (n=87) reported sexual abuse by a child or teen, while the majority of the sample (97.9%, n=4 008) stated that a child or teen had not abused them. In the self-administered questionnaires, 9.4% (n=384) reported having experienced sexual abuse by a child or teen.

Of the 5 635 young people who completed the main interviewer-administered household questionnaires, only 2.2% reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse by a child or teen, and 97.8% (n=5 521) did not report abuse. However, this figure rose to 7% in the self-administered questionnaires.

**The nature of child sexual abuse**
The questions then shifted from focusing on the identity, age and knowledge of the abuser to the nature of the sexual abuse itself. The first of these questions related to forced sexual intercourse or rape (actual intercourse or attempted). Of the 4 095 respondents in the schools sample, 3.2% (n=129) reported attempted or actual forced sexual intercourse, and 96.8% (n=3 965) reported never having experienced forced sexual intercourse in the interviewer-administered questionnaires. In the self-administered questionnaires, 11.7% (n=469) reported having experienced forced sexual intercourse. Again, there is an increase in reporting of sexual abuse from the schools interview to the self-administered questionnaires.

Using the data from the household interviews, we were able to identify that 2.2% (n=128) of 5 635 respondents reported having experienced forced sexual intercourse. Of the young people who completed the self-administered questionnaires, the number of respondents who reported actual or attempted rape increased to 6.6% (n=366). This is nearly three times higher than the number reported in the interview.

Sexual-exposure abuse includes the exposure of young persons to nudity (in the media or in reality), pornography, or masturbation by surprise or by force. Of those responding to the schools interview, 4.1% (n=166) reported having been abused sexually through exposure, and 95.9% (n=3 926) reported not having been exposed to anything in a sexually abusive manner. Again, a stark increase in reporting was seen among the respondents who used the self-administered questionnaires, with 8.5% more young people reporting sexually abusive exposure (12.9%, n=517).

Using the main household questionnaires, we were able to identify that 3.3% (n=192) of the respondents reported having been abused sexually through exposure. Reporting of sexual abuse through exposure more than doubled in the self-administered questionnaires, with 8.1% (n=450) of respondents reporting such abuse.

One type of abuse that was explored through the schools interview, but not through the self-administered questionnaires, was written or verbal sexual harassment. Of the 4 090 young persons who answered this question, 2.4% (n=97) disclosed having been sexually abused through someone writing or saying something sexual about them or their body. Similarly, in the main household component 2.2% (n=121) of respondents were found to have experienced written or verbal sexual harassment.
At this point in the questionnaires, the nature and identity of the abuser were examined together. Respondents were asked if they had ever engaged in sexual conduct with an adult (someone 18 years old or older) either consensually or non-consensually. The increase in reporting between the schools interviews and the self-administered questionnaires was evident. A total of 289 young people (7.1%) reported ‘Yes’ to ever engaging in sexual activity with someone 18 years or older, even if both wanted to, in the schools interview, compared with 15.7% (n=640) of respondents in the self-administered one, thus demonstrating an increase of 8.6%.

From the household interview component, we were able to identify that 6.3% (n=357) of the respondents reported having sexual experience with an adult. In the self-administered questionnaires, this figure rose to 13.1% (n=722). This is more than two times higher than the number reported in the main questionnaires.

Two further questions gathering information on forced sexual activity as a result of gang initiation and forced or encouraged sexual activity with animals were asked through the self-administered questionnaires, which was collected from both households and schools. Of those who completed the household self-administered questionnaires, 3.3% (n=187) reported having been sexually abused as a result of gang initiation. In comparison with the young people who completed the same question in the schools self-administered questionnaires, 31 more adolescents (5.4%) reported experiencing this form of sexual abuse. The respondents to the household self-administered questionnaires were then asked if they had ever been forced to engage in sexual activity with an animal. Of the respondents, 2.1% (n=114) responded that they had experienced this form of abuse. Similarly, in the schools self-administered questionnaires, 96 respondents (2.4%) reported that they had ever been forced or encouraged to engage in sexual activity with an animal.

Lastly, on comparing the household interview with the schools interview, we found only slight variations in responses to adolescents reporting experiences of any form of sexual abuse. However, more notable differences were found when comparing the household and school responses to the self-administered questionnaires, especially with regard to the questions on forced sexual intercourse (attempted or actual) and sexual-exposure abuse. Approximately 5%, or 87 more young people, reported experiencing forced or attempted rape in the self-administered schools questionnaires in comparison with the self-administered household questionnaires. Similarly, for the question regarding sexual-exposure abuse, 67 more adolescents reported experiencing this form of abuse in the self-administered schools questionnaires.

Reported rates of experiencing any form of sexual abuse varied quite widely in this report (as they do for the other forms of abuse that were reported). The highest rate (19.8%) was reported in the self-administered questionnaires in the schools. Given that this was the most private of the possibilities for response, this is most likely to be the most accurate figure that we report. This rate is considerably higher than the average global rate of 12.7% found in a review of studies from around the world. It is, however, very similar to the highest rates identified in the global review: 21.5% for girls in Australia, and 19.3% for boys in Africa. Thus the rate of sexual abuse in South Africa appears to be higher than the global average, but no worse than the highest rates found around the world.
A note on comparing rates of sexual victimisation in South Africa and other countries

The frequency, extent and nature of sexual offences in South Africa have gained worldwide attention over the past years, conferring on the country the dubious title of ‘rape capital of the world’. This title, however, is difficult to validate. Internationally, comparative statistics of sexual offences are imprecise, as there are notable differences in how sexual offences are defined, not to mention the diverse methods of recording and calculating these data. This also applies to research efforts establishing ‘victimisation’ rates through population surveys. With regard to the latter, sexual offences are defined and perceived variously as rape, sexual offences, gender-based violence, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), intimate and non-intimate partner violence, defilement, sexual assault, and so on. There is also variance with respect to population, most notably regarding what gender(s) and ages are being captured by both official and survey-data collection processes. Another variable hampering easy comparison is the source of data: some country-level statistics rely only on offences that are reported to the police and are then sent for further investigation, whereas others include cases that are either reported and withdrawn, or are reported, with other actions being taken (mediation or diversion). Finally, statistics are gathered over timeframes that vary from one year to decades, and also vary in respect of geography (city-wide as opposed to national), thereby making them incomparable.

Non-sexual child maltreatment

Child neglect
Child neglect is defined by the World Health Organization as including:

…both isolated incidents, as well as a pattern of failure over time on the part of a parent or other family member to provide for the development and well-being of the child – where the parent is in a position to do so – in one or more of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions.1 (p. 9)

One of the key parts of the definition of child neglect is that it occurs in a context where parents are able to provide for their children, but choose not to do so. Parents who are living in poverty and who cannot provide adequate food or health care (for instance) for their children are thus not considered neglectful. This is an important point in South Africa, particularly, where, in 2012, more than 10-million children lived in extreme poverty.2

Neglect has consequences for children, consequences that are as serious as any other form of child abuse. Children who have been neglected are more likely to be aggressive, or depressed and anxious, than those who have not been maltreated in any way, and are more likely to experience delays in cognitive and emotional development than children who have been physically abused or not maltreated at all.3–5 As adults, children who have been neglected are more likely to misuse substances, have mental health illness, use social services, and to be violent.5

In this study, we explored five different kinds of physical neglect:

1. Whether the respondent had ever had to look after himself or herself because a parent drank too much alcohol, took drugs, or wouldn’t get out of bed;
2. Whether the respondent had ever had to go looking for a parent because the parent had left him/her alone, or with brothers or sisters, and she/he did not know where the parent was;
3. Whether the respondent’s parents had ever had people around or over at the house whom the respondent was afraid to be around;
4. Whether the respondent had ever had to live in a home that was broken down, unsafe or unhealthy (We attempted to differentiate this from poverty, as the question offered examples to respondents of what this meant: so we asked the question with the following clarification: For example, it (your home) had stairs, toilets or sinks that didn’t work, trash piled up, and things like that?; and
5. Whether there was ever a time when his/her parents did not care if she/he was clean, wore clean clothes, or brushed teeth or hair.

All five were explored in the interviewer-administered questionnaires. Only questions 3 and 4 were asked in the self-administered questionnaires.

Rates reported in the school survey
Of the 4 095 young people who participated in the school interview, 7.9% (n=323) reported having experienced some form of neglect at some point in their lives. As is the pattern in much of the rest of the data, more young people – 21.3% (n=871) – or more than 1 in 5) – reported having experienced the two forms of neglect explored in the self-administered questionnaires. There was no difference by race in terms of experiences of neglect in the main schools questionnaires: young people of all races were equally likely to report having been neglected. Reports of neglect in the main schools questionnaires
did, however, differ by gender: 9.6% of girls reported having been neglected, whereas only 6.3% of boys reported neglect.

**Rates reported in the household survey**

Among the young people who answered the questionnaires in their homes, there was a similar pattern: 8.9% reported this form of maltreatment in the interview, and 17% reported having experienced any one of the two forms explored in the self-administered questionnaires. Yet, in the household survey, we did identify differences by race: black respondents (9.6%) were most likely to report neglect, followed by coloured (8.3%), white (2.6%) and Indian (3.1%) respondents, with respondent being far less likely to report neglect in the main questionnaires. These differences were even more pronounced in the self-administered questionnaires. See Figure 4 for the self-administered responses.

**Figure 4: Neglect by race (household self-administered data)**

In terms of gender, rates of neglect were also more likely to be reported by girls (11.3%) in the household interviews than by boys (6.9%). In the self-administered household questionnaires, rates were markedly higher, but retained the gender difference: 18.9% of girls reported having experienced one or both of the two forms of neglect we explored in these questionnaires, and 15.5% of boys reported them.

Using data from the household interview, we were also able to identify that there are considerable differences between provinces in terms of reported neglect. Relatively low rates of 3.6% and 4.9% were reported in the Eastern and Northern Cape provinces, respectively, with relatively high rates reported in Limpopo (11.6%), and Mpumalanga and KwaZulu-Natal (both 11.1%). Rates of 9.7% were reported in the Western Cape, 9.0% in the Free State, 8.2% in Gauteng, and 7.1% in the North West province.

The forms of neglect that we studied could all be classed as physical neglect. Studies of neglect from low- and middle-income countries are rare: all the data thus far comes from Europe and North America. On average, the rate of physical neglect identified in studies from these contexts is 16.3%. Thus the rates reported to us in the interviews were markedly lower than this, but higher than the global average in the self-administered questionnaires.

The interviews were longer than the self-administered questionnaires, and thus enabled us to explore various different forms of neglect.
As is clear from Figure 5, the most frequent form of neglect was where children lived in a home that was broken down, unsafe or unhealthy.

In the schools interview, boys and girls were equally likely to report having to look after themselves because a parent was intoxicated or would not get out of bed, that they had to go looking for a parent because they did not know where the parent was, and that there was a time when their parents did not care if the respondent was clean and appropriately groomed. However, girls (6.2%, n=122) were more likely than boys (2.5%, n=53) to report being afraid of people their parents had around. Similarly, girls (5.8%, n=115) were more likely than boys (4.0%, n=84) to report living in a broken down, unsafe or unhealthy home. However, this pattern was slightly different in the self-administered schools questionnaires, where we asked the questions about living conditions in the home and parents’ visitors again. Higher rates of these forms of neglect were reported, and the pattern by gender was different. In the self-administered questionnaires, boys (14.8%, n=314) and girls (15.4%, n=304) were equally likely to report living in an unsafe home. As with the main questionnaires, however, girls (17.3%, n=342) were more likely than boys (12.1%, n=255) to report having been afraid of their parents’ visitors.

When respondents were interviewed in their homes, similar patterns were obtained as in the schools interviews: girls (6.5%) were nearly twice as likely as boys (3.3%) to report being afraid of people their parents had around. Girls (8.4%) were also somewhat more likely than boys (5.6%) to report living in an unsafe or unhealthy home. There were no differences by gender for the other forms of neglect. Similar patterns were found in the self-administered questionnaires: 12.9% of girls as opposed to 8.9% of boys had been afraid of people their parents had over, and 15.1% of girls reported living in an unsafe home, compared with 12.8% of boys.
Physical abuse

Physical abuse is defined by the World Health Organization as ‘the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in – or has a high likelihood of resulting in – harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity’. (p. 9) This notes that much physical violence against children in the home is intended to discipline children.

In the interviews administered at schools, 850 respondents (20.8%) reported having been hit, beaten, kicked or physically hurt by an adult who was supposed to be taking care of them. In the self-administered questionnaires at schools, this amounted to 1 410 respondents, or 34.4%. In the interviews administered in respondents’ homes, 18% reported physical abuse by a caregiver; in the self-administered questionnaires completed by respondents at home, the rate reported was 26.1%.

Considering that the self-administered questionnaires which respondents completed at school is most likely to be reliable, over one-third of young South Africans have therefore suffered being hit, beaten or kicked by an adult caregiver.

There were no differences in rates reported by respondents at school in terms of race, but girls were more likely to report physical abuse than boys. In the school interviews, 489 girls (24.7%) reported physical abuse, compared with 17.1% (n=361) of boys. Patterns were similar in the self-administered school questionnaires: 37.2% (n=725) reported having experienced physical abuse, whereas 32.6% of boys (n=685) reported this. However, there were slightly different patterns reported when respondents were interviewed in their own homes. In this setting, there were significant differences by race with regard to both the main and self-administered questionnaires: coloured (19.7% interview; 25.4% self-administered questionnaires) and black respondents (19.0% interview; 27.8% self-administered questionnaires) were most likely to report physical abuse, whereas rates were much lower for white (9.8% interview; 13.4% self-administered questionnaires) and Indian (6.5% interview; 9.8% self-administered questionnaires) respondents. In the questionnaires administered in young people’s homes, we found similar patterns with regard to gender. Girls (21.6%) were more likely to report physical abuse than boys (15.2%) in the interview. This was also true in respect of the self-administered questionnaires which respondents completed at home: 28.7% of girls reported this form of child abuse, compared with 24.0% of boys.

Therefore, we can assert with confidence, that coloured and black children, and girls, are more at risk of physical abuse in South Africa than white and Indian children, and boys.

There were also significant differences by province. Using data from the self-administered household questionnaires, Mpumalanga had the highest rate of physical abuse (33%), followed by Limpopo (30.1%), the Western Cape (29.9%), Northern Cape (28.5%), KwaZulu-Natal (26.1%), Gauteng (25.7%), the Free State (24.2%), and the North West (23.1%), followed finally by the Eastern Cape, where a significantly lower rate of 17.5% was reported.

A meta-analysis of rates of physical abuse around the world found that, on average, 22.6% of study participants reported having experienced physical abuse. Rates reported in this nationwide prevalence study are therefore considerably higher than the global average, that is, if one considers the rates reported in the self-administered questionnaires answered at schools to be the most accurate.
**Emotional abuse**

The World Health Organization notes that emotional abuse has ‘a high probability of damaging the child’s physical or mental health, or its physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.’ 1 (p. 10).

In this study, we asked about one possible form of emotional abuse: ‘At any time in your life, did you get scared or feel really bad because grown-ups (adults) in your life called you names, said mean things to you, or said they didn’t want you?’ In the school interviews, 16.1% of respondents (n=650) reported this form of child abuse (the question was not asked in the self-administered questionnaires). There were no significant differences by race in terms of emotional abuse reported in the schools questionnaires, but there were differences by gender: this form of abuse was more likely to be reported by girls (19.6% of female respondents, or n=382) than by boys (12.8%, n=268). Reported rates were slightly lower in the household interviews: 12.6% said they had experienced this form of abuse. In the household interviews, there were differences by race: coloured (15.1%) respondents were most likely to report this, followed by black (13.3%), white (5.1%) and Indian (3.4%) respondents. Girls (16.2%) were considerably more likely to report emotional abuse than boys (9.6%) when they were interviewed at home.

There were significant differences by province for rates of emotional abuse reported, and these followed a different pattern from those reported with regard to physical abuse (see Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Emotional abuse by province (main household questionnaires)**
Exposure to family violence

Exposure to violence within the family has been shown to result in significant harm to children, including emotional, cognitive, psychosocial and behavioural problems, as well as various negative health-related outcomes. Exposure to violence, particularly domestic violence, can also increase the risk of children entering into similar relationships as they mature into adulthood, both as victims and/or perpetrators of domestic violence. Exposure to violence has also been identified as significantly increasing the risk of the child coming into contact with the criminal justice system as he/she grows older.

In total, just under one in four (23.1%) children interviewed in schools, and 16.5% of children interviewed in homes, have been exposed to some form of violence in their family. The most common form of violence witnessed was parents or caregivers physically hurting a sibling (27.8%, n=1 139 of children in schools, and 17.7%, n=1 004 of children in households), followed by one parent or caregiver threatening to hurt the other, with almost one in four (23.8%, n=974) children in schools, and 14.3% (n=854) of those in households reporting they had witnessed this. Actual physical violence, in the form of slapping, was reported by 19.3% (n=791) of children in schools and just over one in ten (11.2%, n=677) in homes, while slightly fewer reported having seen their parent or caregiver kick, choke or beat the other (14.1%, n=956 and 8.2%, n=490, respectively) (see Figure 7).

There were statistically significant differences between both the race and the sex of children in both schools and homes in their exposure to violence at home. Of those interviewed in schools, exposure to violence in the home was highest amongst Indian school children (24.5%), followed by black school children (23.3%), with the lowest being among white school children (15.9%). The pattern was somewhat different among those interviewed in households, with black children reporting the highest levels of exposure to family violence (17.8%), followed by coloured children (15%), and Indian (11%) and white (6.2%) children.
In both the home and school samples, girls were significantly more likely to report witnessing violence in the home than males (24.3% in schools and 18.3% in the home), compared with 15.1% of boys interviewed in households and 22% of those interviewed in schools.
Exposure to other forms of violence

Direct victimisation
Like other forms of both direct and indirect violence experienced by adolescents, experiences of what might be termed ‘conventional crime’ can have long-lasting negative consequences for children, both at the time of the experience and as they grow into adulthood. A number of questions were asked in the study on the experience of a range of violence, or threats of violence, that the adolescent might have experienced over their lifetime.

The most common form of crime reported was having goods taken from them and not being given back – essentially theft. More than two out of five (44.5%, n=1,820) respondents at school reported having experienced this, while approximately one in four children in both homes and schools reported having something taken from them by force (23.1%, n=1,319 and 26.2%, n=1,072, respectively). One in five (19.7%, n=806) children interviewed at school reported being persistently bullied – an act that explicitly involved an unequal power relationship, with the bully exerting power over the person being bullied. Only slightly fewer children interviewed in households reported having been bullied (16.2%, n=965).

Threats of violence, while not entailing any actual physical contact or harm, can be equally traumatising for children, negatively impacting the development of pro-social and healthy peer or child–adult relationships. A child who is threatened with violence or harm may be more at risk of negative mental health outcomes, as well as poor learning outcomes. One in five of the children interviewed in both households and schools reported that someone had threatened to hurt them (19.1%, n=1,072 and 21.4%, n=876, respectively).

Only slightly fewer adolescents had been attacked by someone in an incident that did not involve a weapon (19.2%, n=786 of children interviewed at schools and 15.8%, n=939 of those interviewed at home). Experience of attacks with a weapon, which could include a gun, knife, stick, rock, or any other physical object, were only slightly less common, with approximately one in eight children reporting having been attacked with a weapon (15.9%, n=651 and 14.9%, n=831 in schools and homes, respectively).

Taking all the different experiences of conventional crime into account, approximately one in five adolescents interviewed across both homes and schools had experienced some form of violence or crime over their lifetime, with rates fractionally higher among those interviewed in schools (21.6%, n=884) compared with those interviewed in households (18.1%, n=982).

There was some variation in experiences of different forms of conventional violence by both race and gender. Coloured (28.8%, n=192), followed by black (23.2%, n=1,105) adolescents interviewed in households were most likely to have had something that they were carrying taken from them by force, while, in the case of those interviewed in schools, this was experienced most by coloured (34%, n=141) followed by Indian (30.2%, n=16) adolescents. Coloured (49.9%, n=207), followed by white (44.5%, n=28) children interviewed in schools were most likely to have had something stolen from them and not given back, while, among those interviewed in households, coloured (44.1%, n=325), followed by black (38.5%, n=1,656) adolescents were most likely to report this form of victimisation. Coloured adolescents interviewed in both schools (19.7%, n=81) and households (13.5%, n=111) were most likely to have had something of theirs broken or ruined by someone else on purpose.
In the household sample, coloured (22.8%, n=141 and 29.8%, n=210), followed by black adolescents (15.1%, n=634 and 15.2%, n=692) were most likely to have fallen victim to physical attacks both with as well as without the use of a weapon respectively.

In the school sample, Indian (28.3%, n=15), followed by coloured (26.5%, n=110) adolescents reported the highest rates of physical assault with a weapon. Physical assaults without the use of a weapon was most commonly reported by coloured (32.9%, n=136) adolescents – with nearly a third disclosing such victimisation. Black (17.7%, n=631) and white (17.5%, n=11) adolescents reported the second and third highest rates of physical assault without the use of a weapon – though the difference between the races was fractional. Coloured adolescents (28.1%, n=206) responding to the questionnaires in their homes, reported the highest rates of bullying, compared to 15.7% (n=705) of black, 10.7% (n=41) of white and 3.9% (n=13) of Indian adolescents. A different trend emerged among the respondents who were interviewed at school. A total of 27% – more than a quarter – of both coloured (n=110) and white (n=17) respondents reported having ever been persistently teased or bullied, followed by Indian (18.9%, n=10) and black (18.7%, n=667) respondents.

**Figure 9: Lifetime victimisation as a result of conventional crime (households and schools)**

Boys were statistically more likely to have experienced all forms of conventional crimes than girls, with the exception of being hit or attacked on the grounds of some form of discrimination (on the grounds of race, religion, sexual preference, disability, nationality, etc.), attempted kidnapping and bullying. Girls interviewed across both schools and
households were significantly more likely to have been bullied when compared to boys. Girls in both households and schools were also more likely to have been a victim of an attempted kidnapping than boys, although the difference between sexes for this form of crime was not statistically significant in the schools sample.

**Indirect victimisation (witnessing violence)**

Indirect victimisation occurs when children are also exposed to violence in any domain – home, school or community – but are not the direct victims or intended recipient of the violent act. Like witnessing violence in the home, witnessing violence of any form can negatively impact on health, educational and other well-being outcomes for a child. When children see violence, they may develop attachment problems, suffer from mental health challenges such as depression or anxiety, and develop aggressive and antisocial behaviour and attitudes.

Children in the study were asked in the interviews whether they had been exposed to six different scenarios, all of which involved witnessing others commit some form of violence against another person: ever seen anyone attacked or hit on purpose using a weapon; ever seen anyone attacked on purpose with a stick, rock, gun or knife, or something else that would hurt; ever had anyone steal something from the house that belongs to the household or family living there; ever seen a parent hit, beat, kick or physically hit the child’s siblings (excluding spanking); ever been in a place where the child could see or hear people being shot, bombs going off or street riots; and whether anyone close to the respondent, including family, friends or neighbours, had ever been murdered. In total, one in six (16.9%, n=693) of those interviewed in schools, and 18.2% (n=929) of those interviewed in households, had been indirectly victimised through witnessing or hearing of violence of some form. Girls were significantly more likely to have witnessed some form of violence than boys.

Most commonly, indirect victimisation assumed the form of seeing someone else attacked without a weapon (45.9%, n=1 869 of those interviewed in schools, and 33.2%, n=1 859 of those interviewed in households), while more than two out of five (42.9%, n=1 749) of the school sample, and just under one in three (32.2%, n=1 774) of those interviewed in households, had seen a more serious attack involving some form of weapon. Just under one-quarter (23.6%, n=964) of children interviewed in schools, and one in five (19.6%, n=1 109) interviewed in homes, had had something stolen from their house; while one in seven (17.3%, n=707) in schools and 13.5% (n=818) interviewed in homes had at some point in their life been in a place where they could see or hear shots being fired, bombs going off or street rioting. One in eight (14.6%, n=596) had seen a parent hit, beat or kick a sibling, while more than one in ten (11.3%, n=460) learners at schools had at some point in their life known the most extreme form of violence, that is, had known someone close to them – a friend or a family member or a neighbour – who had been murdered.

There was no statistically significant difference in the experiences of children by race in witnessing or being exposed to some other form of violence.
Exposure to ANY indirect victimisation

Respondent ever had someone close to them murdered

Respondent ever been in a place where they could see or hear people being shot, bombs going off or street riots

Anyone ever steal something that belonged to the respondents’ family or their home

Ever seen anyone get attacked on purpose with a stick, rock, gun, knife or other thing that would hurt

Ever seen anyone get attacked or hit on purpose without using a stick, rock, gun, knife or something that would hurt

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Conclusion

As mentioned previously, child maltreatment has been the focus of several small-scale studies in South Africa, but no *nationally representative* study on the extent or impact of child maltreatment has existed hitherto. The prevalence of child sexual abuse in South Africa has therefore been largely unknown, which has meant that governmental resources put towards addressing policy, social development and justice responses (amongst others), have been based on official reporting rates - which are underestimates of its prevalence: in any country, many instances of child maltreatment go unreported. For example, police statistics report that there are over 60 000 reported cases of sexual offences a year, with the last Annual Report of the South African Police Service reporting 62 649 cases. It is suggested, however, that only one in nine sexual offences are reported in South Africa. There are a number of problems with official police statistics, including the fact that 'sexual offences' are not disaggregated (there are 60 types of sexual offences in the Sexual Offences Act) and that the recording of crime statistics is often based on 'the most serious offences'. For instance, where a victim is raped by multiple offenders, this is recorded as one incident of rape. Furthermore, even though a number of sexual, physical or other offences were committed during the course of a rape incident, only the most serious offences will be recorded (i.e. rape and armed robbery, excluding other possible offences that took place during the incident, such as physical assault/grievous bodily harm).

There is indeed political will in South Africa to address child maltreatment; our legislative frameworks are evidence of this. While over the past decade, South Africa has developed forward-looking policies and legislation that focuses on both the prevention and treatment of maltreatment and offences against children, this has only relatively recently been promulgated and implemented. There has, until now, been no data to inform the possible impact, success or failure, of these policies.

This study, for the first time, provides the national data on not only sexual abuse but also other forms of child maltreatment, that can be used for planning purposes, against which the national and provincial policies can be assessed, and real, targeted interventions to address problematic areas be designed and implemented.

This research bulletin will be followed by a more detailed study report along with several research bulletins and policy briefs that will be intended to provide a more narrative analysis of the findings, as well as outline implications and concrete recommendations for policies and practice.
The overall goal of the Optimus Study was to estimate the annual incidence and lifetime prevalence of child sexual abuse, as well as to situate child sexual abuse in the context of other forms of child abuse and maltreatment, in a nationally representative sample of young people aged 15 to 17 years.

To do this, the study drew on two data sources: firstly, a population survey that was conducted with a sample of 15- to 17-year-old adolescents recruited nationally from schools as well as households; and, secondly, an agency component that consisted of in-depth interviews with frontline staff and agency directors servicing the communities or geographical spaces identified through the sampling process. For the population study – which is reported on in this Research Bulletin – the study sample frame was developed from population data obtained from the 2001 Census of South Africa, adjusted according to Statistics South Africa's 2011 census population numbers and other district council estimates. In order to obtain a representative sample of the population, a multistage stratified sample was designed for this survey, with province, geographic area (urban/rural) and race group being used as the explicit stratification variables. The sample was designed in three stages. In the first stage, primary sampling units (i.e. enumerator areas) were selected with a probability proportional to size (PPS) from the population sampling frame. In the second stage, households were selected systematically in each primary sampling unit, and, in the final stage, a single 15- to 17-year-old individual was randomly selected from the selected households. Weights were developed at all three stages to compensate for unequal inclusion probabilities, non-response, non-coverage and skewness resulting from the sample design and fieldwork. All household data reported on in this bulletin, draw on the weighted data designed to ensure that sample responses represent the target population as closely as possible. Schools were clustered according to the enumerator areas identified in the household component of the population study.

A combination of a face-to-face interviewer-administered questionnaire as well as a much shorter, self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from young adolescents. The main interviewer-administered questionnaire was designed to assess the prevalence of child sexual abuse in the context of other forms of maltreatment, the consequences of maltreatment, and the risk and protective factors related thereto. After each face-to-face interview, each adolescent completed a self-administered questionnaire which revisited the more sensitive areas of vulnerability and victimisation covered in the main interview. This allowed the respondents to disclose – more anonymously – anything that they may have felt uncomfortable about disclosing during the interview process.

The questionnaire designed for this study drew on two instruments mandated by the UBS Optimus Foundation for this study, namely the Juvenile Victimisation Questionnaire (JVQ; Finkelhor, Hamby, Ormrod, & Turner, 2005) and the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSCC; Briere, 2001). These two instruments were used to estimate the prevalence (i.e., number of incidents over the respondent’s lifetime) and incidence (i.e., number of incidents in the last year) of child sexual abuse, and the chief mental health consequences (anxiety, depression, anger, posttraumatic stress, dissociation, and sexual concerns) of abuse. Minor revisions and additions to these instruments were included in the questionnaire, specifically to shift the terminology from United States English to South African English so concepts were clearly understood in our context, to keep the questionnaire short to minimise subject burden, and to explore the risk factors for maltreatment. The questionnaire also ensured that it aligned with the definition of physical, sexual and other offences, as they are defined in South African legislation. Both administered and self-administered questionnaires were comprehensively pilot-tested to ensure children understood the concepts and were able to answer the questions accurately.

Given the age of the target population, informed consent was mandatory in all cases. Consent was obtained from both parents and adolescents before any interview was conducted. In addition to this, all interviews at school were conducted after permission to conduct the research was granted by the national and provincial departments of basic education, as well as school principals.
Sources


Author biographies

Patrick Burton is the Executive Director of the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP), an NGO working in the field of violence prevention nationally and regionally, with a particular focus on children and youth. Patrick is a post-graduate developmental researcher, having graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with a Higher Diploma in Development Planning, and from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban) with a Master of Science degree in Development Studies, with a gender focus. He has worked extensively in the field of security, HIV/AIDS, health, violence against children, online safety, and school violence prevention. Country experience includes South Africa, Malawi, Tanzania, Mozambique, Namibia, Democratic Republic of Congo, India and Bangladesh.

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