

ARMED ROBBERY, VIOLENT ASSAULT AND PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL INSECURITY AND SOCIETY AS A RISK

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“Too much trust can be a bad thing” (Purdy, 2003:1)

ABSTRACT

This article reports on a qualitative research project which aimed to determine how the personal experience of an armed robbery and violent assault impacted on a sample of 39 victims' perceptions of South Africa as a risk society, a mistrust of strangers, and changes in their personal behaviour as well as security measures to prevent future victimisation. The personal negligence of some respondents, inadequate security measures, and opportunities created deliberately, or out of ignorance by employees, made it possible for the armed robbers to gain entry to homes. All the respondents were physically assaulted, and held at gunpoint to intimidate them into telling where valuables were kept in the house. The experience of being robbed and violently assaulted left them with feelings of ontological insecurity, xenophobia and distrust of strangers, fear of crime and little confidence in the government and police to maintain law and order. The manner in which short-term insurance claims were negotiated and the amount of money eventually paid out, was a final source of frustration and disgust for many respondents.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa currently experiences high crime rates, which include murder, rape, hijackings as well as the violent assault and mutilation of victims. The general public's increased awareness and fear of crime is enforced on a daily basis by means of extensive and often gruesome media reports concerning the country's crime situation. Romer, Jamieson and Aday (2003:88), based on their research in the United States of America, pose that the media primarily contributes towards creating a culture of fear within communities. Crime in South Africa has become a dominant topic in many social conversations, to the point where some even see it as a boring topic. There is also a perception among some people that most South Africans know someone personally, or have heard of someone in their living or working environment that has been the victim of armed robbery, hijacking or some or other form of violent crime. Various researchers reckon that these social networks are responsible for the diffusion of fear of crime and also on people's social construction of the real extent of crime, and their perceptions of the risk of becoming a victim themselves (Friedburg, 1983; Hope & Sparks, 2000; Romer, Jamieson & Aday, 2003). The fear of becoming a victim of crime, can lead to xenophobia and also to a negative prejudice against certain categories of people who are labelled as “criminal” (South African Human Rights Commission, 2000). This leads to distrust of strangers, as well as of the police and government as people hold the state and its penal institutions responsible for maintaining the law (Morin & Balz, 1996:1, 4).

The increase in crime rates is ascribed to, amongst others, the high unemployment rates and its accompanying social problems that are associated with poverty and despair. There is also a general perception amongst the population that illegal immigrants from politically unstable and war-torn African countries are involved in the crime wave which is devastating the country (South African Human Rights Commission, 2000). Amongst these illegal immigrants, whose numbers are estimated to be in the millions, there are a number of crime syndicates who are responsible for the increase in incidents of armed robbery, assault and hijackings.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE RISK OF BECOMING A VICTIM OF CRIME

Risk can be defined as the probability of physical damage or injury as a result of technological or other processes that also include social behaviour forms such as violent crimes (Beck, 1992:4). There is a close relationship between perceptions of the risk of becoming a victim of crime and distrust in strangers, as well as an inherent feeling of insecurity amongst people that leads to an ontological crisis and a fear of crime (De Haan, in Ruggiero, South & Taylor, 1998:24). Emile Durkheim already showed in the late nineteenth century that trust in anonymous people is essential for the survival of a decent society (Ritzer, 1996:100–103). Trust is based on the assumption that the behaviour of other people is predictable within specific boundaries and that strangers on the street will not attack someone, neither will they rob and attack people at home. Trust is further connected with the assumption that the state and police will maintain law and order and ensure people's safety. Purdy (2004:2) adds that a person in modern society should, for his/her own safety, be able to discern between an intelligent and ill-considered trust in other people. The latter attitude is under certain circumstances a false trust that can result in making one an easy target for criminals, and is hence not suited for survival. Late-modern and post-modern thinkers like Foucault, Baudrillard and Jameson (Ritzer, 1996:600-616) argue in this context that present industrial and urbanised societies are increasingly characterised by rising crime levels and corruption which undermine people's trust in each other. A by-product of distrust and perceptions of risk is an element of social anxiety, which exists in modern societies and is caused, according to Beck (1992:24), by a complexity of socio-economic, political and technological factors. He further argues that risk is the result of human behaviour and is accordingly unpredictable and latent; not restricted by time, space or social class, and also not noticed by one's physical senses. All these factors contribute towards feelings of social anxiety and fear of crime.

Anthony Giddens (in Ritzer, 1996:567) uses the term “juggernaut”, a mythical monster vehicle that charges ruthlessly and destroys everything in its path, to describe the violence, social change, mistrust in others and uncertainty in personal safety which characterise modern urban and industrial societies. The negative attitude towards and commentary on the lack of protection against crime that the state and the police are supposed to give the citizens of the country reflect the perceptions of people that they are defenceless against crime and that the risk to become a victim of crime is ever-present. Wuthno (1999:2) refers in this regard to research which shows that the scandals in which police and government officials get involved, contributes further to the distrust which prevails in societies. This causes feelings of ontological security to be replaced with feelings of ontological insecurity, in other words an attitude that one's fellow countrymen, political and other leaders are inherently or potentially unreliable. This attitude can then lead to an ontological crisis on the validity and maintenance of traditionally acceptable values and norms, for example respect for life and the property of others. One of the causes of this can be the fact that people are unsure of how unpredictable the behaviour of strangers will be when it gets to their personal safety.

De Haan (in Ruggiero, South & Taylor, 1998:26) describes this uncertainty regarding predictable behaviour and what you can expect of strangers, as a condition of moral panic. This refers to a condition where the fear of crime is disproportionate to the real extent thereof. Emigrants who maintain that they leave the country because of a fear of crime, together with the increase in security systems and behaviour (for example alarms, high electric fences, insurance against loss as a result of crime, personal behavioural changes to prevent victimisation and security companies who patrol living areas), can be an indication of such a moral panic which has originated within the South African society.

Under these circumstances, a culture of control can develop to manage risks in society (Beck, 1992:4). Personal security measures become for certain people an obsession that can change their normal behaviour dramatically, for example people would rather stay at home than go out at night and visit friends.

A symptom of this is the commercialisation of security: often with the aim of giving meaning to life and achieving self-realisation. The starting-point that is maintained is that a person should buy more security, for example in the form of sophisticated alarm systems and insurance against theft and/or the damage to property. In the process of searching for more safety, it becomes clear that security measures are both a symbol of the limitations that exist in people's lives, as well as their right to be safe in their movements. Post-modernism describes these attempts to control and manage safety as a pitiful simulation of a former and idealised "good life" (Ruggiero, South & Taylor, 1998:435).

A research project was initiated with the aim to determine how a number of victims of armed robbery and violent assault felt about their experience of the incident. The focus was also on the degree to which their feelings of personal security were influenced and how they now perceive society as a risk. Furthermore, attention was given to what extent the research group trusted or mistrusted strangers after their experience of robbery and assault in general.

METHODOLOGY, PROCEDURE AND TECHNIQUES

This article reports on a qualitative research project with 39 respondents, which were victims of armed robbery and violent assault during 2006. The decision was made to do a qualitative case study, as this research method will give the best insight into the personal experiences of the victim's incident. Furthermore, this method also gives the researcher the opportunity to provide a holistic overview of the overall context in which robberies and assault took place (Neuman, 1997:331).

A pilot investigation with five respondents preceded the investigation. Using this procedure, a number of themes were identified with regard to the experiences and perceptions of armed robbery and violent assault that have been included in the interview schedule. Follow-up interviews have been conducted with the five respondents of the pilot investigation; these interviews have been included in the final group of 39 respondents.

A purposeful case study procedure using in-depth interviews resulted in field notes of the respondents' body language and a narrative of their traumatic experiences (Neuman, 1997:206). The data was analysed systematically and ordered with the aim on a focused coding of words for analysis and interpretations (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 2002:271–273).

The universe, from which this purposeful random sample was drawn, was limited to a white middle-class suburb of Pretoria. Seven respondents, who were treated for their injuries in hospital, have given permission for their names and contact details to be divulged to the researcher for an interview. The remainder of the interview group, 32 people, was obtained by means of a snowball sampling process. The first wave originated from people who knew victims of crime, as well as from friends, family and colleagues who knew of victims. Three potential victims were not willing to allow the researcher to interview them as they were still too traumatised after a recent robbery and did not want to relive the incident.

The interview group consisted of 11 men and 28 women, which included four housemaids. The majority of women in the group experienced robberies during the day when their husbands/partners were not present. The ages of the men differed between 20 and 71 years and the women between 27 and 69 years.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

INTRODUCTION

In the report, the focus was on the following: the respondents' knowledge and personal experiences of incidents of armed robbery and assault; their personal safety behaviour and

crime prevention strategies at the house before and after their experience of an armed robbery or an assault incident, the respondents' perceptions of the robbers and the nature and extent of the robbery and injuries which they sustained, as well as their perceptions of changes in their behaviour and attitudes after the incident.

KNOWLEDGE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF CRIMINAL VICTIMISATION

Without exception, all the respondents were aware, with reference to reports from the media and/or the grapevine, of one or more incidents of armed robbery in their area or elsewhere in the city. Furthermore, the majority of these respondents reported that they personally know or heard of people who have previously experienced similar incidents. A relatively common comment from most respondents was that it is almost impossible not to be aware of crime as the newspapers report on a daily basis the corruption, crime and violent assault experienced by South Africans. The media reports have, according to the respondents, contributed towards their increased perception of crime and that they also run the risk of getting involved in crime incidents, while their feelings of personal safety at home and on streets have also been influenced. The research of Romer, Jamieson and Aday (2003:88) supports this finding. The comment of a woman of 62 years illustrates the attitude of the majority of respondents: "I don't read the paper on a daily basis anymore – it's too depressing, the news primarily is about murder and other crimes. I have had too much of it already." Another respondent, a pensioner, made the following comment on social conversations with friends with reference to news on crime:

We have friends for many years and we visit each other regularly, but lately I do not look forward to go there. We will only be there for a short while, and the woman will begin with a story like: 'have you heard what happened the other day...' or 'did you see in the papers...' and then she starts to recall some or other gruesome story. I don't want to hear these things anymore, it only upsets me.

On a question of why it upsets him, the respondent explained that this kind of conversation and news make him scared and more aware that you are not safe anymore "in your own country" or that your safety cannot be guaranteed. This type of comment points towards an overwhelming fear of crime with some people which are most probably out of proportion to the real extent of crime in the country. This also corresponds with what De Haan (in Ruggiero, South & Taylor, 1998:26) refers to as moral panic.

Another respondent mentioned that it is the second time within a year that she has been robbed and assaulted by armed robbers. Her statement was therefore binary: in the first place, it was the same robbers that robbed her of a few hundred American dollars during the previous incident just after she returned from an overseas vacation. She is of the opinion that with the second robbery, the robbers assumed that she still had foreign currency. In the second place, she was of the opinion that the location of her home makes her an easy target for the robbery. She lives close to a station as well as a taxi rank. In the mornings, there are many unemployed people present in the area with the hope that someone would employ them as day workers. She was convinced that they monitor her house and that the robbers are informed about her movements. With the first robbery the respondent was slightly injured, but was injured seriously during the second robbery when the robbers turned her arm in order to force her to tell them where the money is. It injured her shoulder seriously, which was operated just before the robbery for a torn ligament, and she had to be operated again after the incident. Her twenty-year old son was also violently assaulted during the incident.

What is meaningful within the context of this research is that the respondent explained how she used to feel relatively safe when her young son was in the house, but now she feels that the presence of a man or other people in the house does not deter armed robbers. Many of the other respondents made similar comments and this emphasise that their earlier feelings of

personal security when there is someone else in the house, do not exist anymore after the incident.

The remainder (38 respondents) of the group had no previous incidents of armed robbery and assault, although they were aware of it *inter alia* because of media reports. What is meaningful however, is that everyone has more or less fear of crime, and they all personally know someone or someone who has an acquaintance, family member or colleague that has been a victim of a robbery and/or assault. Friedburg (1983) as well as Hope and Sparks (2000) show the important influence that social networks have in the distribution of news about and fear of crime.

PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL SAFETY AND SECURITY MEASURES

A common tendency between respondents was that they are primarily worried over being involved in a hijacking and of being injured and robbed when they stop at a traffic light, or when they need to get out of the car at home to open a gate, or to wait in front of an electric gate to open. A possible reason for these tendencies, is the perception that you are more vulnerable in a car as the car has no or limited security systems against hijacking. Contrary to this, it is believed that at your home you can rely on various security systems, even though media reports and the grapevine find that it is not an infallible guarantee against armed robbery and assault in the house. The high trust that respondents place on security systems in and around the house, point to what Beck (1992:4) describes as an attempt from people in modern society to manage and control their risks. The awareness of ontological insecurity is clearly reflected in the following words of a 62-year-old woman:

I have always had an unsure feeling when I near a red traffic light, especially if it starts to get dark and there are beggars close-by. You never know if they are going to break your window to grab something, or whether they want to hijack you. But once I am in my house, I would feel safe with the dog and the alarm system that is connected to the radio (security company). But now, after this horrible experience, I feel uneasy. All these security stuff is just a joke – how safe can you really be with these people.

The older generation respondents reported that they grew up in an era when life was relatively safer and people respected your life and property. They experience society now as different with electronic crime prevention systems and high walls that were not previously part of their lives. This behaviour points to what Wuthnow (1992:26) calls an ontological crisis as people start to doubt if traditional values and norms regarding respect for others and their property still apply. A female respondent that grew up in a rural area compared the type of experience of security action with doors that were left open and houses that had no burglar bars. She mentioned that she used to trust people and was never afraid that she would be robbed or attacked. She is of the opinion that after the robbery she does not have the same sense of security in her home and also that she became suspicious of strangers. She also mentioned that her new security measures would not necessarily prevent the repeat of victimisation.

I've learned the hard way that I must not leave the doors open. It's an invitation for them to come in. How dare these bastards invade my privacy, point guns at me and do this [assault] to me.

She pointed the researcher towards the following:

As you have probably noticed, we have since then [the robbery] put up a fence and had an alarm system installed. This thing is a bloody nuisance – I keep triggering it off by accident and then they [the security company] phone me to hear if I am OK. Sometimes they phone hours after the alarm went off. If

something really would have happened to me, I would be long dead by the time their armed guard arrives.

With the exception of 12 respondents that only had normal burglar bars in front of their windows, as is still traditional in many houses in South Africa, the rest of the interview group had more sophisticated security systems in and around the house at the time of the armed robbery or assault incidents. This varied from different types of electronic detectors and alarms both inside and outside the home, of which some are connected per radio to security companies, to high walls around the house. On some of the walls there were barbed wire, and in some cases the fence was electrified. All these precautionary measures point to, as argued by Beck (1992), attempts of the respondents to manage and control their personal security. It suggests a feeling of ontological insecurity with the respondents and that they view the country as a high-risk society. The majority of respondents also commented that it is not safe anymore to live in South Africa and three of them referred to their children that have emigrated because of this reason.

Some of the respondents had what they thought good watchdogs, but they seemed to be unsuitable because they were either too small to scare the robbers, or too friendly and tame to warn their owners that there are strangers in the yard or house. In three cases the robbers poisoned the dogs. The respondents think that, with reference to newspaper reports, the poison was probably the so-called "Two Step"-poison (a mixture of some sort of fertiliser and raw meat that is fed to the dogs and that cause them to die within "two steps"). A common and cynical remark by respondents on all these different types of crime prevention methods is effectively expressed in the words of one of the respondents: "We [the family] now live in our own private prison".

Alarm systems and other security systems have become for the respondents, as described by Ruggiero, South and Taylor (1998:435), a symbol of the restrictions on their lives: they feel that they cannot move around freely and should even be on their guard in their own homes.

The respondents were asked how the robbers entered the house. In 13 cases the victims were of the opinion that the robbers waited outside in the street in a car or that they were followed from somewhere, and that they, while the gate was open, were surprised or held at gunpoint. From here they were forced into the house and robbed. Eleven respondents were caught by surprise inside their homes. One housewife described how it happened:

I was busy cleaning the kitchen table when I heard a noise behind me. I turned around and saw three masked men that pointed guns at me. I immediately realised what was happening and started to scream in fear. One of them slapped me through the face and hissed: "Shut up or I shoot". Then he took me by the arm and dragged me through the passage towards the bedroom where they demanded money and asked where we keep the guns. I told him that we do not have guns, after which they started to hit me again. Eventually they believed me and left with my purse, handbag and all my credit cards, car licence as well as a few pieces of jewellery that were on the dressing table.

Four of the victims were convinced that workers in their employment (maid or gardener) were involved in the robbery in some way: either as accomplices or they were intimidated prior to the robbery to open a gate or door to let the robbers in. One respondent said that she is convinced that she recognised one of the masked robbers in his body language and eyes as a worker that used to be in her employment. Another respondent is of the opinion that the gardener intentionally forgot the garden gate open after he cut the grass on the pavement. She thought it strange that the robbers knew exactly where the safe was in her bedroom, and also where she kept her car keys. The gardener was familiar with the house as he used to help in the house sometimes. On five occasions the robbers gained entrance to the house by misleading the maids with stories that they are there to repair something or are fetching some

appliance for repair. In the remainder of the incidents, namely six, the respondents were of the opinion that their own negligence made it possible for the robbers to enter the house: their fences/walls around the yard were relatively new and out of habit they entered the home without locking the door or security gate.

In four cases the respondents, after they were victimised, moved with great costs to a house in a security complex with high walls, electric fencing and security guards at the entrance where visitors have to identify themselves and sign in. These respondents report that they are too afraid now to live in a freestanding house with a big garden. The respondents who had no electronic alarm systems and high walls, all sharpened their security measures after the experiences. Beck (1998) describes this kind of behaviour where people literally buy more personal security, as characteristic of modern industrial societies. One respondent, a single woman of 54 years, cynically remarked that the new security system actually makes her laugh: "They can hijack you just outside your house. How safe can one really be?" Other respondents mentioned that if robbers want to enter a house, they would find a way to do so, regardless of the security measures. The interview group also pointed out that they are now more attentive and consciously act in such a way as to avoid further victimisation, for example to watch out for strangers close to the house before they enter, by not using their car indicators so show where they plan to turn into their drive ways, by locking outside doors and by warning their gardeners and maids not to allow any strangers into the house. This behaviour points to possible ontological feelings of insecurity which the respondents experience as they cannot predict with certainty how strangers will react towards them. Morin and Balz (1996:4) mention that fear of crime is closely connected with suspicion towards strangers. The comment of a 63-year-old male respondent about his and his wife's behaviour is typical of the suspicion towards strangers that they now regard as potential security risks. He explained that: "if we see strangers in a parked car in front of or close to our gate, we would rather drive past. You never know if they are waiting for you to open the gate and then attack you in the garage, this is exactly what happened to us on that horrible day."

THE ROBBERY AND ASSAULT INCIDENT AND INJURIES SUSTAINED

All the incidents in this research occurred during the day between approximately eight in the morning and two o'clock in the afternoon. This is also the time when most men are at work, children are at school and housewives and/or their maids are alone at home. With the exception of three cases, all of the robbers were masked and in all the cases they were armed with guns and held their victims at gunpoint. Furthermore they swore and shouted at their victims and threatened to shoot them should they not obey the orders of the robbers. Victims were dragged by the arms, hit, kicked and arms were twisted to force them to say where the guns, money, jewellery, car and safe keys are kept. Many respondents referred to the callousness and brutality of the robbers: the remark of one female respondent is characteristic thereof: "they pulled out my drawers and threw the stuff on the ground, after which they stepped on it to break it, and the one who kicked and hit me to tell them where the money and stuff is, did not care that he was busy to hurt me seriously." Friedburg (1983) as well as Lewis and Salem (1996) point out that this type of violence that often accompany robbery and housebreaking, and which is often reported in the media, undermines people's feelings of guilt, cultivates their fear of crime and tends to change the way in which people live their lives.

An insightful remark from all the respondents about the types of items which the robbers were looking for, show that they first look for weapons, then car keys, and then diamond and golden jewellery. This is very likely an indication of the type of stolen goods of which they can get rid of quickly and easily and for which they get the best prices. One of the respondents remarked that she had a valuable pair of pearl earrings and necklace in the safe, but that the robber threw it on the ground immediately. He only took her golden jewellery together with her purse, cell phone and watch that he threw in a pillowcase taken from her bed. A common

remark from the female victims is that the sentimental value, which they attached to certain jewellery, was the biggest loss as it is irreplaceable.

Although not one of the respondents in this investigation was raped, they mentioned it as one of their biggest fears. One victim phrased it as follows: "I just prayed that they would rather shoot than rape me."

Only two victims did not have their hands and feet bound. Electric cables, cable binders, ropes and wire were used to tie the respondents. In one case, the robbers started to tear the clothes off a respondent in her middle fifties. She was convinced that the whole gang of robbers wanted to rape her. Just then her phone started to ring continuously and the robbers fled. She thinks that they probably thought there was someone else in the house that has set off the alarm. An elderly respondent that understands Sotho, heard one of the robbers ask: "will we shoot her?" Another one which she assumed to be the leader of the gang, then said: "Awa!" (No). Three of the maids with whom interviews were conducted, purported that the robbers used the word "*Makwerekwere*", a Sotho abusive name for illegal immigrants who speak a "funny" language. They were convinced that the robbers were Nigerians. On a question to one of the respondents on how she knew this, her answer was: "we all know that these crooks come from that country, they are not our people". This type of remark is telling proof of xenophobia and the prejudice towards immigrants about which the South African Human Rights Commission (2000) reports extensively.

Although the media often reports on armed robberies where victims are killed or injured with guns, no shots were fired on any of the 39 respondents in this interview. However, some of the respondents sustained relatively serious injuries, for example torn ligaments as a result of an arm that was twisted, broken ribs, cuts and bruises as a result of kicks or blows with a gun or other object. One respondent had a burst eardrum as a result of a slap against the head. Everyone was traumatised for a period after the incident and most victims went, on recommendation of their insurance assessors, for a few sessions of trauma counselling. The short-term insurance policies made provision for these sessions and paid the bills. This is an indication to the researcher of the extent to which society regards the safety of its citizens that should be insured.

Eating and sleeping disturbances, nightmares and back flashes to the incident were generally reported which is a further indication of the respondents' feelings of insecurity. Anger and hate towards the offenders is a common occurrence under the crime victims (Walklate, 1989:44). It was also a prominent finding of this investigation. Many expressions of revenge and hate towards the robbers were verbalised by the respondents. Furthermore, many comments were made about the mistrust and xenophobia towards what respondents describe as young local unemployed people, as well as a "horde of illegal immigrants and criminal elements" from other African countries. A common perception was also that: "the government does not do anything to combat crime". The respondents also have little trust in the police. Mistrust in the state and the inability of the police to fight crime, were also prominently named by many researchers (Wuthnow 1999). The comment from one of the respondents is typical thereof: "the whole lot [police] do not mean anything, if you read the papers and see how some of them steal and are corrupt, then you can just imagine how unsafe this country is becoming". Various respondents also complained that after they reported the case at the police, they have "never heard of them again". The quite common perceptions of the respondents towards the police suggest that amongst some of them there is an ontological crisis towards the police, from the point of view that it is not traditionally assumed anymore that the police are above suspicion and that they will make real efforts to find the robbers. Other commentary pointed towards the perception among some respondents that the police are overwhelmed with the amount of crime cases that they cannot give attention to everything, and that many of them are simply incapable to solve a crime. One respondent stated that he doubted "from the beginning that the police will find the robbers and that he only reported the crime in order to get the case number" as the insurance company needs it to pay the claim.

Walklate (1998:44) makes the comment, with reference to research on the impact of victimisation and the loss of material goods and injury of victims, that men as victims of robbery and housebreaking report emotions such as anger more often than women. Anger was expressed in this investigation, especially towards the meaningless damaging of property and the loss of goods on which sentimental value was attributed, and the struggle to replace credit cards, driver's licences, cell phones, cars and electrical appliances. An elderly pensioner verbalised his feelings of hate, anger and insecurity about the future as follows:

I worked and saved a lifetime to buy these things and enjoy my retirement, and now they have come and destroyed my wife's and my life in less than an hour. Can you imagine the fear we now live in? You have to experience this yourself to understand my feelings of hate and revenge. I have never been like this before, but I think in time I will eventually come over it, I am working on it.

Most respondents voiced their frustration and annoyance on the negotiations with their insurance companies to determine the value of their stolen goods, they also expressed discontent over the amount of money which was paid out. The problem was that the respondents were, according to their insurance companies, underinsured and did not make provision for the separate valuation and insurance of jewellery.

CONCLUSION

South Africa has experienced, during the last decade, an unprecedented increase in crime rates. The findings of this investigation show that, as far as it concerns these respondents, their feelings of ontological security after an incident of robbery or violent assault was replaced with feelings of insecurity and a view that you stand the risk of being victimised in your own house as well as on the street. Strangers on the street and people in your employment cannot be trusted in the same way as before. Furthermore, doubt exists over the competence of the state and police to do something real about the country's crime situation. There are also indications that respondents experience an ontological crisis, in the sense that traditional values and norms regarding respect for other people's lives and property are in a state of decay. It also appears that some respondents' fear of crime is out of proportion to the real extent thereof. The attitudes and perceptions are reflected in the extension of the security measures in and around the houses of the respondents, as well as their anxiety to freely move around. It was also clear from the investigation that armed robbers are not deterred by electric fencing, high walls or sophisticated alarm systems: they are able to notice weak points in the control of these measures and in people's behaviour, and then take advantage of it. Careless victims often contribute themselves to their victimisation, while others are more vulnerable as a result of circumstances out of their control, for example if someone lets the robbers in, or when robbers attack when you open the gate to enter the yard. Robbers also don't hesitate to seriously injure their victims and destroy their property in their haste to get away with the loot. The nature of negotiations with insurance companies after theft as well as the magnitude of claims that are paid was also described by some of the respondents as traumatic. The experience of various respondents are described strikingly in the words of one of the respondents: "as if the robbery and kicking and hitting of the thieves were not enough, the insurance people came with the final blow when they eventually paid us out."

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