



Crime prevention toolkit



Crime prevention technology sheds light on underlying problem

by Barbara Holtmann

COMMUNITIES IN THE Central Karoo, like so many others, long for a peaceful life, where children play safely in the streets and men and women, old and young, move freely and without fear, day or night.

The CSIR's crime prevention research group was commissioned by the European Union on behalf of the South African Police Service (SAPS) to facilitate the development of a local crime prevention strategy for the Central Karoo District Municipality. The intention was that the learning achieved in the central Karoo could be used elsewhere in the country, particularly in rural contexts.

The study required widespread consultation with local communities and the people who delivered criminal justice and related services to them. The CSIR used its local crime prevention toolkit methodology and started by asking people to imagine 'what it would look like when it's fixed'. Workshop participants were asked to paint or draw images of a safe central Karoo. From the elements that made up the images, the

CSIR was able to identify the key activists and actions that would be required to move towards the achievement of a safe community, village, town and district.

Typically in this exercise, people paint a utopian place, free from burglar bars and drunken brawls, where children play safely in the streets and old and young, men and women are free to move about day or night. What was significant in this instance, however, was that participants could not imagine life without the oppression of alcohol abuse. They drew liquor outlets with rows of taxis waiting to take inebriated people home; they drew crèches where children were looked after while their mothers were out drinking. This helped identify alcohol abuse as one of the biggest contributors to crime and violence in the district; CSIR researchers ensured that their investigations drew out information about the relationship between alcohol and unsafety in the central Karoo.

The police confirmed that over 90% of crimes were related to alcohol abuse. In one of the small towns with a population of

less than 7 000 people, there were 64 known illegal outlets for the sale of alcohol. It is understood that alcohol is often purchased with social grant money – and as the illegal shebeen owners were often also micro-lenders, many people were, in fact, paying huge interest on their alcohol consumption. In line with data elsewhere in the country, the connection between alcohol abuse and victimisation was clear.

Alcohol also makes people very vulnerable; young girls became vulnerable to rape as a result of getting drunk, very often in illegal shebeens where underage drinking is allowed. The area also records one of the highest incidences of foetal alcohol syndrome in the country, and indeed, in the world. Babies born to drinking mothers are at a disadvantage that they are unlikely to overcome in their lives.

The CSIR study found that many people in the central Karoo felt no particular purpose in the society. The study also revealed that young men were problematised and characterised as 'dangerous and without usefulness', while business people resisted



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CSIR engaged the departments of Social Development, Sports and Recreation, Arts and Culture, Health and Education, at least as much as the SAPS or Department of Justice. The study provided excellent insights into the need for a broad and inclusive strategy for safety, rather than a security-based strategy.

It is essential that the criminal justice system be transparent, fair and accessible – and the study offered recommendations in this regard. But the study also demonstrated that without education, health and welfare, the toxic stranglehold of alcohol abuse on the community would not be broken. In addition, it demonstrated that community involvement was essential in both understanding the problems and finding solutions.



The models flowing from the study have been used in training SAPS members in crime prevention and are constantly being refined through exposure to other environments and research. Wherever the CSIR uses these models, service providers and community members recognise their communities in them and add learning and value to their ability to drive strategies that will help make South Africa safe.

The key advocacy message coming from the study is that we should intervene for our teenage pregnant mothers today to support them to be better mothers so that in 15 years' time, their daughters are not pregnant and we need not fear their sons as violent criminals.

expanding their businesses as they felt that young people were unmotivated and unreliable; once again alcohol was to be blamed as an indicator of a lack of interest in working and progressing. There is a fear that drugs are becoming more prevalent, that underage children in shebeens are encouraged to take drugs and to sell them in the local schools. Child prostitution is also linked to the sale of drugs and to the need of children to support their drug habits.

In collating the findings, CSIR crime researchers began to map the context for crime and violence and the life cycle that perpetuated crime and violence. Findings suggest that children who were neglected and abused quickly learned to fend for themselves and tipped over into offending

behaviour, since there was poor supervision and a lack of satisfaction of basic needs.

While it was possible to ignore the needs of children as vulnerable victims – and it seemed that for the most part their needs were ignored – once they tipped over into offending behaviour, they became a problem for the police and the community demanded that the police should act against them. Young people engaged in risky behaviour of all kinds, including sexually risky behaviour with the result that young girls moved to the top of the cycle as mothers, perpetuated the cycle.

Notably, many of the recommendations were in the social arena rather than the criminal justice domain. As a result, the

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