



## The Experience of Violence by Male Juvenile Offenders Convicted of Assault: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study

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### Abstract

*Statistics from both South Africa and the United States of America indicate that the phenomenon of violence amongst youths is increasing. This implies that a larger number of youths are being exposed to the experience of violence and thus present with the complex and multi-dimensional effects of such an experience. Past research has centred mostly on the causative factors that can be statistically represented, with little focus being paid to the juveniles' in-depth, subjective experience of the phenomenon. For the male adolescent, the experience of the phenomenon of violence is complex, diverse and may span across many aspects of his life, including physical, psychological, personal and social dimensions. Three participants were sourced from the Leeuwkop Juvenile Correctional Facility in Johannesburg and interviewed for the purpose of this study. The participants were selected based on their age (between 13 and 19 years of age) and the type of crime that they had committed (assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, common assault or indecent assault). In accordance with the phenomenological approach, open-ended interviews were used as a research method in order to allow for the participants' unique and subjective experience of the phenomenon to emerge. The researchers found that the phenomenon of violence is characterised by the juveniles' experience of external events that provoke a certain response manifesting itself in violent behaviour. The responses described by the participants were mostly emotional in nature and included emotions such as anger, rage and fury. The experience of violence also holds certain consequences for the male juvenile offender. The most common consequence experienced by all three participants was their subsequent arrest and incarceration in a correctional facility.*

### Introduction

Over the past decade political violence (the war in Iraq, violent riots at the World Trade Organization and suicide bombers in London and Afghanistan) appears to have overshadowed interpersonal violence (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005). However, interpersonal violence (assault, murder and rape) and particularly youth violence has emerged as a major area of focus for educators, psychologists, social workers and mental health professionals (Englander, 2007). The

research presented in this paper specifically focused on interpersonal violent crime committed by the youth. More specifically, this research focused on the male juvenile offender's experience of committing a violent crime.

A review of various sources shows that research pertaining to the subject of youth interpersonal violent crime tends to focus more on causative and contributory factors rather than accessing male juveniles' perceptions of their experience. The

existing body of research also labels specific behaviour in an attempt to intervene and curb violent behaviour, disregarding the juveniles' thoughts and feelings surrounding the violent event (Englander, 2007; Lahey, Moffit, & Caspi, 2003; Leoschut, 2006; Pharoah, 2005; Regoeczi, 2000). According to Canter and Ioannou (2004) the actual experience of violence by the offender has been neglected and there have been few recent studies in this regard.

The phenomenon of violence as experienced by male juvenile offenders is multi-faceted and infiltrates many aspects of the juveniles' lives. The phenomenon of violence affects a juvenile's life and also has far reaching impact on the juvenile's victim, his/her family and the society in which he/she resides. According to Evans (2000) juvenile crime is a major problem and professionals and members of the public have expressed concern over the increase in the scope and violence of individual crimes. This increase as well as associated factors provided the motivation for this study.

#### ***The prevalence of violence and assault amongst youths***

The literature concerning violence amongst youth originates predominantly from the United States of America (USA) and various European countries (Englander, 2007; Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005; Moir & Jessel, 1997). Official statistics from the South African Police Services (SAPS) indicate that the number of reported cases of indecent assault increased by 3.5% in the period from April 2007 to September 2007 (SAPS, 2007). However, the statistics also indicate that assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm (GBH) decreased by 2.8% and common assault decreased by 5.1% over the same period of time. It is important to note that the official police statistics do not differentiate between age groups and it is therefore impossible to draw conclusions regarding the number of assaults that can be attributed to juveniles (SAPS, 2007).

The available statistics regarding violence amongst juveniles in South Africa are out-dated. Although these statistics are useful they are not a reliable indication of the current trends with regards to adolescent violence in South Africa. In January 2004 figures compiled by an organisation working with the rehabilitation of offenders in South Africa indicated that of the 3 968 youths in custody, 1 680 youths (just over one third) were being detained for violent crimes (Lombard, 2004).

#### ***Aetiology of violence amongst youths and the development of violent criminal behaviour***

Certain factors are known to contribute to the

development of violent behaviour in youths. The following section explores the various theories that are pertinent to the understanding of the development of violent behaviour in youths, specifically in males. This section also examines the link between violent and criminal behaviour, namely assault.

#### ***(a) Psychopathological explanations for violent behaviour***

Grisso, Vincent and Seagrave (2005) argue that certain psychopathologies manifest in violent behaviour during adolescence. However, the exact nature of the link between psychopathology and violent behaviour in youths is unclear. Research has shown that some adult psychopathologies, such as Antisocial Personality Disorder, are linked to an increased risk of violent behaviour (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Conversely, other disorders, such as schizophrenia, are accompanied by a decreased risk of violence. In addition, the combination of a psychiatric disorder and substance abuse and dependency in adults increases the potential for violence (Grisso et al., 2005). Unfortunately, there has been little research regarding the relationship between violence and mental disorders amongst adolescents. However, preliminary evidence suggests that there is a connection between violence and mental disorders in adolescents (Grisso et al., 2005). Psychiatric disorders such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder have been indicated in the violent behaviour of youths (Kronenberger & Meyer, 2001; Lahey et al., 2003; Wenar & Kerig, 2000). Personality disorders such as Borderline Personality Disorder and Antisocial Personality Disorder have also been identified as possibly resulting in violent behaviour (Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

#### ***(b) Head injuries and brain damage***

Research has shown that individuals who have suffered brain injuries are significantly more likely to manifest with aggression and show antisocial behaviour (Englander, 2007). Lewis (cited in Englander, 2007) also indicates that the medical histories of violent delinquents have high occurrences of head injuries. In addition, scans performed on violent offenders show an 11% reduction in the volume of the frontal lobes. The frontal lobes are the part of the brain that is responsible for modulating an individual's response to stress and fearful situations. These lobes are also the primary modulators of executive functioning (this involves planning, impulse control, affect regulation and attention) (Cauffman, Steinberg, & Piquero, 2005). Thus, damage to these areas of the brain may cause learning and adaptability problems as well as reckless and impulsive behaviour (Englander, 2007).

### (c) *Substance abuse*

Brunelle, Brochu and Cousineau (2000) indicate that the ingestion of certain drugs, particularly alcohol, has been linked to violent behaviour. Alcohol is commonly abused because it is legal, widely available and socially acceptable (Englander, 2007). Research suggests that alcohol has been implicated in approximately half of all convictions for violent crimes in the USA (Englander, 2007). In South Africa, the crime report indicates that drug-related crimes increased by 4% from 2006 to 2007 (SAPS, 2007). However, the report does not provide any indication of the relationship between this increase and the increase in violent, indecent assaults. In addition, the report makes no specific reference to youths. Research investigating the relationship between alcohol use and violence in teenagers found that "a modest relationship existed between drinking and violence" (Englander, 2007, p. 136). When an adolescent is already overactive, compulsive or aggressive and has access to substances, the potential for him/her to act violently whilst under the influence is significant (Paul, 2005).

Other substances that can result in violent behaviour include anabolic steroids, heroin, ecstasy and crack (Moir & Jessel, 1997). Archer (1995) argues that aggressive and violent behaviour is particularly influenced by the consumption of drugs. Furthermore, research conducted over the past decade clearly indicates a link between drugs and crime in South Africa. Finally, drugs are strongly linked to organised violent crimes and violent attacks amongst gangs in communities (SAPS, 2007).

### (d) *Social explanations for violent behaviour*

Evans (2000) argues that modern day children and adolescents are being raised in a culture of violence, aggression and fear and this has serious implications for the mental health of adolescents as well as society at large. Thus, on a larger social level, it seems that society may contribute to juvenile violent, criminal behaviour. This is explored in more detail in sections below.

### (e) *Violent families and violent environments*

South African youths are often exposed to alarmingly high rates of violence within their families. A study conducted by Leoschut (2006) found that many of the youth surveyed were exposed to violence within their homes either as witnesses or as direct victims from an early age (below 10 years old). Statistics show that many youth perpetrators of violence have also been victims of violence (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005). Approximately 90% of young offenders have a history of maltreatment (Renn, 2002). Physical abuse,

previously referred to as battered child syndrome, is a form of maltreatment (Englander, 2007). The term battered child syndrome was coined to describe children with several fractured bones in various stages of healing. However, the abuse of children can take less severe forms. The maltreatment of children can also include emotional, psychological, sexual and verbal abuse (Englander, 2007). Individuals, particularly adolescents, feel helpless when they become victims of crime and violence. Individuals who are exposed to increasing levels and occurrences of these behaviours tend to feel increasingly helpless. Abusing another individual allows these individuals to regain power and a sense of control (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005). When children and adolescents are exposed to violence and abuse, especially during their formative years, it has a negative impact on their development and the physical and psychological effects can be extensive. These effects include low self-esteem, depression and anxiety, suicidal ideation and an increased likelihood of becoming involved with delinquent youths and activities. For South African youth, a violent home environment has become the norm rather than the exception (Leoschut, 2006).

According to Englander (2007), youth in violent environments feel suspicious. Englander (2007) suggests that violent individuals tend to inappropriately perceive hostility where most people would not perceive hostility. This suggests that the individual is violent by nature and will therefore perceive a neutral situation as hostile and respond accordingly. Violence, it can be argued, is thus a result of a misperception of the environment. Furthermore, a study conducted by Dodge (cited in Englander, 2007) suggests that aggressive children and adolescents have perceptual tendencies that are not displayed by nonaggressive children and adolescents. Firstly, aggressive youths are more likely to perceive other people and the environment as hostile. Secondly, they are also more likely to evaluate the results of their aggressive behaviour positively. The study by Dodge (cited in Englander, 2007) also examined how cognitions develop and found that hostile biases were characteristic of aggressive adolescents. This study was replicated using adolescent offenders in a maximum-security Correctional Facility. This second study also reported hostile biases, but only in the population of delinquents who had not been adequately socialised (Englander, 2007).

### (f) *Gangs*

The nature of gangs and the effects that they have on the surrounding communities is an issue that remains elusive (Frank, 2005). Gangs are typically known to be violent and youths often join gangs in order to

protect themselves (Frank, 2005). Studies suggest that violent gang behaviour has increased dramatically in recent years and the average age of gang members is dropping, with the increasing involvement of pre-adolescent children in gangs (Englander, 2007).

Becoming a member of a deviant peer group, which could be a precursor to becoming a member of a gang, is exacerbated by an individual being rejected by normal peers and struggling academically (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998). Within this deviant peer group individuals are praised for deviant behaviour and behaviour that is socially acceptable is punished. Research has shown that peer groups are especially important in determining the continuation of Oppositional Defiant Disorder and Conduct Disorder (Kronenberger & Meyer, 2001). Pressure from the group thus makes it more difficult for children and adolescents to modify their antisocial behaviour, as to do so would alienate them from their major source of acceptance and companionship (McWhirter et al., 1998). As an adolescent's behaviour worsens and further forms of companionship and acknowledgement are sought out, he/she may become involved in more serious groups and gangs.

According to Hardy and Laszloffy (2005) gangs contribute greatly to an escalation in homicides, aggravated assaults, rapes and other forms of violence amongst adolescents. Gang members often commit violent acts such as assault or murder in order to gain entry into these gangs. In addition, gang members may use violence to protect another member of the gang or to gain a greater status within the gang (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005).

#### **(g) Emotional indicators likely to increase violent behaviour**

A quantitative study by Canter and Ioannou (2004) found that criminals experienced a range of emotions during their crimes. The study sampled offenders who had committed a range of different violent crimes including murder, rape, assault, kidnapping of a violent nature and burglary and theft. The findings of the study indicated that offenders most often reported emotional states of anxiety, feeling out of control and scared. Offenders who had committed a violent offence experienced varying emotions including feeling confident, calm, exhilarated, thoughtful, courageous, anxious, annoyed and angry. However, although feeling calm and courageous was not very distinct, feeling angry, annoyed and anxious was very distinct. This suggests that violent offences are typically associated with distress (Canter & Ioannou, 2004).

## **Method**

Phenomenology is a philosophical method of inquiry that concentrates on the detailed description of conscious experience and the analysis of mental experience rather than an individual's observed behaviour (Colman, 2006). Moran (2002) argues that phenomenology is a radical way of practicing philosophy and is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophising, which describes phenomena and attempts to get to the truth of matters. The aim of this study was mainly to describe the experience of violence by male juvenile offenders convicted of assault, in order to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Husserl's approach to phenomenology was selected as an appropriate research method, since this method of phenomenological inquiry aims at reaching the participant's life-world, describing the phenomenon and the attached meaning to the phenomenon (Kvale, 1983). This method differs from other phenomenological methods, which are inspired by Heidegger, where explanation, construction and interpretation play a more prominent role (Giorgi, 1997). In this phenomenological approach "what matters is to describe the given as precisely and completely as possible; to describe and not to explain or analyze" (Kvale, 1983, p.184).

## **Participants**

Patton (2002) suggests that qualitative and therefore phenomenological inquiry focuses on relatively small, purposefully selected, samples. The purposeful selection of cases allows detailed inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon. The detail that a purposive sample permits could possibly be lost if the sample were larger, as the study would then not be able to obtain the same depth of information as with smaller numbers. In this regard, Osborne (1994) states that phenomenological researchers must therefore locate participants who have experienced the phenomenon in question (violence) and who are able to communicate their experiences effectively. This leads to selecting information-rich cases, from which a great deal can be learnt about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). In accordance with these guidelines three male juvenile participants (participants A, B and C), who had all experienced violence while assaulting someone, were selected for this research. This allowed for an in-depth investigation into the phenomenon of violence.

At the time of the study the participants were detained in a correctional facility and therefore specific procedures had to be followed in order to gain access to them. Special permission had to be obtained from the Department of Correctional Services (the



offenders' legal guardian) in order to conduct the interviews. This process involved applying to the Department of Correctional Services through the use of various forms and meeting with a panel in order to discuss their specific research policy as well as the use of the correct terminology. Once this was achieved, specific participants were selected according to the selection criteria of this study.

### ***Procedure: The open-ended interview***

Patton (2002) suggests that researchers collecting phenomenological data need to carefully and thoroughly capture and describe how people experience a phenomenon - how they perceive, describe, feel, judge, remember and make sense of the particular phenomenon. In order to gather this data, the researcher needs to undertake in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest. This type of face-to-face encounter, which takes place in the context of a relationship, provides the richest source of data for the researcher who seeks to understand human experience (Polkinghorne, 1983). This type of data is obtained through the use of open-ended interviews, which allow the researcher to adopt an open approach to data collection. Open ended interviews "share ... the form of meaningful structures with the human realm [and are thus] ... usually the most appropriate data type for research concerning this realm [the realm of experience]" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 268). Kvale (1992) suggests that through this type of research interview "privileged access to the cultural world of intersubjective meaning" is obtained (p. 51).

The open approach to collecting data suggests that the researcher refrains from imposing ideas or topics on the participant and allows the participant to speak freely about things that come to mind. Open-ended interviews have little or no structure and the only structure that is required is an invitation for the participant to talk about the phenomenon of interest (violence) (Osborne, 1994). This invitation is usually given in the form of an open ended question.

Although Polkinghorne (1983) argues that the open-ended interview is the best suited technique for eliciting information about human experience, he also acknowledges that the technique has some limitations. Firstly, in open-ended interviews individuals are able to hold back or disguise their experiences and deceive the researcher. Secondly, professional distance and lack of interest on the part of the researcher may elicit skewed information that has been filtered through the participants' perceived expectations of the task at hand. In order to avoid these difficulties, it is important to establish a relational context in which the subject is encouraged to share his experience (Polkinghorne, 1983).

In order to counteract these limitations, the participants in this study were reassured that the information they shared with the researcher would remain confidential and would not be shared with any Correctional Services authority. Thus, the information could not be used to implicate them and affect their chances of parole or sentencing in any way. The participants were also informed that the researcher herself was not employed by the Department of Correctional Services.

In order to allow the open-ended interview to be as effective as possible, researchers adopt a technique known as bracketing. In order to fully understand the phenomenon of violence as it is experienced by the participants, the researcher attempted to suspend or put in abeyance her own presuppositions and preconceptions of the phenomenon (Valle & King, 1978). To facilitate approaching the research with an open mind and suspending these presuppositions, the researcher first made these presuppositions explicit so that they appeared to the researcher in as clear a form as possible. This process is referred to as bracketing. The notion of bracketing assumes that the researcher can separate her life experiences from her personal knowledge (Byrne, 2001).

Giorgi (cited in Polkinghorne, 1983) designed a method of analysis known as empirical phenomenological analysis. This data analysis method is designed to obtain descriptions of phenomenological structures. The method begins with the individual descriptions of an experience and then from these descriptions a more general description of a phenomenological structure is generated. Giorgi (cited in Polkinghorne, 1983) suggests that this general description can be obtained by first gathering data in the form of transcribed interviews concerning the phenomenon to be researched and then analysing the data according to five steps. This method involves collecting statements from participants, specifically their descriptions of the phenomenon being studied, and "systematically and rigorously interrogating these descriptions step by step to arrive at the structure of the experience" (Polkinghorne, 1983, p. 213). The following five steps were followed in the analysis of the data: (1) obtaining a holistic and global perspective of the data; (2) dividing the data into natural meaning units (NMUs); (3) formulating meanings from the natural meaning units; (4) organising the NMUs into clusters of themes that are essential to the phenomenon; and (5) formulating a comprehensive description of the phenomenon being researched.

### ***Ethical considerations of the phenomenological interview***

In research certain ethical considerations need to be

taken into account. Although the phenomenological interview is open-ended and unobtrusive by nature, it nevertheless can be argued that as the aim of the interview is to access the individual's subjective experience the interview is actually obtrusive. Thus, further precautions needed to be taken in order to ensure that the participants were protected from harm and that their rights were protected.

Several steps were taken to ensure that the participants were protected during the research. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Higher Degrees Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Johannesburg before the commencement of the study. Prior approval from the Department of Correctional Services was obtained in order to conduct the research. The research was conducted according to the standards set out by the research policy of the Department of Correctional Services. Informed consent was obtained from the legal guardian (Department of Correctional Services) of the juveniles, as they were younger than 19 years of age. In addition, informed consent was obtained from the juveniles themselves signifying their willingness to participate in the study.

Confidentiality was maintained and the study did not mention any of the participants' names or specific information which could potentially lead to the identification of the individual. The participants were given the opportunity to receive feedback regarding the research findings. Counselling, de-briefing and/or psychotherapy were made available to the research participants where needed and when necessary. This was done in conjunction with the Department of Correctional Services' Psychological Services. The participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw from participation in the study at any point during the course of the study.

### Research Findings

The study elicited central themes that were common to the participants' experience of violence. These themes typified the phenomenon and are related to topics such as their experience of external events, their emotional reactions prior and leading up to their violent act as well as their experiences of the consequences following the violent act.

#### *The experience of external events prior to the assault: Negative attitudinal bias*

For each of the participants certain events took place on the day the assault occurred that increased the likelihood of violent behaviour. Each event triggered certain reactions that led to the manifestation of violence. The external incidents that triggered certain reactions and gave rise to violence differed for each

participant.

**Participant A:** ...'Eh...why are you so late?'. I've told her that 'Ai man, this is usually... I used to come at this time when I'm making that maybe ... over-hours', I used to come and tell her that... 'eh...I'm making over-hours', but that day I didn't come because...eh...I was under pressure from work, you understand. So...she (looked down and frowned)... she ask me that question and I've told her that 'No...I...I...was...under pressure and I, I didn't have a chance to...to call you and tell you that I would be making...eh...extra hours at work... ..the problem was that at that [when the assault was committed] day I didn't know what was...what came through to her [his girlfriend] head and did what she did. What she did was...and when I came in she didn't tell me that she was having a... child...I didn't know that she was having a child... really I must tell you...it's over between me and you.

**Participant B:** Ah it [the violent behaviour] was... because... it was because of my sister's boyfriend. (Sniffed) That day [day of the assault] was actually, he wanted me to fight with him...he was saying stuff to me that ...that I didn't like. Like... 'its not your child' and what and what... 'why you going on like this', but in Afrikaans. You mustn't...he think I'm scared of you and what and what ...

**Participant C:** (Silence) Ye...at that moment [at the time of the assault] I was actually (stretched word out) under pressure...

According to Englander (2007) a violent individual is likely to misinterpret events that may occur in the environment. He may perceive events as hostile and dangerous and react to them in a violent manner. It is possible that participants A and B perceived the various external events as hostile and their reaction to them manifested itself in a violent manner. Furthermore, Alexander (2000) argues that youth with behavioural difficulties, such as acting out violently, have attitudinal biases. These youths believe that others are 'out to get them' and the manner in which they respond to this belief (violently) causes further difficulties (Alexander, 2000).

#### *Emotional reactions to external triggers prior to up to the violent act*

All three participants experienced intense emotions shortly before assaulting their victims or during the attack. These emotions increased the likelihood of violent behaviour and seemed to have contributed towards the violent behaviour. Participant A

experienced anger, intense rage and fury as well as fear. Participant B also experienced anger and intense rage and fury. Participant C experienced confusion in addition to anger. Participants A, B and C all experienced anger. Participants A and B's anger was followed by feelings of intense rage and fury. However, this did not seem to be the case with participant C.

**Participant A:** ...And what I told her [A's girlfriend] is that 'Ok now [at the present moment] you are not loving me...you love...your...your...your fathers' child and from the first time you didn't tell me that you having your child'. So that...eh...give me anger, then I've lock...eh...him and going to my friends....

**Interviewer:** And you were quite angry.

**Participant A:** Mmm. I was very, very angry. Really I wasn't angry, I was...I don't know what to say...

**Participant B:** My sister tried to stop me [when B was stabbing his sister's boyfriend], but I...I nearly stabbed my sister also...cause I was very, very, very angry (whispers, shifts in his seat).

**Participant C:** At that time [at the time of the assault] I was just actually...I wasn't actually myself ...cause I was just feeling like I can...I don't know...just do something with him (waved hands around) because actually he's trying to...I don't know...make a fool out of me or is he taking advantage or is it make me on the same level, so that's when I actually, I can't actually explain it... (sniffed) **Interviewer:**

Ok...it sounds like you were really, really angry... **Participant C:** Yes (sounded passive-aggressive).

It is evident from the interviews that participants A, B and C experienced anger in response to an external event. A became angry when his girlfriend attempted to break-up with him and B felt anger as a result of his sister's child being kidnapped by her boyfriend. C was angered when he found that some boys were damaging arcade games and stealing merchandise from the store where he was working. Hardy and Laszloffy (2005) suggest that anger is a common emotional response that occurs quickly and spontaneously when a perceived offence occurs.

When anger is not validated or is suppressed it grows and intensifies until it is transformed into rage, as was the case with participants A and B (Hardy & Laszloffy, 2005). It is apparent from the interviews that the greater the anger, the more likely the participant was to experience rage. Instead of voicing his anger to his girlfriend, participant A locked her in

the house and left, thus allowing his anger to brew. From the interview it is evident that this was also the case with participant B. According to Hardy and Laszloffy (2005) participants A and B's suppression and denial of anger and rage increased the probability of anger manifesting in violent behaviour.

### *The experience of the negative consequences following the violent act*

All three participants were exposed to and experienced consequences as a result of their violent behaviour. Although the exact nature of the consequences differed, each participant experienced a sense that his violent behaviour resulted in some form of outcome. The only common consequence experienced by participants A, B and C involved their arrest, detention, conviction and sentencing. Although the participants were convicted of different offenses, the offences all fell in the category of assault. Participants B and C were both convicted of assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, while participant A was convicted of indecent assault.

**Participant A:** ...So they [his girlfriend's friends] take me to police station and...(silence)...they've register the...the statement and I told them everything and they told me everything as well (looked down at his nails). Then it's where I was arrested.

**Participant B:** ...The night of the [the evening after the assault had taken place]...we went again with the police to his house. We found the child (sniffed). He wanted to stab me in the yard, so the police also took him...with me. He spent, spent five weeks in...'Sun City'. His bail was 2000, so his people...eish...ja they bailed him out. Afterwards he made a case against me...and I went to court, got remanded, got remanded two times...no three times. The fourth time I got sentenced...six months.

**Participant C:** ...So after that, they [victim's parents] called the police, the police came. They [police] said I must actually apologize and I tried to apologize, but they [victim's parents] didn't actually accept the apology...so... and we went back with the police so...I've got a case (sniffed)...and they actually fetch me on the 17<sup>th</sup>, that's when they came, the police early in the morning,... And the next day I went to court and I got bail of...uh...R700 and I could actually bail, you see?

The participants all seemed to experience a certain level of shame and remorse, which was communicated through their body language. During

the interviews participant A kept looking down at his hands and participants B and C became very emotional when referring to their victims and their families. However, it is not clear whether the participants felt remorseful in relation to their actions or if the remorse was related to being prosecuted and having to suffer the negative consequences of being convicted.

### Conclusion

The phenomenological analysis of the male juveniles' experience of the phenomenon of violence elicited themes that typify the experience. It seems that certain events take place prior to violent behaviour by male juvenile offenders and the offenders interpret these events as hostile. This negative attitudinal bias then results in the situation escalating and the external triggers cause intense emotional reactions from the males, particularly anger and rage. Once they have engaged in violent behaviour and are then convicted of an offense, male offenders experience shame and remorse, but the origins of these emotions are unclear.

### Recommendations for Future Research

In relation to the research findings, as well as the strengths and limitations of the present study, the following recommendations for further research in this area are made. Future research could try to obtain participants who are more fluent in English. However, due to the diversity of the population in South Africa this may be difficult. It is also suggested that this research topic be conducted in the participants' home languages to ensure more detailed descriptions of their experiences. A greater diversity with regard to ethnic and socio-economic status would provide a broader range of experiences, allowing for a fuller and more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of violence than was obtained in this study. This study did not focus on the long-term effects (10-15 years) of the experience for the male juveniles. Future research in this area would be useful, as this would provide a deeper understanding of the effect of the experience on the male juvenile as well as the process of rehabilitation. Future research could also explore both the male and female experience of the phenomenon of violence in order to add to the existing body of research.

### Referencing Format

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