

Snapshot results of the 2005 National Youth Victimisation Study

Patrick Burton*

In the period between September 2004 and September 2005 over 4.3 million, or 41.5%, of South African children and youth between the ages of 12 and 22 years were victims of crime or violence, as measured in the first National Youth Victimisation Survey.¹

These crimes include assault, sexual assault/rape, theft, robbery, housebreaking and car hijacking. The crimes of assault, sexual assault/rape, theft and robbery are all crimes committed against the individual.

Crimes such as housebreaking and car hijacking, while generally not committed against an individual, are important in assessing the levels of crime that young people are directly exposed to, and which are likely to impact on their development, socialisation and experience and perceptions of life. A slightly higher percentage of young people fall victim to violent crime (26.6%) than to property crime (25.6%).

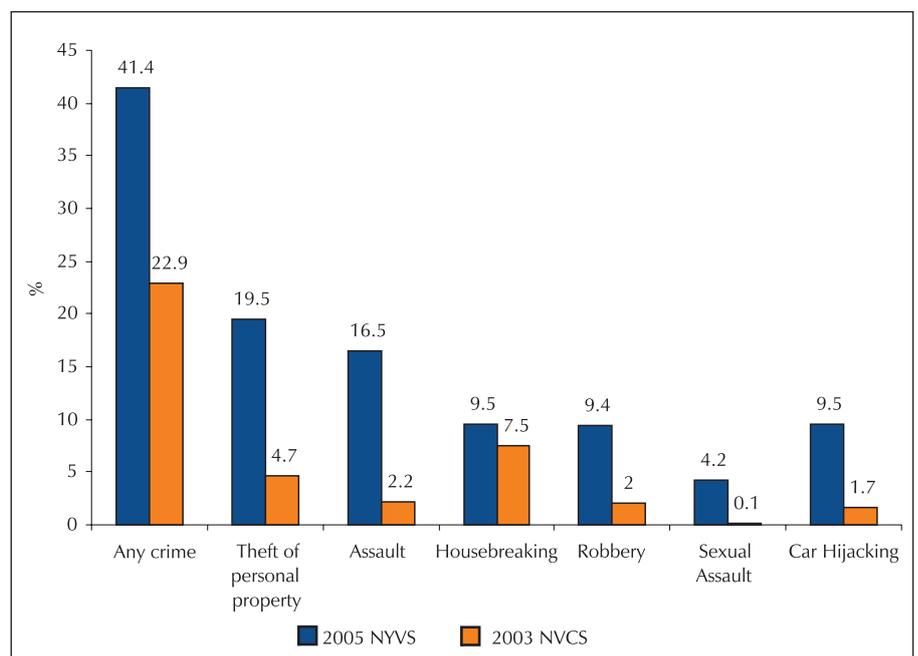
Young people in South Africa are twice as likely as adults to be victims of crime and violence.

The youth victimisation data is directly comparable to the 2003 National Victims of Crime Survey (NVCS) conducted by the Institute for Security Studies.² A comparison between the victimisation rates show

that young people in South Africa are twice as likely as adults to be victims of at least one crime. One in ten young people had experienced more than one crime over a 12 month period.

Young males are more at risk of becoming victims of crime and violence, with almost one out of two

Young and adult victims of crime in South Africa 2005: 2003



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		Child and Youth Victims	
		Counts	%
Any crime	Male	2 370 052	46.1
	Female	1 956 826	36.1
	Total	4 326 878	41.4

(46%) males reporting victimisation, compared to 37% of young females.

In total, just under 900 000 young people in KwaZulu-Natal fell prey to crime and violence, as opposed to 36 000 in the Northern Cape. While in terms of raw numbers more young people in KwaZulu-Natal fall victim to crime, those living in North West Province, followed by Mpumalanga and the Western Cape, are most likely to be victimised *vis-à-vis* the size of the population of young people living in these provinces.

Schools have become places associated with harm and fear for many young South Africans. One in five (16.3%) youth have been threatened with harm, scared or hurt while at school.

For half of these youngsters, such incidents happened on more than one occasion and were inflicted by learners from other classes at the school (43.9%), and less frequently, actual classmates (38.1%). More than

one in ten (12.8%) children were scared of specific places within their school, usually the toilets (49.3%), open grounds or playing fields (26.7%).

One in ten young people had been forced to do something they felt was wrong and did not want to do at school, while one in seven young people had a fellow learner threaten to say something to others that would stigmatise the young person.

About two million children and youth, or one in five, were victims of theft of personal property in the 12 month period.

As the most common crime, theft of personal property could include the theft of items such as money, wallets or purses, schoolbags, books, music equipment or any other personal belongings. By definition, the youth tended to be unaware of the crime as it was being committed, and only discovered the theft following the act. In a country where almost one out of

Assaults recorded in the survey include incidents of bullying that occur at school. The frequency of violent experiences at schools contributes to the levels of fear that many children expressed towards their school environment. One in ten youngsters (9.7%) attending school reported that they were scared at school. In total, 445 000 children or youth, accounting for 7% of those attending school, were assaulted while at school.

two (48.5%) inhabitants fall under the poverty line,³ and 26.7% of the population is unemployed,⁴ theft of any goods can be a significant trauma and can have myriad negative consequences for the victims.

A total of 1.7 million, or one in six, young people were assaulted in 2005.

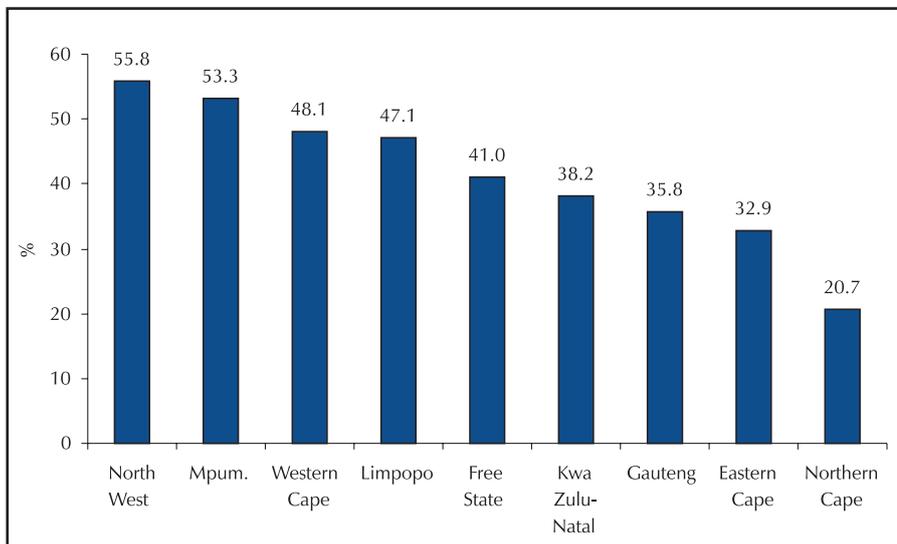
Assaults are most likely to occur at school (26%), in the street near shops (21%), or at home (20%). Nine out of ten young people who were assaulted knew their attacker, most often from school or elsewhere in their community.

In total, roughly 973 000, or one in ten, youngsters were robbed.

One in three robbery victims knew who had robbed them. Perpetrator(s) tended to be someone from the young person's community (37.7%), or a school mate (20.8%).

Robbery is a crime that by definition involves violence or the threat of violence. Violent experiences such as this have been shown often to impact negatively on the interpersonal relationships that young people form, as well as on their coping and resilience mechanisms.⁵

Rate of victimisation by province



Only one out of ten cases of assault against children or youth were reported to the police.

Crimes committed against children and youth are largely unreported to the police. With the exception of housebreaking, reporting rates to the police among young people when crimes are committed against them are very low, varying from 7.1% in the case of theft of property, to 14.2% for robbery. However, reporting rates for household crimes – where an adult is responsible for reporting – tend to be higher, with more than four out of five vehicle hijackings reported, and three-quarters of housebreaking incidents reported.

Young people are most likely to report crimes or incidents of violence to their parents or friends. Seven out of ten children told their parents of cases of assault. As a child, it is difficult to hide physical injuries from one’s parents, often forcing them to tell someone about the incident.

The prevalence of violence such as assault and robbery against South African youth is further exacerbated by the exposure, other than personal victimisation, to violence within their home, school and community environments. Extensive international research has shown that exposure to violence and crime at a young age, including acts of personal victimisation, is likely to impact significantly on the individual’s likelihood of engaging in anti-social or criminal behaviour at a later stage in life.⁶ Those who are exposed to such incidents of violence within their communities and homes when young are also at greater risk of victimisation themselves.

These experiences clearly impact on the overall quality of life of South African youth and children. Over one-quarter (28.4%), or just under three million, young people cite murder as the one thing they are most scared of, while over one-fifth

	Area classification			
	Metro	Urban	Rural	Total
Any crime	44.6	42.0	40.5	41.5
Property crime	26.8	25.1	25.7	25.6
Violent crime	30.8	26.9	25.5	26.6

Youth living in the metropolitan areas of eThekweni, Nelson Mandela, Tshwane, Johannesburg and City of Cape Town are most likely to be victims of crime, while those in rural areas are the least likely. Both property and violent crimes are most common in metropolitan areas, with significantly more likelihood of violent crime occurring in metropolitan areas than in rural areas.

(21.2%) cite rape or sexual assault as the thing they are most scared of.

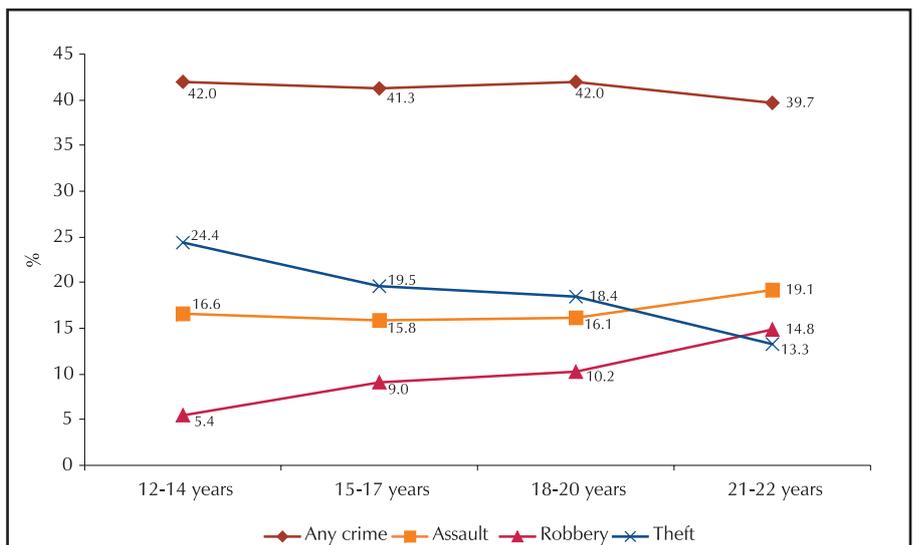
These fears reflect those of the adult population of South Africa, with the 2003 National Victims of Crime Survey revealing that murder, housebreaking and sexual assault or rape were what most South Africans were scared of.⁷

These rates of crimes against young people have profound implications. Fear of crime permeates every aspect of young South Africans lives. One in five do not feel safe in the community in which they live, and

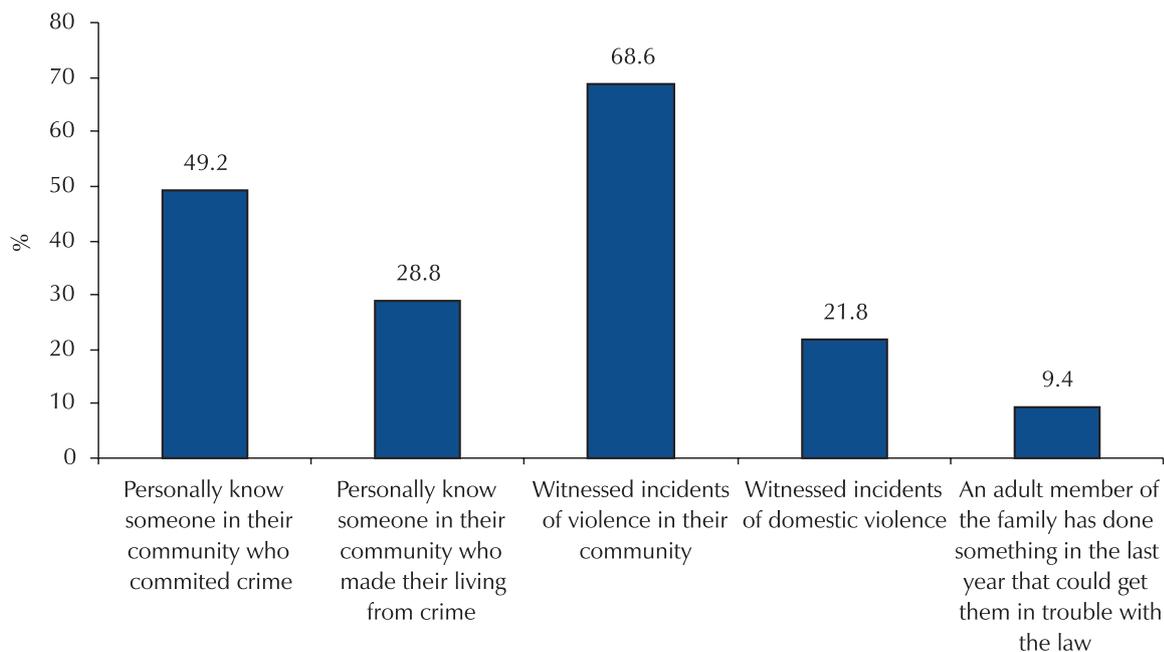
just under one in ten feels scared of criminals when they are at home. This, together with those who feel scared at school, reflects the general conditions of fear that many young people in the country live under.

These fears feed into what can be called the normalisation of crime for young South Africans.

Not only have almost one in two been victims of crime or violence, but they are exposed to it on a range of levels in their home, school and social lives. Crime is something that surrounds almost all young people in



Children between 12 and 14 years, and youth between 18 and 20 years of age, are most likely to be victims of crime. The violent crimes of robbery and assault are more common among the older age cohorts of 18–20 and 21–22 years of age, while the property crime of theft is most common among the younger children. This may in part be explained by the lifestyle of older youths, who are more likely to spend time socialising out of their ‘safe’ environments, and in areas that would put them at more risk of violent crimes.



Three out of five young people have witnessed incidents of intentional violence within their home community, and one out of five children or youths have witnessed incidents of domestic violence within their own home. One in two young people below the age of 22 years knows someone in their community who commits crime; while one in four knows someone who makes their living from criminal activity. One in ten, or 737 000, young people have at least one family member who had engaged in some activities that could get them in trouble with the law over the September 2004 to September 2005 period.

some form or another. In addition to the exposure and victimisation discussed above, almost one in five children or youth had considered engaging in acts that constitute a crime. Half of these, or just less than one million youngsters, had acted on these thoughts and committed criminal acts of some nature. Personal knowledge of people who engage in crime is also common. Almost one in every two young persons personally knows someone who is currently, or who has been, in jail for criminal activities.

The findings of the Youth Victimization Study suggest that government departments responsible for the delivery of a wide range of social services need urgently to review the implementation of policies that prioritise the creation of a safe environment for young people, and

that provide support and interventions for those exposed to ongoing violence and crime.

The data also highlights the need for an integrated and coherent youth safety strategy that involves a wide range of relevant stakeholders, and which can be implemented efficiently and rapidly.

ENDNOTES

- 1 A total of 4409 young people between the ages of 12 and 22 years were interviewed at a household level. The sample was stratified by province and race. A response rate of 93% was achieved. The data was benchmarked and weighted by age and gender using the 2001 Statistics South Africa Census data. The full details of the sampling and methodology are available in the monograph Leoschut L & Burton P, *How Rich the Rewards? Results of the 2005 National Youth Victimization Study*, Centre for Justice and Crime

- Prevention Monograph Series No. 1, Cape Town, 2006, pp 9-11, <www.cjcp.org.za>.
- 2 Burton P, Du Plessis A, Leggett T, Louw A, Mistry D & Van Vuuren H, *National Victims of Crime Survey: South Africa 2003*, ISS Monograph Series No. 101, Pretoria, 2004.
- 3 United Nations Development Programme, *South Africa Human Development Report 2003*, Oxford University Press, 2003, p 5, <<http://www.undp.org.za/NHDR2003/NHDRSumFull.pdf>>.
- 4 Statistics South Africa, *Labour Force Survey 2001-2004*, Statistical Release P0210, 2006, <<http://www.statssa.gov.za/Publications/P0210September2005.pdf>>.
- 5 MacMillan R, Violence and the life course: The consequences of victimization for personal and social development, *Annual Reviews Sociology* 27, 2001, pp 1-22.
- 6 Lauritsen JL, How families and communities influence youth victimization, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, US Department of Justice, November 2003.
- 7 Burton et al, op cit.



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