

Multiple-victim parricides in South Africa, 1990–2019

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Abstract

Previous studies of homicides in South Africa have examined serial murders and mass killings. While some scholars have examined parricides in African countries such as Ghana and Zimbabwe, few have examined the intersection of parricide and multiple victim homicides in the context of South Africa. This paper examines multiple victim parricides in a South African context using newspapers and court records as data. Eighteen cases of multiple-victim parricides were identified and analysed. Our findings indicate that multiple victim parricides in South Africa are shaped by residential patterns as well as social and cultural factors that are unique to South Africa that are embodied in the offence characteristics. The implications on the findings are discussed.

Keywords

multiple-victim; parricides; multi-victim family murder; parricides; South Africa

1 INTRODUCTION

Multiple-victim murders are defined as the killing of two or more people within a 24-hour time period in a single incident (Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). Although mass or spree killings are not common in South Africa, several multiple victim parricides have been reported in recent years. In 2015, a 21-year-old man killed his father, mother, and brother with an axe, the reasons behind these killings unclear (Faber, 2018). In 2014, a 34-year-old man shot both his parents after an argument. He had been drinking and using illegal narcotics at the time (Venter, 2016). These recent parricides-turned-mass murder warrant analysis since they differ in victim-offender relations and offence dynamics from the typical mass murder incidents. In this study, the term “multiple-victim parricide” will be used to refer to the killing of two or more mothers, fathers, or superordinate elders such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and in-laws by subordinate family members such as children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and sons/daughters-in-law by one or more offenders in one incident.

Previous studies of homicides in South Africa have been in relation to serial murder or mass murder (Hodgskiss, 2004; Horning, Salfati, & Labuschagne, 2015; Labuschagne & Salfati, 2015; Salfati, Labuschagne, Horning, Sorochinski, & De Wet, 2015). Labuschagne and Salfati (2015) found that general homicide and serial homicide rates in South Africa are the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Aitken, Oosthuizen, Emsley, and Seedat (2008) investigated the implications of mass murders on mental health, noting that these types of murderers were mostly suicidal. Although atypical homicides such as serial and mass murder have been the objects of enquiry in South Africa, mass killings that occur in the context of parricides have not been analysed. While parricides in African contexts have been reported, they did not analyse mass murder incidents or make the variables related to their dynamics analytically relevant, focusing the analysis on single victim and single offender incidents (Adinkrah, 2017, 2018; Menezes, 2010). It remains unknown how parricides turn into multiple victim homicide incidents within the family.

Multiple-victim homicides within the family have been disproportionately framed as male heads-of-household who kill wives, then kids, following a divorce or a termination from a long-held job (Websdale, 2010). It has been argued that major changes in life circumstances, hence, a consequent change in self-identity, radically detaches such men from their previous social bonds that then serve as triggers for violent incidents. Despite the prevalence of mass killings that originate within the family context (Duwe, 2004), one of the emergent trends in the literature is to frame the incidents from interdiction-oriented perspectives or provide descriptive profiles of active shooters (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Silver, Simons, & Craun, 2018). Parricidal mass murders—parricides that turn into the killing of multiple victims in the context of family relations—tend to be overlooked in the context of other multiple victim homicide events: they merit an examination in their own right.

Mass killings that involve multiple victims have been carried out in countries where firearms are readily accessible such as the United States (Duwe, 2004). Guns facilitate multiple victim homicides as offenders can target and kill numerous people easily. However, such offence dynamics cannot be extended to settings where guns are not easily accessible. In countries where access to guns is restricted, offenders must control their victims through force, deception, or tactics. Non-firearm weapons make multiple victim homicides difficult to complete due to victims' behaviour; they have the capacity to flee or counterattack, which compounds the difficulty of killing. This paper uses the term “victim management” to indicate the techniques offenders use to control their victims in scenes of multiple victim homicides. Previous works on multiple victim killings have overlooked such nuances in victim management. In order to remedy the preceding shortcomings in the literature, this paper examines multiple victim parricides in South Africa. Using newspapers and court records as data, we show how parricidal mass murders in South Africa are similar to and different from the offence characteristics of other homicides. The implications are discussed.

2 PRIOR WORK ON MULTIPLE-VICTIM PARRICIDES

Although most parricide incidents are overwhelmingly carried out by single offenders against single victims, there are warrantable reasons to synthesise the divergent sets of literature into parricide incidents that involve multiple victims. First, even parricide incidents have the potential to turn into mass murder events that meet the current definition of mass murder and familicide. As rare events that make up less than 10% of all parricides (Marleau, Millaud, & Auclair, 2003; Myers & Vo, 2012; Weisman, Ehrenclou, & Sharma, 2002), double parricides converge at the intersection of mass murder and familicide as they have the potential to be

classified as multiple offender-robbery-turned-parricide, as well as parricide-turned-mass murder. The dynamics of double parricide suggest that while offenders may be dictated by forces that are beyond their control, such as defence of self or delusions, they are cognizant of their actions in the second killing of a parent. This means that the dynamics of first and second parricides in multiple victim incidents must be disaggregated in accordance with the offender's intent, weapon usage, and on-scene behaviour. Myers and Vo (2012) noted that second parricides were carried out in order to hide evidence of a crime. Double parricides meet the definition of mass murder if offenders kill themselves after their offence, bringing the total victim count to three.

Second, conceptualising multiple-victim parricides as a unique category is valid for another reason: there is variance in the definitions that are used to classify a killing as a mass homicide incident. Mass murder is generally defined as an incident in which an attacker kills two or three (Fegadel, 2014) or three or more victims in one location and time period (Lankford, 2015). If an offender kills three or more victims in incidents across multiple sites within a 30-day period, the offence is considered a spree killing rather than a mass murder (Fox & Levin, 1994). Although mass murders have been conceptualised as public events, with the offender carrying out the attack in public spaces, the offender transforming his perceived slight and grievance against the world at large and against certain institutions into righteous anger (Fox, Levin, & Quinet, 2005), recent works have shown that parricides morph into mass murder events in ways that configure audiences on the scene in implicative ways as well as other psychological forces (Karlsson et al., 2019). Recently, educational institutions have been the sites of mass shootings where a current or former student targets peers, teachers, and administrators at their school, and carries out lethal attacks against them (Langman, 2009).

Third, scholarly discussion of parricide and other forms of violence against parents in contemporary literature tends to occur in the context of family violence (Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). However, even within the context of family homicides, parricide tends to be overshadowed by killings that target wives and intimate partners (see Karlsson et al., 2019; Liem, Levin, Holland, & Fox, 2013). While multiple-victim parricide is sometimes referred to as mass murder or multicides, it is important to be precise in the nominal classification due to the differences in offence characteristics. Some have categorised multiple-victim murders into four groups: Despondent husbands, spousal revenge, extended parricide and diffuse conflict by some researchers (Fegadel & Heide, 2017, p. 7). The first two categories are associated with depressed husbands and angry spouses. *Extended parricides* are committed by relatively young, troubled men, whose primary anger is directed towards one or more parent/s. Suicide rarely occurs in this group (Aitken et al., 2008). Younger perpetrators often have the desire to get rid of the tormentor, thinking either me or him/her must die. Once the victims are dead, the need for taking his/her own life is removed (Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). Diffuse conflict familicides involve the prevalence of conflicts in diverse constellations of victims, often including a spouse and in-laws, parents, and other family members (Fegadel & Heide, 2017).

Approximately 7.8% of all parricides are multiple-victim parricides, committed predominantly by males (Fegadel, 2014). In a study on multi-casualty events, Abolarin, McLafferty, Carmichael, and Velopulos (2019) identified 2,425 multi-victim murders of which 741 cases were committed by intimate partners or family members of the victims, with very few of the cases that involved mental illness. However, Flemming (2014) established that multiple murderers are in general loners, dealing with depression, anger and frustration

who were motivated by power, revenge, loyalty, profit and terror. Some multiple murderers kill for profit, which could include eliminating witnesses. Motivations for multiple-victim parricides are sometimes attributed to a type of perverted love (Aitken et al., 2008). These murders are also often committed after an argument with a family member, which results in spontaneous, lethal violence. After the first victim is attacked, family members who attempt to intervene or happen to be present are targeted by the offender, resulting in death. Physical and geographical proximity of family members sometimes cause them to become a victim of family murder as they are often seen as an extension of the primary victim (Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). The most common weapon used in multiple-murders is a firearm, followed by a sharp object. Risks for homicide-suicides increase as the number of victims increase (Abolarin et al., 2019).

2.1 The South African context

Mass killings are a rare phenomenon in South Africa. Three incidents that made the headlines occurred more than 17 years ago. In one incident, 11 people were murdered by a security guard. After an argument with his girlfriend, the offender shot her, her father, two of her relatives and six strangers before turning the gun on himself (Anonymous, 2002). In 1992, the Goedemoed shooting was a mass murder in prison by a police constable who killed eight people and wounded four others before taking his own life (Anonymous, 1992). In 1988, a racially-motivated shooting spree was carried out in Lilian Ngoni Square Pretoria. The perpetrator murdered eight non-white victims and injured 16 others (Moore, 2018). Despite the fact that multiple murders are often reported on in the media, multiple victim parricides to our knowledge has not been studied exclusively within a South African context. As mentioned before, past research has mainly focused on general parricides and mass killings that occur in public settings.

Although multiple-victim family murder constitutes a small percentage of all murders, it is deemed an important research topic as 24. Nine percent of all murders in South Africa are committed by a family member or someone who lives with the victim (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The family is deemed a core structure of society and therefore it is imperative to understand the contributing factors that lead to these crimes.

Family structures have changed over the past decades in South Africa (Makiwane, Gumede, Makoae, & Vawda, 2017), with an increase in the number of relatives living in one household, especially in three-generation Black African families and Coloured households. It is estimated that less than one fifth of households in South Africa are classified as nuclear families. Such changes in family composition and structure have been brought about by high unemployment and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, which have created a larger than normal dependent populations that reside in multigenerational households. The largest group of people (36%) live in “extended” family households, followed by single-person households (22%). Extended households include multi-generations such as parents, children, grandparents and can even include cousins, aunts and uncles (Hall & Mokomane, 2018).

Children also tend to stay longer with their families than in the past, with 31.8% of people between the ages of 25 and 35 still living at home. Unemployment, dependent parents and convenience are some of the reasons why South African millennials live longer at home (Nair, 2017). The younger generation is also less likely to achieve past traditional markers such as the completion of education, marriage or finding employment (Fingerman, 2017). Elders who reside in multigenerational households may be attempting to exercise their

authority in the family while subordinates attempt to demarcate autonomy in their decision-making. This tension between the elderly and the young mirrors the sources of conflicts reported in previous literature (Muravyeva & Toivo, 2018). The presence of extended kin in households, therefore, has the potential to amplify conflicts across generations, leading to conflicts that are resolved through the use of violence. It remains unknown if the extended structure of families in South Africa may affect the characteristics of multiple victim parricides within a family context.

In addition to coresidential patterns of families, the environmental, socio-economic, and cultural factors of a country should be considered when conducting research on homicide (Sorochinski, Salfati, & Labuschagne, 2015). Culture is likely to style habits and shapes action by defining what people want. Cultural models play a powerful role in organising social life. Culture has independent causal influence during unsettled periods and enables new strategies of action (Swidler, 1986). Cultural and political changes were the norm in recent decades in South Africa. During the apartheid era violence was seen as a product of the people's protest against the racist regime; it was deemed legitimate. Violence on a political level was easily translated to the social and cultural levels because of the weak traditional family structures. Violence in the home became common and was integrated within the culture that persisted within South African society (Pandey, 2012; Scorgie et al., 2017). The acceptance of violence on social and cultural level in South Africa is evident in aspects such as the socio-cultural tolerance of violence, structural inequality and militarised masculinity. Wide-spread poverty, violent expressions of masculinity and drug and alcohol abuse fuel violence in the home (Mncanca & Okeke, 2019). The high rates of domestic violence and rape in the country can be explained by South Africa's history of social and political dislocation. Economic challenges such as high levels of unemployment and unmet expectations may result in male insecurity and elevated levels of violent behaviour in men. Gender-based violence in South Africa is to some extent "normalised" as there are few social pressures to deter men from violence against women. Violence against women and sexual coercion is not uncommon in South Africa (Horning et al., 2015).

There are other ways that culture influences offence patterns and characteristics. For example, serial killers have been described as highly mobile offenders who use their automobiles to lure and transport their victims from initial point of contact to dump site sites; or they have been described as predatory offenders who break into victims' homes to play out their ritualistic and sadistic violence in the privacy of the victims' homes (Keppel & Birnes, 2009). However, such patterns are unique to serial killers in the U.S., and may not be applicable to other cultural and national settings. Researchers have found that serial killers in South Africa combine multiple locations related to a homicide (i.e., contact site, assault site, kill site, dump site) into a single site; the kill site also tends to be used as a body recovery site (Horning et al., 2015). There is a cultural explanation for this offence characteristic. As noted, Black Africans often live in multigenerational households; therefore, killing victims in their home as a way of playing out an offender's fantasy is not practical: "In South Africa, serial murderers tend not to own or have access to vehicles; therefore, they must lure victims to accompany them to the predetermined comfort-zone where it is isolated and safe enough to commit their crime and subsequently leave their victim's body" (Horning et al., 2015, p. 55). In other words, culture influences criminal behaviour in notable ways. Despite such unique ways that culture shapes the violent strategies of action (Swidler, 1986), there also appear to be cross-cultural characteristics that serial killers share across national and temporal boundaries (Harbort & Mokros, 2001; Salfati & Hratsis, 2001; Salfati & Park, 2007; Salfati et al., 2015; Salfati, Horning, Sorochinski, & Labuschagne, 2015). It is possible that cultural

and social factors in South Africa may also influence the way parricides turn into mass killings.

2.2 The research setting

South Africa's population is estimated at 58.78 million people. The population is ethnically and linguistically diverse. The major ethnic groups are Black Africans (80.7%), Coloureds¹ (8.8%), Indian/Asians (2.6%) and Whites (7.9%). Gauteng, followed by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape are the most populous provinces. A third of the population is under the age of 15, whilst 8% of the population is aged 60 and over (Statistics South Africa, 2017). The average life expectancy of males is estimated at 62.7 years and 65.6 years for females. South Africa's population is predominantly urban with 66.9% of the population living in urban areas. The overall literacy rate of adults is estimated at 95% (Statista, 2015). About 20% of the country's workforce is employed in the financial sector, and 18% in government followed by trade (15%). South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) was estimated at \$348.3 billion in 2017 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). Almost 20% of South African households have inadequate access to food and 49.2% of the adult population live below the upper-bound poverty line (Statistics South Africa, 2019). A third of the population lives on social grants, of which 11 million are younger than 18 (Rossouw, 2017). South Africa has the highest rate of inequality in the world, driven almost exclusively along racial lines. Countrywide, more than 45% of Black Africans are unemployed compared with only 5% of Whites (in Breetske, 2018).

3 DATA AND METHODS

Multiple sources of data were used for a study on family homicides, beginning on January 1, 1990 through October 1, 2019. This broader study was used to select cases related to parricides. Both completed and attempted parricides were included, which is consistent with practices of prior researchers (Weisman & Sharma, 1997). While this conflation may appear to be conceptually, methodologically, and analytically unsound, there are compelling reasons to operationalise both as one act. Previous works have shown that homicide as a lethal outcome is shaped by chance factors such as the availability of medical assistance rather than malicious intent (Monkkonen, 2001).

Previous studies suggest that newspapers constitute a valid and reliable source of information about a homicide when access to official records is difficult (Freilich, Chermak, Belli, Gruenewald, & Parkin, 2014; Mautner, 2008). As there is no centralised database for criminal justice records in South Africa, we utilised a data triangulation strategy for validation purposes. First, true crime books were consulted to find cases identified by previous writers. Two books that were compiled by a psychologist (Pistorius, 2004) and crime reporter (Van der Spuy, 2015) on murder were consulted for possible inclusion. Second, court records of completed judgements were used as official sources. These were drawn from JUTASTAT, a database for completed court judgements in South Africa. Cases were classified under the heading "sentencing reports" from the subheadings "murder" and "child offender." The JUTASTAT database was searched as the court proceedings gave detailed accounts of the murders. A search of this official database resulted in 11 parricides cases and archival documents related to its adjudication. After this official record search was conducted, open-sources were searched to supplement the court records and cases identified from books.

Third, newspaper articles were collected through the search engine Google. Cases were retrieved by searching the phrases “murder,” “family murder” and “parricide.” This type of methodology has been successfully used by a number of previous researchers (Adinkrah, 2017; Boots & Heide, 2006; Fegadel & Heide, 2017; Govender, 2015). The use of newspapers to study murder has been an accepted methodology, especially in countries where there are no national criminal justice databases (Adinkrah, 2014, 2017, 2018) or during historical periods where newspapers constituted the most accessible centralised repository of information about crime in a community (Sharpe, 2012). Due to the violent nature of the act, family-related murders often receive extensive media coverage (Adinkrah, 2014; Liem & Reichelmann, 2014); it was therefore possible to identify family-related murders using this open source methodology (Parkin & Gruenewald, 2015). Our study identified 126 incidents of homicides within the family; of these, 46 incidents (37%) were parricide cases.

While three sources were consulted to identify cases, two sources—court records and newspapers—were the primary source of narrative data and the sequences of actions related to the crime. All the cases were initially read without preconceived categories (Elo & Kyngas, 2008); the data were then sorted according to a coding instrument containing 18 variables, and entered into a database.

Cases that met the following criteria were included in this study: the killing or attempted killing of two or more victims who are related by blood or marriage, such as mothers, fathers, stepmothers, stepfathers, or superordinate elders such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and in-laws by subordinate family members such as children, nephews, nieces, grandchildren, and sons/daughters-in-law by one or more offenders. In addition to variables such as age, sex, and race of victims and offenders, three key variables were selected for scrutiny. Although the principal criterion needed for the classification of parricides is determined by the relationship of the victim to the offender in a South African context (Bell, Milne, Cooper, & Burne, 1951), knowing the intent embedded in the offence, the weapons used, and what the victims and offenders were fighting about which resulted in death are important variables that shape the total context of parricide. Previous studies indicate that there is convergence validity in the emic factors related to parricide in disparate archival sources of data, even when only three key variables such as weapon, intent, and source of conflict are analysed.

Prior researchers have shown that the context of parricides is inextricably tied to the way the crime originated, weapons used, and the level of intent that is embedded in the offence. Therefore, the parricide was coded as being (a) “premeditated” if the offender planned the crime in advance; (b) “spontaneous” if the parricide occurred without prior planning and originated from the on-going social interaction; (c) accidental if the killing was an accident and (d) “unknown” if intent could not be identified. The weapons used in the parricides were coded in the following way: (a) knife/sharp object; (b) firearm; (c) axe; (d) hands & feet; (e) poison; (f) multiple weapons; (g) other; and (h) unknown.

Ethnicity and race of the offenders and victims were constructed by using the offender's last name, photographs and area of residence. Surnames and area of residence are fairly distinct indicators of race within the South African context. In four cases it was not possible to discern race by using the above mentioned indicators.

The source of conflict was coded as being related to (a) “defence” if the parricide originated out of a defence of another family member. The source of conflict was coded (b) “long term finance” if the dispute was related to inheritance and (c) “short term finance” if it was related

to for instance a robbery or spending money. The source of conflict was coded (d) “argument” if the parricide originated from a trivial verbal dispute; (e) “cover up a crime” was coded if the murder was committed to cover up another crime, while (f) “disciplinary” was coded if the parent disciplined the child and as result the murder was committed; (g) “jealousy” was coded if the murder originated from a jealous act against a parent and/or family member for instance a brother or sister. The source of conflict was coded as (h) “abuse” and (i) “mental illness” if the official report or newspaper article imputed the source of conflict as such. In some cases, the source of conflict was coded as (j) “other” when not related to the above; in 11% of the cases the source of conflict was (k) “unknown.”

Using newspaper and official documents has a number of limitations. The 18 multiple victim parricides cases do not necessarily represent an exhaustive list of parricides over a period of 30 years in South Africa. Although an attempt was made to capture as much information as possible by using a coding instrument, the study was limited by what was reported in the newspapers and court documents. However, content analysis of newspaper articles gives the reader a historical glimpse on social life and normative patterns of a particular society and the descriptions can be analysed as units of behavioural analysis. In the sections below, we provide an overview of the general characteristics of parricide in South Africa.

4 RESULTS

The current study emerged out of a previous study of 126 incidents of homicide within the family in South Africa; of these, 46 incidents (37%) were parricides; 18 incidents (39%) involved multiple victims. From 1990–2019, 22 offenders killed 44 victims in 18 incidents of multiple victim parricides in which two or more victims were killed. In 16 out of 18 incidents, the offenders were overwhelmingly male, the average age of the offender 20 years. Six of the offenders were 18 years or younger. The average age of victims was 44 years. In 8 (44%) of the cases drug abuse by the offender was reported. In 15 (83%) of the 18 incidents the offender lived with the victims. No offender took his/her own life at the scene of the crime. In the following, notable offence characteristics related to multiple victim parricides are discussed.

4.1 Offender race

Table 1 represents the race profile of the offenders. Black Africans make up 80.7% of the population, and represented just 22% of the multiple victim parricide incidents.

TABLE 1. Offender race ($N = 18$)

Race	Number of offenders	Percent
Black African	4	22
White	10	56
Coloured	1	6
Asian	3	17
Unknown	0	0

Whites in South Africa account for 7.9% of the total population, but committed 56% of the multiple victim parricides. Whites were overrepresented in parricides in general, for they were offenders in 37% of all categories of parricides and over half of parricidal mass murders. The overwhelming majority of the offenders were male. The Asian/Indian population of South Africa is estimated at 2.6%; however, Asian offenders committed 17% of the multiple victim parricides and 20% of all parricides.

4.2 Intent

One of the defining offence characteristics of mass murders is that disgruntled employees or students carry out attacks against former places of work or schools; in such attacks described in the literature, the level of prior planning that is involved varies, lasting from months to days (Blair & Schweit, 2014; Silver et al., 2018). The findings from the current study diverged in notable ways.

Table 2 represents the intent of the crimes. The intent behind the multiple victim parricides was distributed almost equally. Almost half of the killings were premeditated and planned in advance by offenders in ways that paralleled the prior research on mass murders. However, the killings were not planned in advance in the remaining half of the cases; rather, they emerged spontaneously during the on-going course of events in the household. The intent embedded in the offence was inextricably related to the source of the conflicts.

TABLE 2. The intent of the crime ($N = 18$)

Intent	Number of incidents	Percent
Premeditated	7	39
Spontaneous	9	50
Accidental	0	0
Unknown	2	11

4.3 Source of conflict

By far, the most prominent source of conflict (Table 3) between parents and their offspring which led to multiple victim killings occurred in the context of arguments of a trivial nature. In the current study, domestic arguments made up a full 22% of the conflicts that led to the killings, followed by abuse (17%).

TABLE 3. Source of conflict between offender and victim ($N = 18$)

Source of conflict	Number of incidents	Percent
In defence of another	0	0
Long term finance	1	6
Short term finance	0	0
Domestic argument	4	22
Cover up crime	0	0
Disciplinary	1	6
Jealousy	1	6
Abuse	3	17
Mental illness	0	0
Other	5	28
Unknown	3	17

A typical domestic argument that morphed into a multiple victim killing resembled the following, as reported in a local newspaper:

4.4 Excerpt 1 (case 4)

A 16-year-old schoolboy was arrested for the murder of his mother, father and brother. The boy shot his family members after an argument with his father over his consumption of alcohol at a party he attended that day. The boy said that he was the under influence of alcohol, but not to such an extent that he did not know what he was doing. The father apparently confronted the boy and slapped him. This was the second argument they had that day. He later stated that after the argument everything felt too much to handle. He first shot his father, then his mother and brother. After the murders he took his father's vehicle and went back to the party without telling his friends what happened. He spent the rest of the weekend drinking and driving around in his father's vehicle with his friends. On the following Monday the boy decided to take his own life, but was apprehended by the police, after a high-speed chase.

There are several characteristics of the offence that are noteworthy and merit attention. One, the victim and the offender are men. In incidents that predominantly involve men as offenders and victims, they relate to another as men rather than as members of a hierarchically organised relationship. Previous researchers have shown that fathers and sons become embroiled in arguments that turn into lethal fights in the context of recreation, discipline, and domestic disputes. This pattern of conflict has been shown to occur across the world—Scotland, Russia, United States, Finland, South Korea—in scenes of violence between fathers and adult sons (author; Boag, 2014; Kilday, 2016; Muravyeva, 2016; Muravyeva & Toivo, 2016). This interaction between fathers and sons unfolds in a way that

parallels the exchanges between two men, as described by sociologists (Polk, 1994) and historians who have examined masculine violence in the past (Gorn, 1985). The current findings thus support Mncanca and Okeke (2019) statement that violent expressions of masculinity often fuel violence in the home (Mncanca & Okeke, 2019). This pattern of violence can be observed in the South African parricide example. The victim precipitates his own demise by actively contributing to the sequence of events. In excerpt 1, the father verbally confronts the offender, and then strikes him first. The shooting occurs after the victim strikes the first blow, and the offender escalates his response to the initial assault. The attack against the primary target is not planned in advance but emerges as a response to this use of force by the eventual victim.

While the sociological concept “victim precipitation” has been used to describe dynamics of male-on-male homicides in the seminal literature (Wolfgang, 1958), we can see the relevance of this concept in the incipient stages of family conflicts that lead to multiple victim parricides in South Africa. The multiple victim parricide begins with the killing of the primary target (father), and then spreads to secondary targets who happen to be present at the scene (other family members). This contagious character of multiple victim parricide diverges from the mass murder events described in the contemporary literature. It also illustrates the processes by which parricides morph into mass murder incidents in the context of family life in South Africa. Finally, a firearm is used to carry out the killing. The offender executes his killing without concerns of victim resistance or counterattack because he is able to sidestep concerns related to vulnerability (Fox, Burgess, Levin, Wong, & Burgess, 2007).

A second notable source of conflict between parents and their offspring was related to abuse. Consider the following case recorded in the court documents:

4.5 Excerpt 2 (case 32)

A young man raised by his mother and maternal grandparents lived a life of social exclusion. His life was characterised by verbal, physical and sexual abuse at hands of his mother. His grandmother also verbally abused him. On the night of the murders his mother and grandmother started verbally abusing him. At one point his mother pointed a gun at him, where after he snapped and shot his mother, grandmother and grandfather. He was acquitted of all three the murders.

There are several significant aspects of this offence that is unique to South Africa. Like excerpt 1, the multiple victim incident in excerpt 2 is not planned in advance. It occurs as a response to verbal abuse, and as an escalation in response to the mother's initial show of force. The concept “victim precipitation” is again applicable to the nascent stages of multiple victim parricides where the first attack is ignited by factors (i.e., abuse) that previous scholars have already described. Second, we can see the relevance of residential patterns and family system in the category of victims that are represented. The presence of multiple elders not only expands the class of victims, but also the conflicts that emerge in the context of family life.

In excerpt 2, the grandmother and the mother, verbally abuse the offender. The very appearance of a grandparent already marks the divergent characteristics of parricide in South Africa compared to the Western ones noted in the literature. The grandmother's presence compounds the number of people who engage in behaviour that the killer finds offensive. In previous studies, grandparents and other superordinate elders (e.g., aunts, uncles) are not

significant figures in scenes of parricide because they are not part of the family structure. Parricides that have been examined tend to be based in North America and Europe where households are primarily nuclear in character, composed of fathers, mothers, and children (Heide, 2014). This trend may be attributable to the fact that most research findings are derived from North America during the latter part of the 20th century (Heide & Petee, 2007; Walsh, Crowder, & Krienert, 2008). The cast of characters in scenes of South African parricides mirror those found in Asian and Eastern and South European contexts where families are multigenerational and extended (Hayami, 1983; Jung et al., 2014; Korotayev, 2003; Kumagai, 1986). The additional class of victims that is represented in scenes of parricides thus already illustrates the way macro-level forces shape the structure of households in South Africa and the patterns of violence within them. It is these types of ordinary conflicts that are interpreted as personal affronts that initialize the ensuing violent encounters.

Third, while abuse has been almost exclusively conceptualised as sexual in character in the parricide literature, usually at the hands of fathers and stepfathers (Heide, 2014), the presence of other elderly superordinates hints at the confluence of authority and autonomy in an extended household. Prior research in multigenerational households, especially in Asian and European contexts (Toivo, 2016), has found that the meddlesome practises of elderly figures who intrude into the daily lives of offspring become foddors for conflict even as offspring age into adulthood and contribute in significant ways to parricides (Chilton, 2002). As a point of comparison, mothers and fathers-in-law routinely appeared as victims in scenes of parricide in South Korea and Russia, as women married and moved into their husbands' households and the domestic conflicts between daughters-in-law and their in-laws erupted into fatal violence (Muravyeva, 2013, 2016). The multigenerational character of households in South Africa shapes the victimisation patterns in similar ways. This pattern of violence is unique to South African parricides and diverges from the ones found in nuclear households noted in North America.

4.6 Weapons

Table 4 represents the weapons used in the murders. Firearms were the predominant methods used to kill multiple victims in parricide incidents.

TABLE 4. Weapons used to commit parricide ($N = 18$)

Weapon used	Number of incidents	Percent
Knife	1	6
Firearm	8	44
Hands or feet	1	6
Axe	3	17
Multiple	3	17
Other	2	11
Unknown	0	0

While firearms have been the most common weapons used in single all categories of homicide and parricide, particularly in the U.S., that is not the case for South Africa. In all categories of parricide, including single-victim, single-offender cases, guns make up about a quarter of all cases in South Africa; the rest involves ordinary implements such as knives and axes, and personal weapons such as hands and feet. As Table 3 illustrates, axes are the preferred weapons of offenders in multiple victim parricide incidents; as others have shown, the use of knives in mass attacks and overkill techniques lead to blades that break when they come into contact with bones, which then requires replacements or the use of multiple weapons (Bleetman, Hughes, & Gupta, 2003; Ong, 1999). The use of guns, however, sidesteps such practical issues in addition to potential counterattacks and evasive manoeuvres that victims may take.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We have examined multiple victim parricides in a South African context using newspapers and court records as data. Our findings indicate that multiple victim parricides in South Africa are similar to and different from other homicides and offence and offender characteristics reported in the homicide literature. First, our findings indicate that multiple victim parricides are equally likely to be planned in advance by offenders and emerge spontaneously during the on-going social interactions. Multiple victim parricides thus are consistent with mass murders that entail intricate premeditation such as workplace shootings and school shootings (Fox et al., 2005); they are also consistent with parricidal mass murders that originate from situational violence that spreads to witnesses and bystanders who are present at the scene (Karlsson et al., 2019).

Second, although a sense of injustice permeates the purported motivations of those who carry out mass attacks against others, our findings indicate that domestic arguments and verbal abuses by superordinate relatives contribute in significant ways to the typical conflicts that morph into fatal attacks against multiple victims. As criminologists have noted, violence is seductive and contagious (Katz, 1988); hence, that killings spread to intimates who are present as bystanders and witnesses in the context of family life is consistent with what has been reported in the literature. Moreover, that additional elders are present in the household to interfere in the personal—often romantic and financial—lives of subordinates in a typical South African extended family also shares structural resemblance to other family contexts reported in the history of the world.

Third, firearms represented the most commonly used methods to kill multiple victims. This finding is consistent with the ones reported in the mass murder literature. Firearms facilitate the killing of multiple victims without undue concerns about disarmament, victim evasion, or counterattacks (Fox et al., 2007). That a firearm was the modal way of carrying out attacks against multiple victims is consistent with the element of rationality embedded in the decision-making processes of offenders connoted in the existing literature. However, there may also be an element of cool-headed rationality in the non-gun weapons selected, for axes—a rather sturdy tool—and not household knives were favoured in multiple victim parricides. As others have noted, knife blades present numerous of difficulties for offenders, from self-inflicted wounds to blades that break during stabbings (Ong, 1999). That knives were not as favoured as axes hints that there may have been rational forces at work in weapon selection. Conversely, it could be the utility of axes as household tools that may explain their appearance as weapons in multiple victim parricide incidents in South Africa, similar to findings from other rural settings (Karlsson et al., 2019).

Finally, the role of race in parricides in South Africa warrants additional commentary. Black Africans, although an overwhelming majority of the population in South Africa, were underrepresented in the parricide cases. Whites and Asians/Indians, two minority groups in South Africa that respectively make up 8 and 2% of the population, were disproportionately represented in parricides in general and multiple victim parricides in particular. The two racial and ethnic groups combined accounted for three quarters of the multiple victim parricides in the current study. Such disproportional representation relative to the general population suggests that there may be other demographic, social, and cultural factors within White and Asian families that shape violence within them.

That Black Africans are not prominently represented in mass murder incidents suggests several explanations. One, the convenience sample we used for the current study may not be reflective of the actual number of parricidal mass murders that occur in the context of family relations in South Africa. Using a police source as data rather than open sources to determine the total number of cases may yield different findings. Two, the multigenerational and extended character of Black African households, despite the potential for amplification of conflicts across family relations, may function as a protective factor against violence. In our sample, the presence of superordinate elders aggravated the domestic conflicts between offspring and their parents and additional elders in the family. Yet, overall, the percentage of Blacks who carried mass murders were lower than other ethnic and racial groups in South Africa. It is possible that the extended family may have acted as mitigating factors in family violence and conflict which were not reflected in our data. For example, it is possible that collective values that emphasise respect and deference towards elders may act as disinhibiting factors against ascending forms of violence against elders in Black families in ways that parallel Confucianism in far east countries such as China, Japan, and Korea (Keum, 2000). The absence of this type of collective orientation in Asian and White families in South Africa may be responsible for the disproportionately high percentage of mass killings in nuclear families. Without additional empirical data and analysis, however, such conjectures are speculative at best.

As noted, during the *apartheid* era in South Africa, violence was seen as a product of the people's protest against a racist regime; it was deemed legitimate and inevitable by all. The acceptance of violence on a political level made it easy to move down to social and cultural levels because of the weak traditional family structures. Violence in the home became common and over time it was integrated within the culture that persisted within South African society (Pandey, 2012; Scorgie et al., 2017). Structural inequality, socio-cultural tolerance of violence, militarised masculinity, disrupted community and family life and the erosion of social capital have been proffered as South Africa's pathway to violence, while wide spread poverty, violent expressions of masculinity and drug abuse, especially alcohol abuse are cited as some of the causes of domestic violence (Mncanca & Okeke, 2019 in Taukeni). It just may be that Whites and Asians in South Africa embody the cultural factors related to violence in different ways. That is, there may be additional stressors that are shaping the family dynamics that affect White and Asian families in nuclear households. Although we have not directly examined the impact of post-apartheid era sensibilities on Whites and Asians living in South Africa, it is possible that they may be the recipients of forces that are disproportionately affecting their social status and positions in South African society, as reflected in multiple victim parricides in South Africa. Such speculations warrant further research and empirical validation.

The salience of “abuse” as sources of conflict in White and Asian families may also warrant a further examination of the factors that contribute to violence in the family in a South African context. Abuse in a North American and European context entails sexual and physical abuse and maltreatment. Abuse in Asian context involves verbal and emotional invectives that are directed against adult offspring who fail to meet socially delineated milestones in life such as gainful employment or marriage or against daughters-in-law who serve as domestic caretakers and servants in patrilocal marriages. There is thus variance in the practises that constitute abuse as well as the victims who are receiving end of such abuses. The practise and meaning of abuse in a South African context may be different from other cultures and settings.

To our knowledge this the first systematic study of multi-victim parricides in South Africa, however, there are limitations. Our study was exploratory and not randomised or a complete collection of all parricides in South Africa. For future works, it may be worthwhile to obtain a complete record of all homicides as the denominator and parricides as numerators so that an accurate percentage of the total number of cases could be calculated. It may be a worthwhile project to carry out studies relating to racial differences as there seems to be a disproportionally high number of multi-victim parricides in White and Indian households.

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Endnote

¹ While this term may seem inappropriate in North American and European contexts, this term is the official one designated for those who are in “mixed race” categories. However, the term “mixed” is offensive in a south African context. Therefore, a term that reflects the accepted and normative practises in South Africa have been consistently adopted.

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