

# Attempted and Completed Parricides in South Africa, 1990–2019

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## Abstract

Previous studies of parricide have been carried out predominantly in a Western context, in North America, Australia, and Western Europe. To date, only a handful of studies in parricide have been conducted in continental Africa. Previous studies in Ghana and Zimbabwe note that there may be culture-specific ways in which parricides may be shaped by the norms and cultural beliefs systems within those respective countries. Missing from the literature is an examination of parricides in South Africa. Using newspapers and court records, this article examines the offense and offender characteristics of parricides in South Africa. Our findings suggest that residential patterns of families may shape the offense characteristics found in South African parricides.

**Keywords:** Parricide, South African parricide, violence against parents, African homicide, familial homicide

## Introduction

Although the term “parricide” has been used in previous research to refer to the killing of one’s parents, it was once used to refer to men who assumed full-fledged status as legal subjects when they established their own households (Biscotti, 2018). The use of parricide to refer to children who kill their parents emerged only later. Under South African law, parricide is defined as the killing of a near blood relative (Bell et al., 1951). This expansive definition of parricide is consistent with the practices of Asian and eastern and southern European countries that include extended family members in their definitions, as well as previous studies that have included them in the definition of parricides in international settings (Gabbiani, 2013; Muravyeva, 2016). Consequently, this study also uses the term “parricide” to refer to the killing of 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.

In previous works, child abuse and mental illness have been proffered as causal factors in parricides, even in an African context. For example, Menezes (2010) primarily explained parricides in Zimbabwe to the living arrangements and the presence of psychosis in offenders. Similarly, one previous study of parricide offenders in South Africa found that they had been exposed to inconsistent discipline from their parents and other dysfunctional family environments (Moen, 2017). Thus, when parricides are examined in African contexts, explanations continue to be framed primarily from Western templates of judgment, imbued with psychiatric discourses rather than socio-cultural factors that might be pertinent to their

understanding. It is important to move beyond mental illness and child abuse as implicative factors in parricide incidents.

While ethnicity and race of victims and offenders in parricide incidents have been meaningful in countries where national databases provide reliable and consistent indicators, such as the Supplementary Homicide Reports in the United States (Heide, 2014) and Home Office in the United Kingdom (Holt, 2017), such measures have been overlooked in convenience sample studies. Ethnicity and race are particularly important in a South African context due to its multi-ethnic character. While Black Africans make up the majority of the population, the presence of other ethnic and racial groups in the country warrant an examination of how ethnicity and race may configure into parricides in a South African context.

The handful of works that exist on parricides in continental Africa continue to frame the offense from a clinical framework. To our knowledge, no one has examined the offense characteristics of parricides in South Africa. To overcome such shortcomings in the literature, this study attempts to answer to the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the general offense characteristics of attempted and completed family parricides in South Africa?
- **Research Question 2:** What are the weapons that are used to kill parents and superordinate relatives in South Africa?
- **Research Question 3:** In what contexts do offspring kill their parents and subordinate relatives in South Africa?
- **Research Question 4:** What is the race and ethnicity of offenders and victims in family parricide incidents in South Africa?

Using court records and newspapers as data, this article examines the offense and offender characteristics of parricide incidents in South Africa.

## **Review of the Literature**

The conflicts between parents and their children that result in parricides have been framed as child abuse or mental illness for the last 30 years. Moreover, parricide has been equated with adolescent parricide, portrayed as an offense committed by teenagers against indulgent, abusive, or blameless parents (Heide, 2013). A systematic study of parricide offenders and victims across the entire life cycle has been absent in the literature. When adult parricides have been examined they have been framed in relation to mental illness (Liettu et al., 2009; Malmquist, 2010). Previous psychiatric studies of parricide offenders in the West have found that schizophrenia, psychosis, personality disorders, and impulse disorders make up the most commonly diagnosed mental illness in parricide offenders (Dantas et al., 2014; Raymond et al., 2015).

There are only a handful of previous studies that have examined parricides in Africa. First, Menezes (2010) found a total of 39 parricides between 1980 and 1990 in Zimbabwe. He found that mothers and fathers were equally likely to be killed by their sons, using blunt and sharp objects. Menezes explained the killing of parents by proximate causes such as the living arrangements of victims and offenders. Menezes also found that psychosis was present in the offenders. Similarly, one prior study of parricide offenders in South Africa found that they suffered from anxiety and tenuous emotional attachments to their parents (Moen, 2019). The few published works thus reify the discourse of law, mental illness, and abuse as

implicative factors rather than the conflicting ideas about hierarchy and authority as sources of discord between parents and their offspring.

A third study of parricides in Africa was carried out by Adinkrah (2017). He found 18 cases of parricide in a 27-year period in Ghana, from 1990 to 2016. He found that 83% of parricides were rural, and that edged instruments were used in half of the fatal attacks; he noted that almost half (44%) of the parricides were not planned and that 17% of parricides were related to accusations of witchcraft. In a study of matricides in Ghana, Adinkrah (2018) found that 43% of matricides related to accusations of witchcraft, which tend to occur in the context of family strife, mental illness, and illicit drug use. Adinkrah (2018) argued that witchcraft is crucial for understanding violence against women, that women were particularly susceptible to such accusations, as middle-aged, elderly, widowed, poor women are believed to possess witchcraft spirit and use it to afflict disease, mental illness, death, and other misfortunes to relatives. Allegations of witchcraft involve offenders who blame their fathers or mothers for life's miseries and difficulties resulting in accusations and counter-accusations. He found that allegations of witchcraft make up an important source of conflict between parents and offspring.

### **Shortcomings in the Parricide Literature**

While previous parricide literature has examined parricides in relation to child maltreatment and adult mental illness, the bulk of the research has occurred in Western contexts, in North America and Europe. Although others have examined parricides in African countries such as Zimbabwe and Ghana, the general offense characteristics of parricide in South Africa in its own right has been absent in the literature. It is possible that South Africa may differ from other African countries noted in previous literature in offense and offender characteristics.

One way that South Africa may differ from other African countries is its multi-ethnic character. There are 11 official languages that are recognized by the South African government; there are four major ethnic groups, in addition to a sizable population of refugees and asylum seekers, whose presence recently has resulted in xenophobic attacks directed at them. It remains unknown how the ethnicity and race of victims and offenders might shape parricides in South Africa.

While there has been one prior study of parricide offenders in South Africa, its aim and findings delved into the parenting styles and psychological factors related to the offense. This study found that parents of parricide offenders were too permissive or authoritarian, that parents had expected children to conform to their ideal (Moen, 2017, 2019). Although the psychological characteristics of offenders and parenting styles are discussed, the one prior work on parricide offenders in South Africa did not delve into the general characteristics of parricides disaggregated by age and sex of victims and offenders, its types, weapons used, and the sources of conflict that lead to the killing of parents. The current study attempts to remedy those shortcomings in the literature.

### **South Africa: 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%), Coloureds<sup>1</sup> (8.8%), Indian/Asians (2.6%), and Whites (7.9%). Gauteng followed by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape are the most populace provinces. A third of the population is under the age

of 15, while 8% of the population is aged 60 and above (Statistics South Africa, 2017). High unemployment and the prevalence of HIV/AIDS have created a larger than normal dependent population. The average life expectancy of males is estimated at 62.7 and 65.6 years for females. South Africa's population is predominantly urban with 66.9% of the population living in urban areas (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). The overall literacy rate of adults is estimated at 95% (Statista, 2019). 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 US\$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 (Breetske, 2018).

South Africa has strict policies pertaining to firearms. According to the Firearms Control Act of 2000, no person may possess a firearm unless he or she holds a license, permit, or authorization issued (South African Government, 2001). The estimated total number of guns (both licit and illicit) held by civilians is estimated at 5,352,000 (GunPolicy.org, 2017). On average, 58 people are murdered on a daily basis in South Africa. The murder rate has increased by 35% over the past 7 years (Institute for Security Studies [ISS], 2019). The Crime Research and Statistics report of the South African Police Service (SAPS) states that 70% to 80% of all murders over the past decade involved victims and perpetrators who knew one another (Kearney & Erasmus, 2013). Almost 25% of all murders in South Africa are committed by a family member or person with whom the victim lives (Statistics South Africa, 2017). South Africa is regarded as a "risk society" due to factors such as high crime rates, poverty, inequality, and child-headed households (Moen, 2019).

South African family structures have changed over the past decades, resulting in a mosaic of family formations (Makiwane et al., 2017). The colonial and apartheid past affected the institution of the family. As a multiracial society, South Africans maintain varied forms of the family. Household compositions have transformed with the increase in the number of relatives accommodated within the households. This means that there has been an increase in three-generation linear households, mainly in Black African families. A reduction in the size of the households was also reported in families of Indian origin. However, the reduction in size did not affect the functions of the family such as caring for the aged and children who need support. Black African and Coloreds continue to live in households that are extended, while Indians and Whites have households that are primarily nuclear. One explanation might be that Black/Colored populations still value the sense of communality. African marriages tend to be based on the principle of collectivity and interdependence. The construct "family" from a Western point of view is commonly based on a nuclear family, consisting of the conjugal pair and their offspring (Sooryamoorthy & Makhoba, 2016). This Westernized notion of "family" is not applicable to majority of families in a South African context. As noted, we will attempt to answer to the following research questions:

- **Research Question 1:** What are the general offense characteristics of attempted and completed family parricides in South Africa?
- **Research Question 2:** What are the weapons that are used to kill parents and superordinate relatives in South Africa?

- **Research Question 3:** In what contexts do offspring kill their parents and subordinate relatives in South Africa?
- **Research Question 4:** What is the race and ethnicity of offenders and victims in family parricide incidents in South Africa?

## Data and Method

Previous studies suggest that newspapers constitute a valid and reliable source of information about a homicide when access to official records is difficult (Adinkrah, 2014, 2017, 2018). As there is no centralized database for criminal justice records in South Africa, we utilized a data triangulation strategy for validation purposes. Multiple sources of data were used for the study on family homicides. This broader study was used to select cases related to parricides searching sources by using the terms murder, family murder, parricide, and homicide. 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 judgments were used as official sources. These were drawn from JUTASTAT, a database for completed court judgments in South Africa. Cases were classified under the heading “sentencing reports” from the subheadings “murder” (251 cases) and “child offender” (22 cases). All the cases under these headings were scanned and read to determine whether they were related to family murders. The identified family-related murders were read again to only identify and include parricide cases as per definition of the study. The definition of “parricide” in this study included the killing of 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. The JUTASTAT database was searched as the court proceedings gave detailed accounts of the murders. A search of this official database resulted in 11 parricide cases and archival documents related to its adjudication. The low number of cases identified might be due to the fact that only completed court cases are uploaded on the system and that cases settled outside of court are not included. 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.” The search began on January 1, 1990, through October 1, 2019. The reason for selecting this time frame was that JUTASTAT organizes its South African Criminal Law Reports from 1990 to date. This type of methodology has been successfully used by a number of previous researchers (Adinkrah, 2017; Boots & Heide, 2006; Fegadel & Heide, 2017; Govender, 2015; Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). 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 centralized 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, 2017). Our study identified 126 incidents of homicides within the family; of these, 45 incidents (35%) were parricide cases.

According to the SAPS (2019), the national police force responsible for the administration of law enforcement in South Africa, 21,022 murders were reported between 2018 and 2019. Of

these, family parricides constitute a small percentage of all murders in South Africa. According to Malherbe and Barkhuizen (2017) over a period of 25 years (1991–2016), “various accounts of parricides have been reported by the South African media” (p. 79). As a rare and highly publicized form of murder, parricides would be reported in the media; court documents provide a close reflection of the actual parricide cases. Previous scholars have found that homicides reported in newspapers approximate about 75% to 100% of actual homicide cases reported in official sources (Eckberg, 2001).

We selected cases for inclusion if a son, daughter, stepchildren, nieces, and nephews killed or attempted to kill a parent (Weisman & Sharma, 1997), stepparent, or other superordinate family members in the family. The inclusion criteria for this project thus describe ascending forms of violence within the family. This practice was consistent with the definition of parricide under South African law (Bell et al., 1951). We have excluded from the current study killings that occur between equals such as intimate partners or descending forms of violence directed against children and infants, as well as homicides between siblings. These types of intrafamily homicides warrant a separate treatment and analysis. While including attempted and completed killings may appear to be conceptually, methodologically, and analytically unsound, there are compelling reasons to operationalize 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).

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. 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 et al., 1951), knowing the intent embedded in the offense, 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 analyzed (Shon & Lee, 2016).

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyze the data. The goal of qualitative content analysis is the systematic analysis of data by using a system of categories (Flick et al., 2005). The first author read through the newspapers and court records in Afrikaans, one of the official languages used in South Africa and coded the incidents, which were then sorted according to a coding instrument containing 18 variables, and entered into a database (see the appendix). Offense and offender characteristics related to the killings were used to create preliminary and abstract thematic codes (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). The analytical themes were created based on coding categories that described specific offense characteristics (see Strauss, 1987). Coder inter-reliability was not a factor because only one native speaker of Afrikaans carried out the coding tasks.

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 offense (Shon, 2009). Therefore, the parricide was coded as being (1) “premeditated” if the offender planned the crime in advance, (2) “spontaneous” if the parricide occurred without prior planning and originated from the ongoing social interaction, (3) accidental if the killing was an accident, and (4) “unknown” if intent could not be identified. The weapons used in the parricides were

coded in the following way: (1) knife/sharp object, (2) firearm, (3) axe, (4) hands & feet, (5) poison, (6) multiple weapons, (7) other, and (9) 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. This method of determining the racial categories of offenders by inferring the racial characteristics based on publicly available information such as pictures and names has been shown to be a valid and reliable research strategy when access to official records is limited (Thompson & Gartner, 2014).

The source of conflict was coded as being related to (1) "defense" if the parricide originated out of a defense for another family member. The source of conflict was coded (2) "long-term finance" if the dispute was related to inheritance and (3) "short-term finance" if it was related to, for instance, a robbery or spending money. The source of conflict was coded (4) "argument" if the parricide originated from a trivial verbal dispute; (5) "cover up a crime" was coded if the murder was committed to cover up another crime, while (6) "disciplinary" was coded if the parent disciplined the child and as a result the murder was committed; (7) "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 (8) "abuse" and (9) "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 (10) "other" when not related to the above; in 11% of the cases, the source of conflict was (11) "unknown."

## Results

From 1990 to 2019, 58 offenders were responsible for 45 incidents of attempted and/or completed parricides which resulted in the deaths of 74 victims; in the current study, 79% of offenders were male while 21% were female. The victims were almost equally distributed by sex, with 41 female victims (55%) and 33 male victims (45%). Twenty-nine mothers were victims of parricide (39%) while 25 fathers (34%) were killed. Four stepparents (6%) and six grandparents (8%) were killed in parricide incidents. Other eight family members such as brothers, sisters, and an aunt made up 10% of victims who were killed in multiple victim parricidal killings. The average age of the victims was 49 years. The youngest victim was 3 months old and the oldest 80 years old.

In 34 (76%) of the reported cases, the offenders lived with the victims. In four (9%) incidents, the offenders lived elsewhere, and in seven (15%) incidents, the living arrangements could not be determined. Parricide offenders predominantly live with their victims at the time of the murders (Flowers, 2013). Multiple victim parricides were reported in 17 (38%) cases. Twenty-six (57%) of the multiple victims were females and 20 (43%) were males. Multiple victim parricides were much less common in comparison with single-victim parricides (Liem et al., 2013; Liem & Reichelmann, 2014). The average age of the offenders was 23 years. The youngest offender was 12 years and the oldest 37 years. In five of the 45 reported cases, additional victims were injured, but survived the attempt on their lives.

## Incident Characteristics

### Parricide Type

Sons who killed both parents—double parricides—made up almost a third of the incidents (29%), followed by sons who killed their mothers (24%) and fathers (11%) in single-victim incidents. Sons thus made up more than half of the parricide offenders in our sample (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Parricide Type**

<i>n</i> = 45	<i>n</i>	%
Son kills father	5	11
Son kills mother	11	24
Son kills both	13	29
Daughter kills father	4	9
Daughter kills mother	3	7
Daughter kills both	2	4
Stepchild kills stepparent	4	8
Subordinate kills superordinate relative	3	6

Daughters killed their fathers (9%) and mothers (7%) almost equally; only two incidents involved daughters who committed double parricides. Stepparent parricides committed by a stepchild made up about 8% of the cases; in two incidents, stepsons killed their stepfather and stepmother. One incident involved a stepdaughter who killed her stepfather. Three incidents involved offenders who killed a superordinate elder, such as a grandfather, grandmother, and an aunt.

### Race

Although Black Africans make up 80.7% of the population, they represented just 24% of the parricide cases. Whites in South Africa account for 7.9% of the total population, but committed 38% of the parricides, the majority of the offenders who were male (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Offender Race**

Race	No. of offenders	%
Black African	11	24
White	17	38
Colored	3	7
Asian	9	20
Unknown	4	9

The Asian/Indian population of South Africa is estimated at 2.6%; however, Asian offenders committed 20% of the parricides. The number of murders committed by the Colored population (7%) was consistent with their proportion within the population (8.8%).



### Source of Conflict

Domestic arguments made up the most common source of conflict between parents and their offspring (24%). For instance, a son was accused of using drugs and consuming alcohol when his mother yelled at him to leave the house. When his father said he agreed with his mother, the son hit the father behind the head with a cricket bat. When the mother leaned over to assist the father, he also attacked her and murdered both parents by hitting them with the bat and stabbing them (see Table 3).

**Table 3. Source of Conflict**

<i>n</i> = 45	<i>n</i>	%
Defense of another	2	4
Long-term finance	5	11
Short-term finance	1	2
Domestic argument	11	24
Cover up a crime	2	4
Disciplinary	2	4
Jealousy	1	2
Abuse	7	16
Mental illness	4	9
Other	5	11
Unknown	5	11

Abuse made up the second largest source of conflict between parents and offspring (16%). As an example, a 16-year-old shot both his grandparents; he confessed that he shot them to get away from his abusive grandmother. Conflicts over finances—long-term and short-term—made up another 13% of the conflicts between parents and offspring. One example involved a 31-year-old son who strangled his father after discovering he was left out of his will. In 9% of the cases, mental illness was stated as the source of conflict. There were two (4%) incidents where the murders were committed in defense of another family member. For instance, a 17-year-old boy stabbed his stepfather to death after the stepfather attacked his mother.

Two murders (4%) were committed to cover up a crime. A 32-year-old man shot his mother to prevent her from reporting him to the police after she discovered that he had murdered his wife. Two cases were reported where the murders were committed due to disciplinary actions by the parents and one murder (2%) was committed as a result of jealousy. In 11% (5) of the cases, the source of conflict was due to other or unknown reasons.

### Weapons Used

Knives (33%) were the most common weapon used to kill parents, followed by firearms (24%). Hands and feet were used to murder parents and caregivers in 11% (5) of the cases. Axes were used in 4% (2) of the murders. The use of multiple weapons was reported in 13% (6) of the cases. In 7% (3) of the cases, the weapon was not indicated, while in 7% (3), other types of weapons were used to commit crime.

## **Intent**

In almost half (47%) of the cases, the parricides were spontaneous acts and in 40% (18) of the cases, the offense was premeditated. Such findings are consistent with previous studies (Adinkrah, 2017; Shon, 2009). None of the reported cases were accidental. In 13% of the cases, the intent of the crime could not be identified.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Using court records and newspapers as data, this article has examined parricides in South Africa. To date, our study is the first to systematically examine offense and offender characteristics related to parricides in South Africa. While the number of cases selected in our convenience sample for this study is low and not randomized, and therefore not generalizable, it is consistent with the overall low number of cases reported in two prior studies of parricides in Ghana and Zimbabwe (Adinkrah, 2017, 2018; Menezes, 2010). There are also notable offense characteristics regarding parricides in South Africa that warrant additional commentary.

First, the sex distribution of offenders and victims was similar to the broader trends in parricides across the world (Holt, 2017). Mothers and fathers were equally likely to be killed, but the offenders were overwhelmingly male. Second, consistent with other male-on-male homicides and male-on-male patricides, parricides in South Africa were predominantly unplanned events that morphed out of the ongoing social interactions between victims and offenders that escalated into arguments and lethal fights. Arguments constituted the most common source of conflict between parents and their offspring. This finding was consistent with previous literature, as numerous other scholars have reported that most parental killings occur between adult offspring and their parents in domestic disputes that turn deadly (Adinkrah, 2017; Shon, 2009). This conflict and context of adult parricides have been one of the most consistent findings across national boundaries and historical periods.

Another way parricide in South Africa is similar to and different from other nations is related to spirituality and local belief systems. While witchcraft has been noted as an important source of conflict between parents and their offspring in Ghana that leads to the killing of parents, we did not find such conflicts in a South African context. Adinkrah (2018) argued that witchcraft was a culturally specific and unique feature of parricides in Ghana, in ways that disproportionately affected elderly, widowed, and poor women who were believed to have the power to afflict misfortune on relatives. Others have reported that spirituality, religions, and superstitions, and traditional belief systems (e.g., witchcraft) in Africa are significant because they form the content of patients' delusional constructs (Liu, 2016). Our work did not support such notions.

Our study found an inordinately high proportion of multiple victim incidents where more than two victims were murdered in one incident. Double parricides and parricidal mass murders make up less than 10% of cases in prior studies. However, almost 40% of parricides in our study involved double parricides and parricides that turned into family mass murders. The dynamics of these offenses were consistent with findings reported from previous literature in that they were equally likely to be premeditated or emerge from the ongoing social situation that morphed into fatal attacks against multiple victims. The proportion of these types of incidents in the context of parricides, however, was not consistent with the findings in previous literature (Shon & Roberts, 2008).

Our findings were also mixed in relation to weapon usage. While parricide studies conducted in the United States consistently find that guns are the most prevalent methods used to kill parents (Fegadel & Heide, 2017), we found that knives and other edged weapons made up the most common weapons used in the killing of parents. Such findings are consistent with results of parricide studies that use clinical populations, and in countries where access to firearms is strictly regulated (Liettu et al., 2009; Malmquist, 2010). Even though firearms are available in South Africa, legally and illegally, they were not as prevalent as knives in the methods used to kill parents.

One particularly notable finding in the current study is in relation to race and parricide. Prior researchers have reported that in countries that are multi-ethnic and multiracial, race as an analytical variable warrants a closer examination. For instance, African Americans make up approximately 14% of the U.S. population but almost 30% of victims and offenders in parricidal incidents (Walsh et al., 2008). Such lopsided ratio of parricide and race suggests conflicts related to gender roles and other family pressures may serve as triggers for violence that are directed at closest family members. Asians/Indians make up a mere 2.6% of the population in South Africa but made up 20% of the incidents in our study. Similarly, Whites in South Africa make up close to 8% of the population but represented 24% of the cases in our study. Black Africans who make up 80% of the population committed just under a quarter of the parricides in our study.

That Asians/Indians and Whites are disproportionately represented even in non-random samples suggests that residential patterns may configure in notable ways in parricidal incidents in South Africa. For instance, Black African households tend to be multigenerational, at times accommodating up to three generations of family members under one roof as a stem family (Nkosi & Daniels, 2014). However, that type of a residential pattern is not found in Indian and White households in South Africa. The latter are much more likely to be a nuclear household. Children 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 continue to live at home (Nair, 2017). The younger generation is also less likely to achieve past traditional markers such as the completion of education, marriage, or entry into the labor market at a young age (Fingerman, 2017). Therefore, the parents and their offspring may come into frequent contacts as part of their routine activities that entangle them in domestic conflicts that are resolved through the use of violence. Black African parents, on the contrary, may not appear as victims in parricides because a significant portion of them is not present in households, and therefore removed from the daily conflicts that occur. It is not an accident that grandparents appear as victims in South African parricides, for they have become the default caretakers of children whose parents have migrated from rural areas to urban and industrial centers in search of work, or grandparents may be the primary caretakers of orphaned children whose parents passed away from the contraction of HIV/AIDS (Fourie, 2004).

## **Limitations**

While we have conducted one of the first systematic studies of parricide in South Africa, our study has several shortcomings. First, using newspaper and official documents has limitations. The 45 parricide 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 provided the reader a glimpse of social life and normative patterns of South African society.

Second, our study is not randomized or a complete universe of parricide incidents in a jurisdiction. It is a convenience sample based on a limited number of court cases and newspaper reports. 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. Gathering a complete list of annual killings may enable the construction of a national parricide rate for comparative purposes (e.g., Holt, 2017).

Third, it may be a worthwhile project to carry out qualitative studies of multigenerational households to examine how the tension and discord become manifest in such households. As parricide researchers have noted, conflicts between offenders and victims in parricide incidents center around authority and resistances to it across generations. This area may be ripe for ethnographic and interview-based studies in the future.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>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 practices in South Africa has been consistently adopted.

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## Appendix

### SOUTH AFRICAN PARRICIDES

#### FAMILY RELATED MURDER VARIABLE CODE SHEET

1. CASE NUMBER (CASNUM)
2. DATE OF OFFENSE REPORTED (DOFREP): e.g., 15JUN1949
3. PARRICIDE TYPE (PARTYP):
  - 311=son kills father
  - 312=son kills mother
  - 313=son kills both
  - 314=daughter kills father
  - 315=daughter kills mother
  - 316=daughter kills both
  - 321=stepson kills father
  - 322=stepson kills mother
  - 323=stepson kills both
  - 324=stepdaughter kills father
  - 325=stepdaughter kills mother
  - 326=stepdaughter kills both
  - 331=son kills grandfather
  - 332=son kills grandmother
  - 333=son kills both
  - 334=daughter kills grandfather
  - 335=daughter kills grandmother
  - 336=daughter kills both
  - 341=son kills parent figure e.g. aunt, older brother or sister who had a caregiver role
  - 342=son kills both parent caregivers
  - 343=daughter kills parent caregiver
  - 344=daughter kills both parent caregivers
4. VICTIM COUNT DECEASES (VICCNTD)
5. VICTIM COUNT NOT DECEASED (VICCNTN) = raped, attempted murder
6. NAME OF OFFENDER (OFFNAM)
7. AGE OF OFFENDER (OFFAGE)
8. NAME OF VICTIM (VICNAM)
9. AGE OF VICTIM (VICAGE)
10. PROVINCE OF OFFENSE (PRVNAM)
  - 1 = Gauteng
  - 2 = KwaZulu-Natal
  - 3 = Freestate
  - 4 = Eastern Cape
  - 5 = Western Cape
  - 6 = Limpopo
  - 7 = North West Province
  - 8 = Mpumalanga
  - 9 = Northern Cape
11. WEAPON USED IN OFFENSE (WPNUSD)
  - 1 = knife/sharp object
  - 2 = firearm
  - 3 = axe
  - 4 = hands & feet
  - 5 = poison
  - 6 = multiple weapons
  - 7 = other
  - 9 = unknown
12. INTENT (INTENT)
  - 1 = PREMED = offense is premeditated
  - 2 = SPON = spontaneous
  - 3 = HIT = offender was a hitman
  - 4 = ACCD = accidental
  - 9 = unknown
13. SOURCE OF CONFLICT (SOCCFT)
  - 1 = defense of mom, self, or another family member/friend/acquaintance
  - 2 = long-term finance (e.g., inheritance, land, life insurance, property)
  - 3 = short-term finance (e.g., spending money, robbery)
  - 4 = trivial/domestic argument (e.g., food, living situation, etc.)
  - 5 = cover up a crime
  - 6 = disciplinary
  - 7 = jealousy
  - 8 = Due to abuse
  - 9 = unknown
  - 10 = other
  - 11 = mental illness
14. ALCOHOL (ALCOHL): alcohol was present in:
  - 1 = victim
  - 2 = offender
  - 3 = both
  - 4 = none
  - 9 = unknown
15. MURDER FOLLOWED BY SUICIDE (MURSUI)
  - 1 = yes
  - 2 = no
16. FAMILY MASS MURDER (MLTCDE)
  - 1 = yes
  - 2 = no
17. LIVING ARRANGEMENT IN HOUSEHOLD (LIVARN)
  - 1 = together
  - 2 = separate
  - 9 = unknown
18. RACE OF OFFENDER (RACE)
  - 1 = Black
  - 2 = White
  - 3 = Colored
  - 4 = Asian
  - 5 = Other
  - 9 = Unknown