

Snapshot results of the CJCP 2008 National Youth Lifestyle Study

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Local and national media reports persistently draw attention to the prevalence of violence and crimes committed against children and youth in South Africa. Prior to 2005 there was a dearth of literature on young people's experiences as victims of crime and violence on a national level. To bridge this gap, the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in 2005 conducted the first ever National Youth Victimization Study in South Africa. As this initial study was intended to provide baseline data, the CJCP embarked on a second sweep of the study in 2008, which involved interviewing 4,391 young people between the ages of 12 and 22 years recruited country-wide.

Participants in the 2008 National Youth Lifestyle Study (NYLS) responded to a survey questionnaire exploring, among others, the nature and extent of crimes they may have experienced ever and in the past 12 months, as well as their exposure to violence in the different social contexts in which they live. In

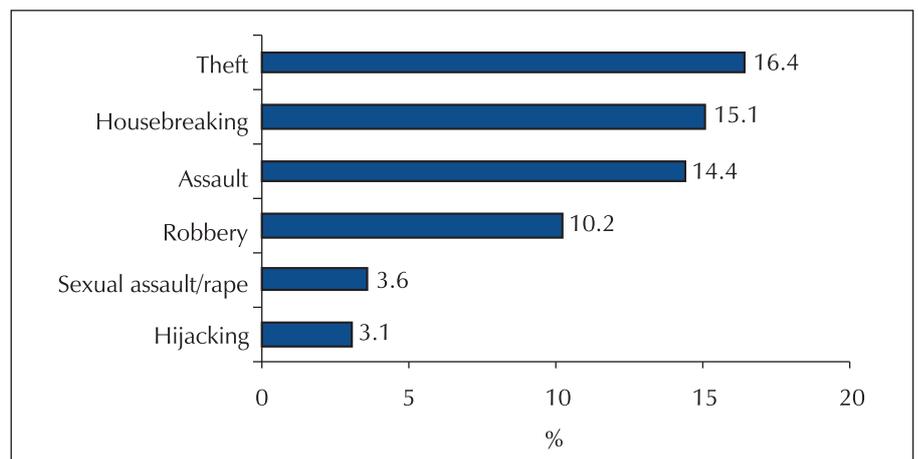
addition, the second sweep of the study measured self-reported offending and youth engagement in risky behaviours – phenomena that were not gauged in the 2005 study.

The NYLS once again highlighted the plight of many children and youth in South Africa. On the whole, young people who had EVER fallen victim to crime were most likely to have experienced theft of personal property, with one in six respondents reporting having had this experience, followed by housebreaking which was reported by 15.1% of the sample. Violent crimes such as

assault and robbery constituted the third and fourth most frequently reported crimes experienced, with more than a tenth of the sample having ever been robbed or assaulted at some point in their lives. Sexual assault (3.6%)¹ and hijacking (3.1%) were the crimes least experienced by the young participants surveyed (see Figure 1).

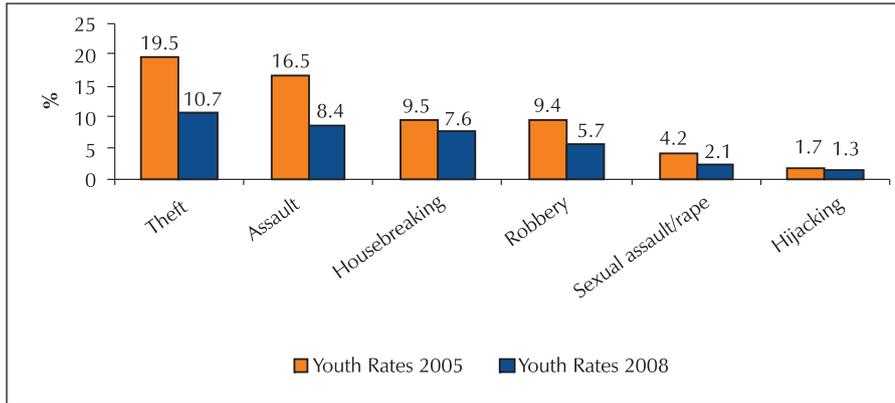
When considering victimisation in the 12-month period between February 2007 and February 2008 only, again, theft of personal property (10.7%) was the most common type of crime experienced, followed by

Figure 1: EVER been the victim of ... (n=4391)



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Figure 2: Comparative youth victimisation rates



assault (8.4%), housebreaking (7.6%), robbery (5.7%), sexual assault including rape (2.1%), and hijacking (1.3%). These victimisation rates were relatively lower than those obtained in the 2005 National Youth Victimization Study. On the whole, the incidence of property crimes has decreased over the past three years, with theft of personal property having decreased by more than 5% and housebreaking by nearly 2%. Similarly, the findings highlighted a reduction in the incidence of violent crimes perpetrated against South African youths. Assault has gone down by 8%, robbery by 3%, sexual assault (including rape) by 2% and hijacking by 0.4% (see Figure 2).

The decrease in victimisation rates appears to reflect a general decline in South African victimisation rates – a trend consistent with statistics released by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) which conducted a National Crime and Victimization Survey in 2007 capturing the victimisation experiences of 4,860 South Africans 16 years of age and older.² Despite this reduction, young people in South Africa are still being victimised at rates significantly higher than those observed among their adult counterparts. Furthermore, the rates for violent crimes in particular were more than double that experienced by adults participating in the 2007 National Crime and Victimization Survey (see Figure 3). Figure 3 clearly shows that the youth rates were three times higher for

theft of personal property, six times higher for assault, and two times higher for robbery than the rates observed among adults. Since this trend was also evident in 2005, the finding suggests that although the overall victimisation rates have declined, the nature of the crimes experienced by young people have remained largely unchanged over the past three years. In essence, young people are still being victimised at alarmingly high rates.

A number of demographic differences were associated with the youth victimisation rates. Assault (17.7%) and robbery (12.6%) were highest among the male youths, suggesting that males are more susceptible to falling prey to violent crimes, with the exception of sexual assault/rape (5.9%) which was more common among female respondents, along with theft of personal property (17%, $p < 0.001$). With regard to

ethnicity, white and coloured youths were most likely to have been the victims of assault, robbery, theft and housebreaking EVER in their lives, while hijacking was more frequently experienced by white and Indian respondents. Sexual assault was more prevalent among coloured (4.4%) youths – a percentage higher than the national rate observed (3.6%) – followed by their black (3.7%), white (2.6%) and Indian/Asian (2%) counterparts (see Table 1).

By and large, rates of assault, robbery and sexual assault tended to increase with age. Older youths aged 18–22 years thus accounted for the highest percentages of these violent crimes. A different trend, however, emerged with regard to theft of personal property, with rates for this crime decreasing with age. Hence, those in the 12–14 year age cohort were most likely to have had their personal belongings stolen EVER and in the year preceding the study (see Table 1).

Homes, schools and other areas (particularly streets) in the communities in which the participants live were the most commonly reported sites for the thefts (31.2%, 47.2% and 6.9% respectively), assaults (13.6%, 21.9% and 41.3% respectively) and robberies (8%, 7.3% and 50.4% respectively) experienced. Sexual assault, however, tended to occur in the victims' homes (24%) or somewhere else in the community (21.4%

Figure 3: Comparative youth and adult victimisation rates

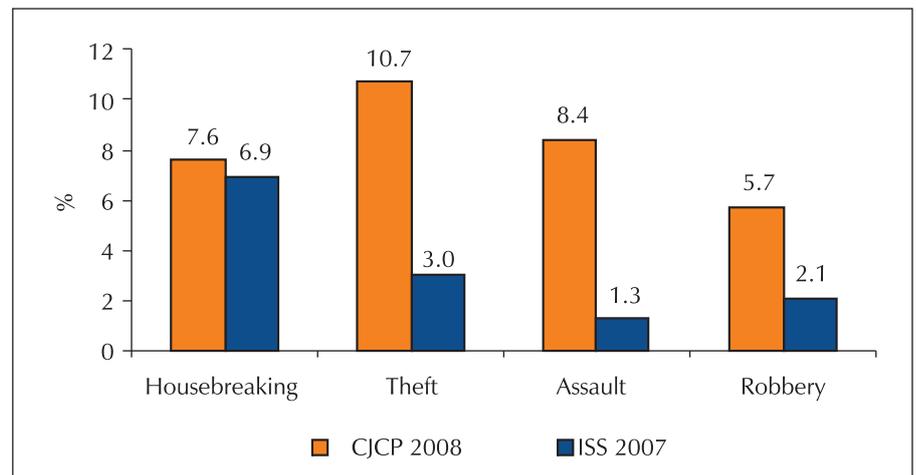


Table 1: EVER been the victim of ..., by province, age, gender and race (%) (n=4391).

	<i>Assault</i>	<i>Robbery</i>	<i>Theft of personal property</i>	<i>Burglary</i>	<i>Sexual assault including rape</i>	<i>Hijacking</i>
Province						
Mpumalanga	26.1	13.5	20.9	16.8	7.2	4.7
KwaZulu-Natal	17.9	9.0	32.1	19.0	4.7	5.1
Western Cape	15.0	21.2	21.7	21.7	4.6	6.2
Free State	17.5	7.0	11.6	10.8	0.5	0.2
North West	15.5	10.3	9.7	10.3	4.3	0.6
Gauteng	15.3	14.4	12.5	16.6	3.6	3.2
Northern Cape	12.2	9.1	7.8	5.6	0.4	0.6
Eastern Cape	10.6	8.4	9.3	15.8	3.5	1.9
Limpopo	2.1	0.2	2.2	5.7	0.6	0.3
Age						
12–14 years	11.7	6.0	18.8	14.2	3.1	3.3
15–17 years	12.1	9.1	14.5	13.3	3.0	3.0
18–20 years	17.1	11.6	15.6	16.1	4.4	2.8
21–22 years	18.6	17.6	16.8	18.6	4.3	3.2
Gender						
Males	17.1	12.6	15.7	15.0	1.3	3.0
Females	11.1	7.7	17.0	15.0	5.9	3.2
Race						
White	16.6	13.8	29.0	23.5	2.6	13.1
Black	14.1	9.2	14.8	14.3	3.7	1.9
Indian/Asian	11.1	8.1	13.5	9.0	2.0	9.4
Coloured	16.5	18.2	23.4	19.2	4.4	5.7

in someone else's home, 15.4% in the street and 11.5% close to the respondent's home), but were less likely to occur in schools (4.2%) when compared to the other crimes asked about. In more than two-thirds of the assault (83.3%) and sexual assault (72.1%) cases, the victims personally knew their attackers, while respondents who had fallen prey to theft (47.4%) and robbery (23.6%) were significantly less likely to know their attackers.

The high levels of crime and violence experienced by these youths seem to be a reflection of the general disorder and criminality characterising the social environments in which youth live. Exposure to physical violence within their homes (11.1%) and communities (50.5%) was found to be the norm rather than the exception for a significant number of respondents. Given the high levels of crime and violence in

In addition to these crimes, young people were found to experience a range of other victimisations and bullying at school:

- 51.7% had been hit, caned or spanked by educators or the principal for their wrongdoings
- 17.8% had been verbally teased or insulted by someone at school
- 12.4% had been threatened with harm, scared or actually hurt by someone at school
- 11.5% reported that someone at their school had threatened to say something about them that would stigmatise them
- 8.3% had been forced by someone at their school to do something they knew was wrong and did not want to do

the communities represented here, it is not surprising to find that young people in South Africa live in close proximity to criminal offenders – many of whom live within their own families (see textbox, *next page*).

Families and communities constitute two of the most important socialisation contexts for children and youths. When young people are consistently exposed to crime and violence within these contexts, not only do they become desensitised to

violence but they also come to view it as a socially appropriate means to resolve interpersonal conflicts and fail to learn non-violent ways of interacting with others.³ This inclination was reflected in the NYLS, with 28.7% of the sample indicating having been involved in a physical fight in the past year, 10.1% ever having hit, kicked or punched a sibling on purpose, 6.5% having ever been hit, slapped or physically pushed by a girl/boyfriend, 5.8% having themselves ever hit, slapped

Many of the respondents personally knew people in their community who:

- had engaged in criminal activities in the past year (34.2%); and
- make a living from crime (32.7%).

Additionally,

- 16% of the sample reported that an adult in their family had ever been incarcerated; and
- 6.8% of the sample indicated that an adult in their family had in the past year done things that could have got them in trouble with the police.

or physically pushed a girl/boyfriend, and 5.2% having carried a weapon in the past year.

In addition to these violence-related behaviours, the youths surveyed were found to engage voluntarily in other risky behaviour that could be detrimental to their safety and well-being, including the use and abuse of substances and engaging in unsafe sexual practices. Of the different substances explored, alcohol appeared to be the primary substance of choice, with 31.4% of the sample having ever had a drink of alcohol. Of these, one in three (34.8%) youths had been under the age of 15 when they had their first drink of alcohol. Alcohol use among young people is a serious cause for concern for a number of reasons, some of which are outlined below:

- Adolescents who initiate alcohol use before the age of 15 are five times more likely to develop alcohol dependence than those who have their first drink of alcohol at the age of 21.⁴
- Initiating alcohol use at an early age is also associated with alcohol-related violence (including physical and sexual assault) among both youths and adults.
- Alcohol use has been associated with risky sexual behaviour (including having unprotected sex,

unintended pregnancies and multiple sexual partners) suicide, and other injuries.⁵

These associations were supported by findings emerging from the NYLS. More specifically, youths who had ever had a drink of alcohol were significantly more likely than their non-drinking counterparts to have ever fallen prey to both violent and non-violent crimes such as assault (26.6% and 8.8% respectively), robbery (20.2% and 5.6% respectively), sexual assault/rape (7.2% and 2% respectively) and theft of personal property (24.8% and 12.5% respectively).

Other risky behaviour engaged in included tobacco use (18%) and especially smoking prior to the age of 15 (39.6% of the smoking sample), being sexually active (38.6%) and particularly having engaged in sexual behaviour prior to the age of 15 (18.3% of the sexually active sample), inconsistent condom use (62% of the sexually active sample) and the use of alcohol and drugs prior to engaging in sexual activity (17% of the sexually active sample).

In essence, the 2008 NYLS provided a glimpse into the lifestyles led by young South Africans country-wide. Evidently, these youths are compelled to live in social environments where crime and violence is the order of the day. Continual exposure to these

societal anomalies in the contexts in which socialisation primarily takes place, makes it difficult for children to learn non-violent ways of interacting with others. This – coupled with their personal involvement in risky behaviour such as substance use, unsafe sexual practices and engaging in violent behaviour – makes it nearly impossible to elude vulnerability to victimisation.

The findings thus point to the need for a multifaceted intervention strategy aimed at improving child and youth safety within South African communities by addressing the diverse array of factors that put young people at risk of criminal victimisation. Any effort to create a safer South Africa for the country's children and young people would depend on the involvement and continued support of a range of different stakeholders, including government, non-governmental and community-based organisations, parents, schools, communities and the youth themselves.

ENDNOTES

- 1 It is important to note that the percentage observed for sexual assault and rape does not accurately reflect the incidence of this crime among South African youths given the propensity to under-report the crime.
- 2 Pharoah R, *Who is most at risk? Victimization trends in the 2007 National Crime and Victimization Survey*, ISS paper 182, April 2009.
- 3 Davis NJ, *Youth Crisis: Growing Up In the High-risk Society*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999; Lawrence R, *School Crime and Juvenile Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- 4 US Department of Health and Human Services, *The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Prevent and Reduce Underage Drinking*. US Department of Health & Human Services, Office of the Surgeon General, 2007.
- 5 Ibid.



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