
**THE CRIME-RELATED VIEWS OF FIRST-YEAR CRIMINOLOGY STUDENTS
ATTENDING TWO PARALLEL-MEDIUM SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES****Francois Steyn,¹ Karen Booyens,² Herma Foster³ and René Ehlers⁴****ABSTRACT**

In addition to the provision of tertiary education, Institutions of Higher Education are expected to instil critical and independent thinking skills in students. Students often bring into the learning environment their own subjective views about the world they live in. We conducted a self-administered survey among 867 first-year students registered for Criminology at two parallel-medium universities (University of the Free State and the University of Pretoria). The aim of the study was to determine their views and perceptions about the crime phenomenon in South Africa. The survey was undertaken at the beginning of the academic year in order to minimise the possible influence of academic modules on their views and perceptions. Tests of significance (chi-square and effect size) revealed some differences in respect of the gender of students. However, significant differences mostly featured across population groups, in particular between African and White students' views about personal safety and vulnerability to crime, the causes of crime, sentencing, law enforcement and imprisonment. In terms of the careers that students wish to pursue, differences in views appear to be influenced by their backgrounds instead of the professions they aim to fill. The findings call on Criminology lecturers to incorporate materials in their curricula that will challenge the misconceptions students may hold about crime in South Africa. In addition, platforms are needed where students can confront their own assumptions and existing beliefs about crime, ultimately to strengthen social cognition in this domain. Such activities could prove difficult in parallel-medium institutions where the languages of tuition create two discernible student profiles. Follow-up research is needed to gauge the impact of tertiary education on the crime-related views and perceptions of students.

Key words: *crime-related views of first-year criminology students; crime; police; personal safety; vulnerability to crime.*

INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1990s, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) had to realign themselves with the prevailing socio-economic and developmental needs of the country. At the same time, IHE strived toward embedding the principles of human rights, diversity and equity within the framework of an increasingly knowledge-driven and technology-oriented global community. In this context, the Higher Education Act (101 of 1997) calls for optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge in the pursuit of South Africa's transformation goals. Quality scholarship – benchmarked against international standards and teaching practices – should feature in realising the potential of students. IHE answered this call by incorporating South Africa's transformation agenda in their vision and mission statements, as well as strategic and operational frameworks. These directives largely reflect the concepts of academic excellence, local relevance, transformation, equality and non-discrimination, tolerance and respect for diversity, innovation, and representation.

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Changes in local higher education coincided with global shifts away from the mere transmission of knowledge to constructivist approaches in teaching and learning (Martinez, 2004). An essential component of this movement entails the frequent differentiation between surface learning (memorising and recalling of facts) and deep learning (which involves understanding). In this sense, education must move beyond conditioning and repetition in order to strengthen reflection and intellectual development. In addition, it must entail “self-reflection and perceptual shift that define higher order of consciousness” (Grösser, 2007:50). Social cognition is an important facet of such learning as it is generally accepted that students enter education settings with grounded views about a specific topic (even if only in broad terms). Their frame of reference serves to ‘make meaning’ of newly acquired knowledge, while new knowledge in turn has the potential to impact on such reference frameworks (including personal views). First-year students, in particular, bring into the learning environment their subjective attitudes, perceptions, values and norms about subject matters. Learning and problem solving at IHE therefore, has the task of creating a better understanding of the ‘bigger picture’ (Clinch, 2006). In other words, collaborative and cooperative learning should be strived for where individual and group tasks promote knowledge, negotiation, communication and accepting different opinions (De Villiers, 2006).

The above assumptions and approaches to higher education are reflected in, among others, the ideologies and teaching practices of South African universities. Mission statements often include the themes of stimulating critical scientific reflection and independent thinking. In addition, local universities call for:

- The nurturing of complex and deep knowledge (thus strengthening higher-order thinking skills).
- Creative and holistic thinking among staff and learners, including intellectual and cultural curiosity.
- Students to challenge assumptions, existing knowledge and beliefs, and to embrace new thinking.

The latter principle, in particular, necessitates reflective thinking where learners should reflect on what they have learned, the impact thereof on their (subjective) perspectives, and how it influences their future behaviour. Within this context, it is evident that changes in perceptions are essential for transformative learning and meta-cognitive awareness to take place. Assessment of academic outcomes is most often undertaken through formative and summative mechanisms. At the first-year level, assessment features mostly by means of testing of knowledge, while routine lecturing activities regularly entail informal group discussion and reflection within the classroom setting. These mechanisms do not provide formal routes of ascertaining the views and perceptions of new students regarding the issues that they study.

With reference to Criminology, very little evidence exists about the crime-related views and perceptions of first-year students. An electronic search covering local Criminology and Education journals revealed no such investigations. Nevertheless, targeting students to obtain their perceptions on matters such as the death penalty (Du Preez, Ladikos & Nesor, 1993), the practical relevance of Criminology (Maree, Joubert & Ladikos, 2003), community service learning (Bender & Jordaan, 2007) and factors influencing academic success (Fraser & Killen, 2003) point toward the appropriateness and value of such methodologies. In addition,

the need for knowledge about the views and perceptions of students is underscored by both the teaching and learning policies of the universities investigated in the present study, which state that academic programmes must continuously be evaluated against and be underpinned by both disciplinary and educational research. In part, such endeavours are to align curricula with current debates and matters facing society, as well as inform strategies to optimally transfer knowledge to learners in order to promote critical, independent thinking.

AIM AND RESEARCH METHODS

This study sets out to determine the crime-related views and perceptions of first-year Criminology students attending two local parallel-medium universities. It endeavours to identify potential differences in students' attitudes and perceptions about crime on certain biographic characteristics, particularly gender, population group and the careers that students pursue. The universities were chosen purposively (Hagan, 2010) because of their language policies, their similar historical development, and lecturing staff having collaborated in the past.

Given the large number of first-year students who register for Criminology at the two parallel-medium universities selected for this study, use was made of a quantitative approach. It was anticipated that this large number of students would answer the questions about crime in a diverse manner. Furthermore, that from these answers collective inferences could be made (Black, 2003). A survey design proved feasible, given its relative speed and ease, as well as the need to make comparisons of the characteristics of first-year Criminology students (Babbie, 2008). More specifically, a self-administered survey was conducted where students completed the questionnaire while in class, thereby ensuring a captive, stationary study population (O'Leary, 2010). The survey took place at the beginning of the 2011 academic year in order to minimise the potential contamination of students' crime-related views following exposure to various academic modules. All students who were present on the days of data collection, completed the questionnaire, which represented 66% of those registered for first year Criminology.

Lecturing staff involved in undergraduate (and specifically first-year) Criminology modules, developed the survey instrument. Apart from biographical information, the questionnaire contained 53 items that took the form of statements to which a five-point scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' applied (Maxfield & Babbie, 2001). The Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.63 shows that the reliability of the questionnaire was acceptable. All questions (except for the careers which respondents want to pursue) were closed-ended in nature, thereby facilitating completion. Although the statements were mixed in the questionnaire, they were categorised within the broad themes of fear of crime and vulnerability, the causes of crime, violence, sentencing, laws, imprisonment, the police, crime prevention and the media and crime. The cover page of the questionnaire contained information about the study and how to complete the survey instrument. The purpose and methods of the survey were also verbally explained to students.

Data was captured in *MS Word Excel* (2003) and analysed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Sciences* (17.0 and 19.0). Chi-square analysis was done to determine whether the responses on the different statements are related to gender, population group and the career respondents pursue. The categories of 'strongly agree' and 'agree', and 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' were recoded to form two distinct categories of answers (i.e. 'strongly agree/agree' and 'strongly disagree/disagree') in order to facilitate analyses and interpretation. Pearson's chi-square and Fischer's exact tests were applied to determine the

degree of significance (p) in comparisons. The standard p -values of $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$ as indicators of significance were used. In addition, effect sizes (w) were calculated and interpreted using the standard demarcation of small (.10), medium (.30) and large (.50) (Steyn, 2002).

In terms of population group, only the responses of African and White respondents (totalling 93% of all respondents) were analysed given the low prevalence of Coloured and Indian/Asian students in the study. Similarly, chi-square analyses were conducted only for the three main careers that Criminology first-year students pursue, namely in the fields of Social Work, Psychology and Law, which represent a combined total of 82% of respondents' career choice (the remaining 18% covered nearly 30 other career types). A summary of the results from the chi-square analysis is presented in table-format (see Table 3 and Table 3a) where statements are grouped together under broad headings. For each statement the percentage of respondents within each subgroup (e.g. female or male) agreeing with the particular statement ('strongly agree/agree') is provided. Due to space limitation, we only report on the 'strongly agree/agree' responses of each subgroup. For similar reasons, the themes of the media and crime and crime prevention were omitted from this discussion.

The voluntary nature of participating in the survey and confidentiality of the information provided was communicated. Respondents signed an informed consent section on the cover page of the questionnaire (Hagan, 2010). The study was ethically cleared and approved by both participating universities.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

A total of 867 students participated in the survey. Female students made up the bulk of the sample ($n=677$; 78.1%); male students represented less than a quarter ($n=190$; 21.9%). Nearly half of the respondents were African ($n=441$; 51.0%), followed by White ($n=361$; 41.7%), Coloured ($n=39$; 4.5%) and Indian/Asian ($n=21$; 2.4%) students.

Proportionately within the population group, more African students (25.3%) studied Social Work than White students (4.6%), while more White students (28.1%) studied Law compared to African students (14.6%). Considering careers pursued, Law has a much larger proportion of male students (41.6%) compared to the other careers. Most respondents were between the ages of 18 and 20 years (Table 1).

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Age	n	%
≤17	30	3.5
18	282	32.9
19	282	32.9
20	133	15.5
21	61	7.1
22	22	2.6
23	14	1.6
≥24	33	3.8
Total	857	99.9

Slightly more than half ($n=467$; 55.1%) of the respondents grew up in urban areas (cities and metros). Roughly a quarter ($n=225$; 26.6%) were from rural (small-town and farming) areas.

Less than one in five ($n=155$; 18.2) grew up in townships. African students made up the bulk of those who grew up in townships ($n=149$; 96.8%). Three quarters of respondents ($n=653$; 76.5%) came from middle-income backgrounds (Table 2).

Table 2: Self-reported household income level per population group

Income group Population group	Low		Middle		High	
	N	%	n	%	n	%
African	119	27.2	311	71.0	8	1.8
Coloured	5	13.5	31	83.8	1	2.7
Indian/Asian	1	5.0	17	85.0	2	10.0
White	5	1.4	292	82.0	59	16.6
Total	130	15.2	653	76.5	71	8.3

RESULTS

This section reports on the main findings of the survey. The results of the chi-square analysis are summarised in Table 3 and Table 3a. In addition to the percentage of respondents within each subgroup agreeing ('strongly agree/agree') with each statement, p-values are given as well as the effect size in cases where the p-value is less than 0.05. The findings are presented under the previously-mentioned broad categories.

Fear of crime and vulnerability

One in five respondents (18.7%) agreed to the statement 'I generally feel safe from crime'. The statement was significantly related to gender ($p<0.001$; $w=0.56$), population group ($p=0.002$; $w=.45$) and the careers students pursue ($p<0.001$; $w=0.80$). More male (26.3%) than female (16.6%) respondents agreed with the statement. Although the effect size was medium, more White (22.7%) than African (16.6%) students agreed that they generally feel safe from crime. Three quarters of respondents (75.9%) felt that South Africans' fear of crime is justified. The statement was significantly related to gender ($p<0.001$; $w=0.16$), while more White (88.0%) than African (67.2%) respondents shared this view. The vast majority of students (93.3%) agreed that, for some criminals, a cell phone means more than the victim's life. A significant relationship with medium effect was noted between this statement and population group ($p=0.001$; $w=0.45$).

Causes of and contributors to crime

Roughly a third of respondents (34.6%) believed that people commit crime because they are poor. The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.78$) and more White (41.9%) than African (29.2) students shared this view. Very few respondents considered criminals to be born evil (5.7%). The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.82$). Although the effect size was medium, a significant relationship also featured with the careers that the respondents wished to pursue ($p=0.015$; $w=0.47$). Fewer Law students (2.3%) felt that criminals are born evil compared to Social Work (6.1%) and Psychology (6.3%) students.

The majority of respondents (71.3%) held the view that criminals commit crime out of their own choice. The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.73$). Fewer African (66.6%) than White (77.0%) students agreed that criminals commit crime out of their own choice. The majority of respondents (89.5%) felt that drugs contribute to South Africa's crime situation. Three quarters of students (67.5%) agreed that people from dysfunctional families are more likely to commit crime. The statement was significantly

related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.69$). More White (71.7%) than African (62.6%) students shared this view. Half of respondents (50.5%) felt that children learn criminal behaviour from their friends.

Violence and violent crime

The majority of respondents (85.4%) agreed that violent crime stems from a lack of respect for human life. Slightly more than half (57.7%) indicated that violence coincidentally occurs when other crimes are committed. A quarter of respondents (26.2%) supported the view that violent protests due to poor service delivery, is justified. The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=1.1$) and the careers respondents pursue ($p=0.002$; $w=0.63$). More African (33.0%) than White (18.3%), and more Social Work (34.1%) than Psychology (25.2%) and Law (21.1%) students agreed with the statement.

One in ten respondents (10.1%) felt that it is sometimes in order to use violence in solving problems. The statement was significantly related to gender ($p<0.001$; $w=1.0$) and population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.58$). The proportion of male students (19.0%) who agreed with the statement was more than double that of female students (7.6%). Also, more African (13.9%) than White (5.6%) respondents agreed that it is sometimes in order to use violence to solve problems. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (72.4%) indicated that government is losing the fight against violent crime. The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=1.8$) and the careers respondents pursue ($p<0.001$; $w=.94$). More White (83.9%) than African (63.7%) students felt that government is losing the fight against violent crime. Two in five respondents (40.4%) agreed with the statement that violence stems from South Africa's political history, with a significant relationship featuring the careers that the respondents want to pursue ($p<0.001$; $w=.87$). Fewer Social Work (28.2%) than Psychology (37.2%) and Law (48.5%) students agreed with this statement.

Sentencing and punishment

More than half of respondents (57.5%) supported the reinstatement of the death penalty, with a significant relationship prevailing with population group ($p<0.001$; $w=2.4$). More White (72.6%) than African (44.0) students supported the death penalty. A quarter of the respondents (25.3%) felt that punishment (sanctions applied) in relation to crime is fair in South Africa, with a significant relationship featuring each population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.87$). More African (30.3%) than White (19.4) students agreed that punishment in relation to crime is fair. Nearly three-quarters of students (72.4%) felt that violent criminals should get life imprisonment without parole. The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=0.97$). More White (80.8%) than African (65.8%) students agreed that violent criminals should get life imprisonment without parole.

Laws and law enforcement

Very few respondents (11.2%) supported the legalisation of marijuana. The statement was significantly related to gender ($p<0.001$; $w=1.6$). Substantially more male (23.5%) than female respondents (7.8%) agreed to the legalisation of marijuana. Nearly one in five students (18.2%) felt that South Africa's laws are effective in deterring people from committing crime. The statement was significantly related to population group ($p<0.001$; $w=1.3$). More African (18.3%) than White (12.8%) respondents agreed that laws are effective in deterring crime. Although the effect size was medium ($p=0.002$; $w=0.42$), fewer female (15.8%) than male (26.9%) respondents felt that laws are effective in deterring crime. One in five students (19.5%) agreed that laws are effectively enforced in South Africa. The

statement was significantly related to population group ($p < 0.001$; $w = 3.3$). Substantially more African (30.4%) than White (6.9%) students agreed that laws are effectively enforced.

Prison and imprisonment

Nearly two in five respondents (38.9%) viewed prisons as 'five star hotels'. The statement was significantly related to the population group ($p < 0.001$; $w = 1.9$). Nearly double the proportion of African (50.0%) compared to White (24.7%) students shared this view. Nearly half of respondents (49.2%) considered imprisonment the best way to deal with criminals in South Africa. Slightly more than a third of the respondents (35.2%) felt that offenders should be locked up in their cells for 23 hours per day. The statement was significantly related to the population group ($p = 0.009$; $w = 0.91$). Substantially more African (43.4%) than White (26.1%) students supported the statement.

The police

Three in five respondents (61.8%) viewed the police as corrupt. More White (67.8%) than African (56.9%) respondents shared this view. More than two-thirds of respondents (68.0%) felt that the police should have the right to shoot dangerous criminals. The statement was significantly related to the population group ($p < 0.001$; $w = 1.7$). More White (79.2%) than African (58.5%) students agreed that the police should have the right to shoot dangerous criminals. One in three respondents (34.8%) indicated that, when the police fail, it is in order to take the law into one's own hands.

Table 3: Summary of results from chi-square analysis

Statement	Gender		Significance		Population group		Significance	
	Female (677)	Male (190)	<i>p</i>	<i>W</i>	African (441)	White (361)	<i>p</i>	<i>W</i>
Fear of crime and vulnerability								
I generally feel safe from crime	16.6	26.3	<.001	.56*	16.6	22.7	.002	.45
South Africans' fear of crime is justified	76.3	74.5	.872	-	67.2	88.0	<.001	1.6*
For some criminals, a cell phone means more than the victim's life	93.7	92.0	.624	-	90.3	96.7	<.001	.45
Causes of and contributors to crime								
People commit crime because they are poor	35.3	31.9	.664	-	29.2	41.9	<.001	.78*
Criminals are born evil	5.7	6.1	.350	-	6.8	4.4	<.001	.82*
Criminals commit crime out of their own choice	71.6	70.4	.699	-	66.6	77.0	<.001	.73*
Drugs contribute to SA's crime situation	90.8	84.6	.030	.23	92.2	87.8	.009	.33
People from dysfunctional families are more likely to commit crime	65.5	74.9	.047	.21	62.6	71.7	<.001	.69*
Children learn criminal behaviour from their friends	49.0	55.9	.196	-	52.8	48.8	.045	.22

Statement	Gender		Significance		Population group		Significance	
	Female (677)	Male (190)	<i>p</i>	<i>W</i>	African (441)	White (361)	<i>p</i>	<i>W</i>
Violence and violent crime								
Violent crime stems from a lack of respect for human life	86.0	83.1	.589	-	86.3	84.1	.455	-
Violence coincidentally occurs when other crimes are committed	58.0	56.7	.553	-	59.4	56.4	.057	-
Violent protest due to poor service delivery is justified	24.6	31.9	.051	-	33.0	18.3	<.001	1.1
Sometimes it's okay to use violence to solve problems	7.6	19.0	<.001	1.0*	13.9	5.6	<.001	.58*
Government is losing the fight against violent crime	75.3	62.0	.002	.43	63.7	83.9	<.001	1.8*
Violence stems from SA's political history	38.7	41.4	.080	-	36.9	44.6	.088	-
Sentencing and punishment								
The death penalty should be brought back	58.2	55.1	.696	-	44.0	72.6	<.001	2.4*
Punishment in relation to crime is fair in SA	24.4	28.5	.187	-	30.3	19.4	<.001	.87*
Violent criminals should get life imprisonment without parole	74.2	66.0	.83	-	65.8	80.8	<.001	.97*
Laws and law enforcement								
The use of marijuana should be legalised	7.8	23.5	<.001	1.6*	10.9	11.9	.028	.25
Our laws have sufficient value to deter people from committing crime	15.8	26.9	.002	.42	18.3	12.8	<.001	1.3*
Laws are effectively enforced in South Africa	17.7	26.2	.012	.30	30.4	6.9	<.001	3.3*
Prison and imprisonment								
Prisons are 'five star hotels'	41.3	30.1	.005	.36	50.0	24.7	<.001	1.9*
Imprisonment is the best way to deal with criminals in SA	48.2	52.7	.479	-	54.5	44.3	.009	.33
Offenders should be locked up in their cells for 23 hours per day	36.6	30.1	.224	-	43.4	26.1	<.001	.91*
The police								
The police are corrupt	61.0	64.7	.624	-	56.9	67.8	.002	.43
The police should have the right to shoot dangerous criminals	66.9	72.0	.388	-	58.5	79.2	<.001	1.7*
When the police fail, it's okay to take the law into one's own hands	34.3	36.5	.281	-	36.8	33.5	<.001	.45

* $p < 0.001$; $w \leq 05.0$

Table 3a: Summary of results from chi-square analysis

Statement	Career pursued			Significance	
	Social Work (133)	Psychology (379)	Law (173)	P	W
Fear of crime and vulnerability					
I generally feel safe from crime	15.3	15.4	28.3	<.001	.80*
South Africans' fear of crime is justified	72.3	73.3	80.8	.195	-
For some criminals, a cell phone means more than the victim's life	93.8	92.6	94.8	.119	-
Causes of and contributors to crime					
People commit crime because they are poor	25.8	31.7	36.0	.084	-
Criminals are born evil	6.1	6.3	2.3	.015	.47
Criminals commit crime out of their own choice	74.4	71.7	67.1	.060	-
Drugs contribute to SA's crime situation	93.2	89.1	86.7	.310	-
People from dysfunctional families are more likely to commit crime	64.1	68.2	74.1	.155	-
Children learn criminal behaviour from their friends	53.8	49.9	49.1	.483	-
Violence and violent crime					
Violent crime stems from a lack of respect for human life	86.3	81.5	89.5	.005	.56*
Violence coincidentally occurs when other crimes are committed	65.4	53.7	59.2	.111	-
Violent protest due to poor service delivery is justified	34.1	25.2	21.1	.002	.63*
Sometimes it's okay to use violence to solve problems	15.8	6.9	12.7	.034	.39
Government is losing the fight against violent crime	66.4	72.9	73.8	<.001	.94*
Violence stems from SA's political history	28.2	37.2	48.5	<.001	.87*
Sentencing and punishment					
The death penalty should be brought back	50.4	56.0	59.3	.430	-
Punishment in relation to crime is fair in SA	8.4	6.7	5.8	.091	-
Violent criminals should get life imprisonment without parole	68.4	73.6	72.3	.401	-
Laws and law enforcement					
The use of marijuana should be legalised	7.7	10.1	10.5	.017	.46
Our laws have sufficient value to deter people from committing crime	14.8	18.2	24.0	.206	-
Laws are effectively enforced in South Africa	24.1	16.4	20.5	.325	-
Prison and imprisonment					
Prisons are 'five star hotels'	52.7	42.0	29.7	<.001	.83*
Imprisonment is the best way to deal with criminals in SA	58.8	48.1	41.9	.071	-
Offenders should be locked up in their cells for 23 hours per day	49.6	32.4	29.1	.001	.67*
The police					
The police are corrupt	59.5	63.8	63.3	.601	-
The police should have the right to shoot dangerous criminals	66.2	64.9	69.8	.076	-
When the police fail, it's okay to take the law into one's own hands	41.4	33.8	32.4	.096	-

* $p < 0.001$; $w \leq 05.0$

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this investigation demonstrate that students bring into the learning environment differential views and perceptions about the crime phenomenon, and that these may be attributed to differences in their socio-economic and demographic make-up. While it is generally acknowledged that survey-type research does not offer direct answers to findings, it is worthwhile to reflect on some of the results and offer explanations.

The perceived levels of vulnerability to crime are generally disproportionate to actual levels of victimisation (Frank, 2006). Few students responded that they feel safe from crime. This finding correlates with the South African Social Attitudes Survey which found that the youth generally appear more fearful of crime than other groups, including the elderly. More female students than male students indicated that they fear crime, which could be motivated by the finding that 50% of women will become victims of crime during their lifetime (Singh, 2005). The students also felt that fear of crime in South Africa is justified, a view supported by Roberts (2008:3), who indicated that South Africans are more fearful than people in most parts of the world, including the rest of Africa, Europe and the United States of America. One may put forward that the high levels of person-to-person and property crime in South Africa are valid reasons for the high levels of fear of crime. However, it should be kept in mind that between 70% to 80% of murders, 60% of attempted murders, 90% of assaults and 75% of rapes in South Africa occur between people who know each other (Bezuidenhout & Klopper, 2011).

In terms of violence and violent crime, the results of three statements are worth highlighting. Firstly, the condoning of violence due to poor service delivery could possibly be due to students from informal settlements identifying and showing compassion with people in situations where access to basic services are problematic. Secondly, the acceptance of violence as method of problem-solving, especially by male students, could be linked to gender theories of masculinity and male bravado which supports this view. Thirdly, many students felt that government is losing the fight against crime. Several surveys indicate that the perceptions of South Africans regarding personal safety and the ability of government to provide safety not only deteriorated since the mid-1990s, but also remain low (Sekhonyane & Louw, 2002: 6). It is worth noting that White students in particular had lost faith in government to protect them from crime. This view could possibly be linked to their perceived higher levels of vulnerability to crime. Despite this view, it must be kept in mind that almost 80% of the victims of violent crime are African, which may be ascribed to many living in high-risk areas where unemployment and poverty prevail (Van der Hoven & Maree, 2005).

White respondents held more punitive views toward sentencing and punishment which could possibly be explained by their disproportional perceptions of fear and vulnerability to crime. Fewer of the African students supported the statement that the death penalty should be reinstated, potentially because of its connotation with Apartheid during which most death row inmates were African, and a number of whom were executed for political reasons. Despite very few students supporting the legalisation of marijuana, substantially more male than female students agreed to the statement. This finding is supported by evidence that males are more likely to use substances than females (Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), 2008), hence their more favourable position toward the legalisation of the substance. From the responses it would appear that students are misinformed about life in prison and that they may not be aware of the negative consequences of imprisonment, such as overcrowding, assaults and the lack of reintegration services. The media could have a stake in this view since the Correctional Services Portfolio Committee viewed the newly built Kimberley Correctional Centre as a 'luxury hotel'. In addition, some high profile cases may have strengthened views of preferential treatment in correctional facilities, for example Shabir

Shaick, who spent most of his sentence of imprisonment in the hospital section of the correctional centre.

Most students supported the statement that the police should shoot to kill dangerous criminals, more so from the side of White students which could again be linked to perceptions of vulnerability. One may also argue that the highly publicised debate to amendments of Section 49 of the Criminal Procedure Act and the subsequent support thereof by President Zuma also played a role. An interesting finding is that African students appear to be more retributive regarding issues of punishment compared to White students. This could be explained by some African communities having a history of developing systems of 'own' policing and swift punishment of criminal behaviour. Vigilante activities (also referred to as mob justice) are most common in predominantly African communities (Burton, Du Plessis, Leggett, Louw, Mistry & Van Vuuren, 2004: 69). Finally, it is important to note that significant differences among the careers that students hoped to pursue appear to be part of their background characteristics rather than the professions for which they study. Most of the law students were White males, while most social work students were African women. This adds to the main observation that students from different backgrounds present significant different views about crime, victimisation and crime management in South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The results have important implications for first-year Criminology education. Lecturers must be sensitive toward socio-economic and cultural differences in their lecturing environments. With this in mind, they must actively strive toward the elimination of unfounded beliefs, in particular those stemming from the unique backgrounds of students. Lecturers would be wise to incorporate material in their curricula that challenge students' misconceptions about the crime phenomenon. Prior to this, the views and perceptions of students must be determined through sound research methods. Proactive steps are needed to engage students in constructive dialogue about differences in views and perceptions about crime. In parallel-medium IHE, this may prove challenging since tuition languages give rise to distinguishable student profiles. A possible solution is to have mixed language classes where perceptions can be challenged and experiences shared.

This study demonstrates the value of gauging the views and perceptions which students bring into the Criminology learning environment. It tasks lecturers to focus not only on factual knowledge, but also on the social cognition abilities of students. Platforms must be created where students can challenge their own assumptions and existing beliefs about crime, ultimately to promote the mandate of IHE of imparting and strengthening critical and independent thinking in students.

The results of this survey cannot be generalised to first-year students who are registered at other IHE in South Africa. It is anticipated that student populations across the country display varying and unique characteristics which may impact on their views about crime. It is further acknowledged that this article represents a first step in the analysis of the dataset, and that differences within the studied populations may occur. Cognisance is also taken of the limitations associated with chi-square and effect size tests. In addition to further analyses, follow-up research is needed to determine whether (and if so, to what extent) exposure to tertiary education in general, and Criminology in particular, affects the crime-related views of students. Also, qualitative investigations are needed to supplement the quantitative findings.

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