HOME AND FAMILY CIRCUMSTANCES OF YOUNG OFFENDERS: AN EXAMINATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS VIEWS

Thozama Mandisa, Lecturer in Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

Crime is endemic in South Africa. It affects citizens across, age, racial, gender, religious, and socio-economic divide. Young persons seem to be the likely suspects and offenders in most criminal acts. However, detailed investigations pertaining to the causes of youth offences mainly attributes youth offending to socio-economic factors. This research has considered home and family circumstances of youth offenders as leading factors influencing the rise in youth offences. A purposive sample of social workers and probation officers closely working with young offenders was utilized to test some of theories on youth offending. The respondents in this research have worked with offenders from all communities in South Africa. Particularly important was to look at the role of parenting during the socialization processes in youth offenders lives. The research results have revealed youth offenders either have been improperly socialized or were exposed to conditions, which might have indirectly encouraged violent behaviour. The outcome of this research suggests that South Africans ought to examine introspectively their parenting practices in order to prevent crime.

Key Words: Youth Offenders, Home, Family, Parenting, Social Workers and Probation Officers.

Introduction

Many South Africans will concur with the statement that crime is problematic in South Africa. The author's personal observation from radio talk shows, newspaper reports, and speeches by Criminal Justice authorities is that, young persons commit a significant amount of crime in this country. According to the Department of Correctional Services, as on 9 September 2006, there were 60703 sentenced youth between the ages 14 – 25 confined in South African Correctional Centres. The department has classified the crimes

they have committed as economical (9651), aggressive (20086), sexual (4795), narcotics (585) and other (1395).

Although the family is meant to be a starting point for crime prevention, most South Africans blame the economic factors for the high levels of youth offences. The research conducted by Strydom, & Strydom, (2006) had examined perceptions and fear of crime among members of certain communities and found that an overwhelming majority of respondents consider poverty, unemployment and laziness of offenders as dominant factors contributing to crime. According to Mistry, Snyman & van Zyl (2003), the people of Northern Cape regarded unemployment and poverty as the fundamental cause of their crime problem. On the other hand, the respondents who were dissatisfied with their income interviewed by Prinsloo (2006) expressed the opinion that if the government eradicates unemployment and poverty crime would subside. The researchers quoted above had also noticed a lack of commitment by the community to participate in community related crime prevention efforts. The community also saw the police and government as foremost responsible for crime prevention. The researcher has observed that most parents have overlooked the impact of traumatic episodes experienced by children at home, and focused mainly on socio-economic issues such as poverty and unemployment as primarily motivating youth offending.

This paper is seeking to highlight issues within the home and family, which contribute to youth offending. Although multiple factors contribute to crime, unmitigated traumatic childhood experiences have an immense ability to destroy children's chances for smooth social functioning. The research results on youth and adult offenders have often shown that most offenders had experienced adverse childhoods compared to non-offenders, (Booyens, 2003; Dissel, 1999; Masuku 2004 and Segal, Pelo & Rampa 1999). It is postulated by Liese (2003) that children who have experienced emotional deprivation, family violence, lacked support from parents and were exposed to unhealthy nurturing patterns may feel an emotional emptiness that directly influence their actions and behaviour. On the contrary, some children may encounter external resources that may help them build resilience and inner control, which enables them to shy away from crime. Moreover, children from warm and loving families do get involved in criminal activities.

The most valuable questions to be answered in this paper are as follows:
- What happens at home before a child participates in criminal activities?
- What types of parenting styles are received by young offenders?
- Do parents realize that their parenting and child socialization practices might contribute to young offending?
- How do parents respond to children's criminal behaviour?
- Are parents involved in any mechanisms designed to aid behavioural transformation of offending offspring?

Background to the Study

The South African research and media reveal that some children are exposed to violent home and family parenting and socialization practices early in their lives. According to (Rapcan, 2001 p1) 25000 cases of child rape reported in 9 months in 2001, 1800 cases of cruelty, and 10, 5 million children go hungry everyday. Quoting statistics from the Minister of Safety and Security, Mr. Charles Nqakula, (Adams, 2006 p1) reports that between April 2004 and March 2005, 22486 children were raped in South Africa. During the same period, the report continues, 1569 cases of attempted murder and 4829 of indecent assault towards children were reported to the South African Police Services. With the general national conviction rate of 5%, there is a 95% chance of the perpetrator getting away without a guilty verdict. The above statistics excludes the dark figure since they are only cases recorded by the South African Police Services. These traumatic experiences are seldom considered by parents to contribute to young offending.

It is postulated by Muncie (1999) that in most homes, as fascinating to some adults as are children, an ambiguous treatment might prevail. Some adults see children as objects that need protection although they frequently infringe upon such children's inherent rights (McKendrick, 1990 p81). For example, Muncie (1990) has claimed that adult members of their families have constantly harassed young offenders contrary to the socially constructed nature of home as a peaceful place. Muncie (1990) has further suggested that in most instances young offenders may have witnessed instances of parental violence and eventually become indirect victims of this violence. Generally, van Niekerk (2003) explains that children rarely report victimization by parents because the abusive parents may hold positions of power at home.

Most young offenders reside in homes where parents are confronted with sudden stressful family structural changes such as sudden single parenthood due to death of spouse, divorce or pregnancy out of wedlock (McKendrick, 1990). These parents may spend most of their time trying to balance unexpected structural amendments leaving limited space to nurture and give full attention to their children. The research conducted by Mokwena (1991) indicates that when families fail to minister to emotional needs of their children, children may easily turn to the streets where it is likely that they might learn sophisticated ways of partaking in violent crime. On the other hand, resilience theorists quoted by Donald, Dawes & Louw (2000) maintain that some parents do shield their children from stressful events by supportively helping them to concentrate on violence free activities such as school work and those parents may teach their children to cope despite the adverse situations. However, a thought worth capturing is an answer to why some homes with stressed parents produce law-abiding citizens and others in similar situations produce children who become involved in criminality.

In most South African households, it may happen that some women are raising children alone because they are either not married to the children's biological fathers or the male partner works far away from home or as illustrated in a story by (Molohlanyi, 2007); the father is unknown to both the mother and the child. According to Boswell &Wedge

(2001), both parental genders are important for child growth but optimal parenting can be achieved regardless of the familial structure. Richter & Morrell (2005) point it out, that the absence of a father through neglect is said to have a devastating effect on some boys. The authors have observed that during certain memorable stages in their lives, some boys would rather run away from home than face the shame of not having a father. The explanation provided by Wilson (2005) is that the anger generated by absence of a father may stem from the fact that some children believe that they are missing out on a relationship with a biological role model. The parental structure may not necessarily influence young offenders, rather the manner in which parents had separated and the processes within families particularly parent-child and parental relationships in the absence of one parent. Some law abiding young men in South Africa have grown up without father figures. A warm, loving and supportive parent is needed for a child to conform to legal and social norms.

Inadequate parenting skills, change in parental roles and subsequent absence of one parent from home, age of the parents, exposure to parental violence, non-existent parent-child relationships and deprived socio-economic conditions are some of the traumatizing experiences that shall be discussed as contributing to youth offending. South African and international researchers have found these factors to have been observed in homes of young offenders (Boswell & Wedge, 2002; Dawes, de Sas Kropiwnicki, Kafaar & Richter, 2005 Hamber & Lewis, 1997; McKendrick, 1990; Mokwena, 1991; Morrell & Richter, 2005 and Muntingh, 2005).   Children who missed love and nurturing are more likely to feel owed or entitled to get their way (Namka, 1994), they may develop a sense of loss and shame that manifests itself in being angry. With this kind of attitude, they may believe that the world revolves around them and violently force others to make up for what their parents did not provide. With proper supportive intervention strategies, it is possible to exit a difficult childhood unscathed. Few South African children are able to access those interventions or lucky enough to encounter a positive role model who is willing to offer an opportunity to learn differently. Not all of those vested with ample chance to transform are willing to capture that ideal. Crime easily becomes an alternative space to display their distressful socialization lessons.

Parenting is inadequate if it involves an inability to teach children to distinguish between right and wrong without necessarily resorting to violent punishment Muncie (1999). According to (Muntingh, 2005 p11) generally, offenders come from homes where what is right and wrong is not always clearly defined and have rarely been taught by parents how to mediate shortcomings such as limited opportunities and exclusion from resources. Parents with inadequate parenting abilities neglect to build up social controls over socially disapproved behaviour. Furthermore, Muntingh (2005) explains that when families become disorganized, the chances of children exercising social control become diminished.

Research on poverty in South Africa has offered insights into the understanding of inadequate parenting and young offending. Parents from poverty-stricken communities are likely to work long hours or be absent from home looking for work (Masuku 2004 and

Tshiwula 1998). Inability to find employment, ill treatment at work, and low paying jobs may create stressful conditions that disable efforts to adequately adhere to children's emotional and financial needs. However, Tshiwula (1998) warns against overemphasizing the impact of poverty and has put a strong emphasis on weak bonds between people, institutions and values as contributing to youth offending. The author suggests that poverty be separated from family interaction and be seen as a development issue. The question to be asked is why poor families fail to parent their children productively enough to control them from engaging in criminal tendencies.

The South African literature has revealed a link between gender violence, family harmony, economic status of the parent and use of corporal punishment. Parents from violence prone poverty stricken backgrounds are more likely to apply punitive measures to keep their children safe than middle class parents Dawes et al. (2005). The same authors continue and state that men who abuse wives are likely to victimize their children as well. Abused mothers are likely to experience stress and depression, which may lead to negative or inconsistent parental practices (Bezuidenhout, 2004 and Tshiwula 1998). On the contrary, (Bhana & Hochfeld's 2001 p10) research results reveal that few abused women abuse their children, but women with children in abusive relationships use enormous amounts of energy on staying safe and avoiding abuse. They may hide the abuse from the children, healing wounds that make proper parenting a difficult task to fulfil. Secrecy surrounding violence ought to be more devastating and often contradictory to children who may be hearing cries of violence at home (Bhana & Hochfeld, 2001 p4). This type of parenting does not bode well for children's healthy development. It may convey a message that says it is proper to use violence towards your partner as long as it is hidden.

Exposure to inter-parental violence means that children are either present in the room when parents fight, hear screams and the sound of yelling or experience the feeling of being shoved against the wall when they are trying to intervene (Rossman, Hughes & Rosenberg, 1998 p1). Growing up, young offenders have often been caught in between violent ferocious rows dominated by emotional and physical violence of one parent by another. The climate of such homes may reflect a culture of violence, meaning that violence pervades their lives Kotch, Muller & Blakely (1999). Furthermore, Rossman et al. (1999) explain that parental violence consequently produces emotionally closed parents who cannot assist their own children to deal with challenges outside home. Lack of emotional attachment may create a distance between parents and children and in turn facilitate secrecy about each other's   movements. Long – term exposure to violence may facilitate a development of a frame of mind, which suggests that violence is a useful mechanism to silence opponents.

According to Tshiwula (1998), children learn to stay out of trouble in society through social bonding created in the family with parents, guardians, or extended family members. The author further explains that along with attachment, commitment and involvement children ought to develop a belief that fair rules merit being obeyed consistently. In the absence of a strong parent-child attachment common in most offenders' homes, parents

may often devise emotionally destructive means to bring attention of their children to home and family processes. Some parents may use hurtful labelling words to catch the attention of their children. Therefore, those parents may lose an opportunity to control their behaviour (Tshiwula 1998) and push their children back to antisocial arenas. When children refuse to use parents as primary sources of emotional affection, other social agents such as gangs may take over. That may create an emotional void, which fosters loss of respect for the elders or "generational conflict" (Mokwena, 1991 p4). In some cases, particularly common among the working class, violence prone and dysfunctional families, parents apply excessive forms of corporal punishment to control children's behaviour (Donald et al. 2000). Parents may resort to corporal punishment with the belief that it shall prevent children from participating in violent criminal tendencies prevalent in their communities (Dawes et al. 2005). The same bond may become unhealthy where parents become pre-occupied with their own problems, such as unemployment, inter-parental violence and extended working hours. In such a situation children tend to look elsewhere for guidance. The consequences of this form of behavioural control may exacerbate the situation and drive children further away.

Research Methodology

This research comprises of qualitative and quantitative research designs. Qualitative design was especially relevant in order to ask open-ended questions. Quantitative research methodology is applicable to biographical details of respondents. A structured questionnaire consisting of open and close-ended questions was used to solicit information from respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The close-ended questions such as biographical details appeared in Section A and the open-ended questions were asked in Section B. Questions in Section B were formulated to probe respondents' opinions on various themes such as type of offences committed by young offenders, relationship with parents, young offender– parent communication, inter-parental violence, responses of parents to young offending and parental participation in rehabilitation programmes for young offenders. All respondents were asked the same questions in the same order. May (2001) states that consistency such as, not prompting or providing a personal view, not interpreting meanings or improvising during interviews, allows little room for deviation from the interview schedule. The researcher had planned to utilize a tape recorder to record responses. However, due to their professions, respondents did not wish for their names to appear in the researcher's report. The names of their places of work are used for the purpose of data analysis. The informed consent was verbally sourced and the researcher had verbally guaranteed their privacy and anonymity.

The respondents were known before interviews were conducted. The respondents had been responsible for the guidance and monitoring of social work students conducting fieldwork practice. The researcher had been coordinating the fieldwork practice. Purposive sampling was a sampling method that fulfilled the purpose of this research. (Denscombe, 1998 p15) explains that purposive sampling is applicable in situations where the researcher already knows something about specific people who are likely to produce most

valuable data. The added advantage of using a purposive sample was that no added costs were incurred.

Thirteen social workers from the Department of Correctional Services and two Probation Officers from Social Development were interviewed. The social workers were working at Fort Beaufort, King Williams Town, Grahams Town, Umtata, Queenstown, Middledrift, Barberton, Krugersdorp and Mdantsane Correctional Centres (CC). Probation Officers were employed at Alice, Zwelitsha and East London Social Development. Respondents were working with young offenders and therefore had first hand information with regard to the home and family circumstances of young offenders. Respondents are identified according to places of work to respect their privacy. In cases where two social workers from one correctional centre were interviewed, the social worker attached to the main correctional centre has been identified with number (1) and the social worker at community corrections is identified with number (2).

Research Findings

The results of this research were analyzed qualitatively through data interpretation. Qualitative analysis may have indented inverted commas when quoting exact words of respondents, and a summary where two or more respondents expressed a similar sentiment.

Throughout this research, the word parent is used to mean either biological parent or primary caregiver. Based on research results, female figures play an instrumental role in childcare. Fathers or male figures are either absent through separation or divorce. Respondents did not mention the death of a parent to have been experienced by a young offender. Respondents had mentioned fathers or male partners as abusers, when answering questions about inter-parental violence.

I had interviewed 15 respondents for the purpose of this research. Three (20%) respondents were working as Probation Officers at Social Development Departments. Under the jurisdiction of Department of Correctional Services, 12 (80%) respondents were working as Social Workers. Twenty (20%) of the research sample are male and 80% are female. Generally, there are more female than male social workers in South Africa. According to the South African Council for Social Service Professions (2006), of the 11447 registered social workers in South Africa 1223 are male and the rest comprise of females.

All (100%) respondents were married during data collection. Marriage in this regard, refers to a heterosexual union between a man and a woman. All respondents are parents of high school going children. They live and work in the same area with their partners. In the context where respondents are requested to offer opinions about people whose lifestyles are different from theirs (May 2001 p21) suggests recognition of subjectivity. The author argues that a research is biased if respondents have offered judgmental perceptions pertaining to the subject.

Thirteen respondents work in the Eastern Cape, which, according to researcher's observation, is riddled with a wide range of socio-economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment and teenage pregnancy. Rural villages and most recently low-cost houses are hugely situated on the periphery of city and town centres in the Eastern Cape. Most of these towns were previously governed by the former Ciskei and Transkei. Middledrift, Zwelitsha, Mdantsane, Alice (former Ciskei) and Umtata (former Transkei) are thriving small towns with police stations, magistrate's courts, prisons (except Alice and Zwelitsha) and government departments such as Social Development. Queenstown, East London, (cities) Graham's Town, King William's Town, and Fort Beaufort (small towns) were previously governed by the apartheid state. They have most basic amenities and are hugely surrounded by middle class suburbs and townships, with villages at a 20 –30km distance. Young offenders incarcerated in these correctional centres come from the same towns and cities or nearby villages. Due to lack of resources for female offenders, Queenstown correctional centre has female offenders from all over Eastern Cape.

Barberton is a small town with a police station, magistrate's court situated in the Mpumalanga province on the outskirts of Nelspruit. It is facing similar challenges as Eastern Cape. Young offenders incarcerated in its Barberton correctional centre are from the surrounding farms, villages and Nelspruit. Krugersdorp forms part of Gauteng and its superior facilities accommodate inmates from all over South Africa and foreigners found guilty of committing crime in South Africa. Farms, townships with low cost houses and middle class suburbs, are surrounding the city.

The following paragraphs illustrate the home situation of young offenders before they participate in criminal activities.

The Socio-economic Conditions of Young Offenders

Depending on the area where the respondents work, most young offenders come from relatively deprived backgrounds such as informal settlements, Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) houses, and four roomed houses. They have to share these houses with an average of nine siblings or cousins in case of grandparent lodging:

> One bedroom, some children sleep in the kitchen and in rural areas a large family can occupy one rondavel (Zwelitsha).

> Some live in shacks with big families and some in RDP houses (Barberton).

In areas such as East London, some young offenders come from suitably comforting backgrounds that provide enough room to make adequate decisions:

> It depends on the area, in Mdantsane you have four roomed houses, and Duncan village there are shacks. In East London, you have suburbs. It depends and varies from site to site; there is no standard size of houses (East London).

Occupations of parents range from fruit and vegetable stall owner, domestic workers, factory worker, casual jobs, pension recipient and child maintenance grant beneficiary:

> Most children live with single mothers and some with grandparents who depend on pension (Grahamstown).

> Some children come from rich backgrounds and some depend on grandparents' old age pension (Fort Beaufort).

What Types of Parenting and Socialisation Practices are Received by Young Offenders?

It was important to probe disciplinary measures utilized by parents to discipline their children. Results have pointed to authoritarian ways of disciplining children. Seemingly, parents give instructions and expect them to be obeyed by children without question. Harsh words may be communicated to children to emphasize the importance of discipline:

> Most parents do not see communication with children as important. Children are usually instructed to follow orders without question. It is a standard norm generally practiced in other households (East London).

From nine to sixteen years, children need guidance and surveillance from parents. Seemingly, in the absence of a parent, they are expected to behave like responsible adults. The confusion created by double roles played by children may generate conflict between parents and children. Wright & Bearer (2005 p1171) have suggested that:

> Child specific parenting behaviour ought to be closely examined. Parents have a differential relationship to their children. They may treat one with hostility yet pamper another. For example, conflict may occur in the father - son, and the mother - daughter relationships. Mothers are likely to be carefree with boys and fathers with girls.

However, when conflict occurs most parents interpret it as children's resistance towards their authority. They send their children to social workers. They feel that legal restrictions pertaining to the use of corporal punishment to discipline children have opened a window of disrespect and disorder:

> Children defy authority, parents cannot beat them. Then parents come to social workers. They think that children's unruly behaviour should be reported to social workers (Zwelitsha).

> Parents and children resolve conflict by visiting social workers to report that children do not want to listen. It is always the case that parents believe social workers will make children listen and follow orders (East London).

Social work intervention is important in child rearing matters, especially where parents are seeking solutions to behavioural problems of children. However, social workers may give a diagnosis not a cure. The bulk of the work remains with parents. Westway (2000 p71) argues that social workers are often ineffectual and frequently fail to intervene successfully in halting family confliction situations. Westway (2000) has further argued that some social workers might fail to intervene in the families, which are reluctant to realize their mistakes. On the other hand, parents might have done the best they could under stressful circumstances, but employment challenges occupied most of their time, thus leaving minimal opportunity to attend effectively to children's issues:

> We motivate parents to communicate with their children. However, we have noticed that throughout our intervention parents, especially mothers may lie on children's behalf. They will say a child has improved and the next we meet both (parent and child) in court (Grahamstown (2)).

> Crime will not be as high as it is if children were ashamed of their acts. Nowadays children smoke in uniform and you cannot reprimand them. There is a misunderstanding regarding culture. Children have adopted a Westernized thinking which clash with family and community morality. In addition, the social worker sometimes can only work with children instead of taking the whole family (Middledrift (2)).

An idea shared by most respondents was that parents have become confused with their roles regarding children's discipline and control. They would like to freely use corporal punishment without governmental or statutory interference. Most respondents created an impression that children had used knowledge of "rights" to threaten parents once they had attempted to beat them:

> One parent asked, "What are you [Social Workers] doing about our children? These children these days have rights. You cannot punish them or say anything; they will tell you they have rights" (Krugersdorp).

This parental confusion should be seen within the changing context of family, society and human rights currently prevalent in South Africa. According to Bezuidenhout (2003 p5) the confusion has been generated by the fact that:

> [South African] youths grew up in a culture of violence where little respect and consideration for human life were shown, and now have to internalize the human rights values as set by the Constitution.

South Africans, generally have been confused with rights accorded to its citizens. These rights seem to clash with social norms. Moreover, the lack of consistent and coherently structured norms and values exacerbates some parental confusion regarding child-rearing practices. Eventually each parent raises his/her child in accordance to what a parent

commonly knows, even though what the parent knows may be considered neglectful or criminal by authorities. When the researcher asked whether parents understood concepts such as parental supervision and monitoring most Correctional Services social workers and the Probation Officer from Zwelitsha seemed to think that joy of having children, which respondents believe most adults regard as necessary in their lives, seems to diminish completely once stress and other life's challenges overwhelm some parents.

A Fort Beaufort Correctional Services social worker pointed out a racial differentiation pertaining to the socialization of children. He has worked with young offenders from all racial and economic background in the Queenstown and Fort Beaufort areas. He was remarkably irritated by the way; some people still leave children either unsupervised or let them play alone in the streets:

> In some communities it is very rare for parents to follow up on children's activities. Other communities care about the general emotional welfare of the child especially their school progress. Other people care in health related matters. There are similarities found among communities in terms of child rearing practices. Children get lost; they must be monitored and supervised all the time. Even when washing dishes you must see where your children are (Fort Beaufort).

Due to limited parental formal education and busy schedules, some parents do not attach importance to supervision of children particularly school adjustment and schoolwork. They make use of outdated means of supervising children such as sending them to a neighbour, traditionally practiced in most neighbourhoods. As a South African, the researcher has observed that some communities have become fragmented due to socio-economic dislocations and deprivations and might no longer commit to socialization of children as a community responsibility. Consequently, such challenges have created diverse interpretations of socio-cultural norms and values and parenting styles:

> Parents or guardians are away for 8–9 hours working or selling vegetables. Parents have no option but to go to work to put food on the table. At times children bunk school to engage in criminal activities (East London).

According to (Crosnoe et al. 2002 p540), some parents may not monitor their children's deviant associations completely because most of these incidents happen outside the parental purview. However, parental positive response is important once the child is caught within deviant associations:

> Most of them are not aware of children's movements. Children are alone after school without a child-minder (East London).

Were the Young Offenders Exposed to Inter-Parental Violence?
Responses from respondents show that young offenders had constantly been exposed to violence when growing up. Respondents had observed it in different contexts of parental intimate partnerships. This violence was mostly directed towards the mothers. The mothers were married, cohabiting, or separated from abusive spouses:

> In Grahamstown it is not common for people to marry, they cohabit. It happens that the mother is a breadwinner and the father is unemployed and the father or boyfriend spend mother's money in shebeens, come drunk, fight, and the children are caught in between (Grahamstown).

> Domestic violence in young offenders' homes is common regardless of the intimate structure of those involved especially when huge volumes of alcohol are consumed (Krugersdorp, Zwelitsha and Barberton).

> Even though violence is common in young offenders' homes, some parents are very protective of their children and would do everything they can to protect them (East London).

> Parents fight especially where there is substance abuse. Children want to stop but get beaten by father, children ran away to live with grandparents (Zwelitsha).

Based on responses it seems children were caught up in the frenzy of these scuffles and attacked especially when trying to stop the conflict. Boys seem to have been more affected by these quarrelsome episodes than girls have. Nevertheless, one social worker has provided an example of a girl who responded harshly to her mother's abuse:

> Boys are worst affected by violence especially where the partner is not biologically related. They either fight the abusive partner or leave home (Barberton).

> We have a young girl here, pregnant with a baby; she killed her mother's boyfriend because she couldn't tolerate his violence towards the family. She poured boiling water at him. He died of third degree burns (Queenstown).

Due to gender socialization of children, girls may be more reluctant to display aggressive tendencies than boys. Gendered reactions of children to inter-parental violence need to be examined further.

Is Criminality Unique to One Child within a Family Setting?
Few respondents knew of an occurrence of sibling criminality within the same home. These respondents had pointed its prevalence to exist in grandparents' homes where five to nine cousins were sharing the house:

> It's common to have five siblings arrested for different crimes, when asked where they learnt to commit crime they say amongst each other. Siblings are also involved in crime (Zwelitsha).

> Some young offenders get along with their siblings. They may have 'normal' regular fights but make peace (East London).

However, the response from one social worker has revealed that traumatic events experienced by children may negatively influence them regardless of the type of caregiver:

> Identical twin boys, whose unmarried parents had separated, grew up in different households. One twin chose to live with the father and the other twin chose to live with the mother. They are currently serving sentences for rape. They committed their crimes in different areas (Middledrift (2)).

The Relationship Between Young Offenders and Their Parents or Guardians
Research results have indicated a lack of understanding of emotional support and the significance of parent child relationship. Respondents have noticed that as long as children and parents occupy the same household, a relationship exists, whether they have spoken to their children or not. However, some respondents have come to understand reasons for lack of communication between parents and their children, generally. They stated that most parents work in demanding jobs for long hours and in the process accumulate stress, which makes it difficult to relate to their offspring on their return home from work:

> Generally parents do not have time for their children because they spent most of their time at work and travelling to and from work (Barberton).

> Most parents do not consider communication with children as important. No, how small children are they do ask questions and I think they deserve some answers (Fort Beaufort).

How do Parents Respond to their Children's Criminal Behaviour?
Children are known to act out learned parental behaviour either at home or on the playground. This 'acting out' behaviour is a spontaneous repetition of actions, which may have occurred early in their lives. It may manifest itself into criminal or anti-social behaviour depending on its original form. However, parents may not associate children's criminal behaviour with their own. Respondents have noticed that parents feel utterly embarrassed by their children's involvement in crime. This is seen in the way parents react on hearing that their offspring is in a police-holding cell:

> Parents experience ambivalent feelings towards children's misbehaviour. They first blame themselves, also take things personally and worry about the

image child offence will portray to society. They are sometimes embarrassed to the extent of beating children in front of the police officers (Zwelitsha).

Parents take children's offending behaviour personally. They see it as a violation of their instructions. They worry about community's responses to children's arrest. They rarely ask themselves why children have behaved in that manner instead they will ask why their children are embarrassing them (East London).

Parents feel depressed and puzzled by the news of child's arrest. Parents do not care to learn about children's challenges in life because they do not take children seriously (Barberton).

Parents may neither deliberately plan for their homes to be dominated by violent conflict nor for their children to draw life lessons from negative home circumstances. Some parents may not be aware that children are responsive beings, who are negatively affected by circumstances at home. Most children are conceived in homes largely dominated by parental conflict before they could pronounce a single syllable. Literature for this research has proven that children's exposure to parental violence might mean that their chances of learning peaceful ways of living are shattered at the onset. If they have not encountered caregivers who could expose them to peaceful conflict resolutions before they break the law, they may develop a frame of mind that merely associates dispute resolution with violence.

Even though non-judgmentally recognized, social workers and probation officers interviewed have expressed alarm at the lack of proper parental involvement in the childhood lives of young offenders. Probation officers in Zwelitsha, East London, Correctional Services Social worker in King William's Town and Fort Beaufort, were particularly troubled with the way parents shift responsibility of their children's misbehaviour to service providers. According to these respondents, parents of young offenders seem to think that out there exist a big person looking after and monitoring children's movement:

When they hear that their children have been arrested they take it personally and yell at them. They rarely look inwardly to examine factors contributing to children's criminal behaviour (Krugersdorp).

Parents may say, 'Children do not want to listen; corporal punishment shall enforce turnaround in their behaviour' how do you make them interested in children's lives with that attitude? It's always the young offender's fault (Krugersdorp and Middledrift).

Do Parents Participate in their Children's Rehabilitation Programmes?
According to respondents, young offenders and parents are allowed an opportunity to work together to transform the child's criminal behaviour. However, few social workers

have expressed an admirable parental involvement in their children's rehabilitation process. The Probation Service expects parents to play an important role in diversion, restorative justice and after care services such as the Journey Programme. According to the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), the Journey is a two to three months intensive programme for youth at risk. It is aimed at rehabilitating serious and multiple offenders. Parents and community members are meant to support participants through the Journey process. However, all respondents have said that despite these opportunities, most parents and family relatives of young offeders do not show interest:

Parents are not willing to participate in rehabilitation programmes with children. Children are disciplined and are probably not taught anything (Zwelitsha).

Parents have certainly demonstrated lack of dedication and determination to help children improve their offending behaviour. They think it is someone else's role to do that (East London).

Parents are not involved in rehabilitation of young offenders in prison. Nevertheless, we encourage parents to support their children when released (Middledrift).

Conclusion

Although further research among parents and young offenders is needed to supplement the practitioners' views, this research has brought to light the lack of parental enthusiasm regarding challenges faced by children on a daily basis. Research results have revealed that parents of young offenders do not seem to take their parenting roles seriously and instead shift child discipline to social workers once child parent relationships become difficult to mend. As expressed by one social worker, this style of parenting seems to be favoured by parents in neighbourhoods where unemployment and poverty prevails. There is no doubt that South Africa's history may have propelled many people to reside in depleted areas, which are socio-structurally hostile to healthy development of children. In addition, it is interesting to note that offenders from middle class backgrounds may have experienced similar negligent parenting practices as offenders from poor backgrounds. Therefore, a conclusion drawn from research results is that, when growing up young offenders were exposed to inter-parental violence, weak parental control and discipline, non-existent parental supervision, monitoring, and raised by stressed parents who regarded social workers as instrumental in the upbringing of their children.

The strengthening of family welfare and parenting services might be an essential alternative to help the government rehabilitate children who have circumstantially been raised to lack the desire to explore and reach beyond violent experiences. When nine to fourteen year olds embrace crime as a favourable activity overlooking the opportunities that might prevail with education and good neighbourliness, South Africa may not win

the fight against crime unless the parenting citizens take cognizance of the profound contribution they transfer to their offspring. As evidenced in the media and other public debates, crime in South Africa brings disastrous economic and socio-political consequences. In particular, all South Africans seem to abhor crime. However, few South Africans are willing to look introspectively into the parenting strategies prevalent in their homes.

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