

Can we measure one's potential for violent behavior?
The Youth Violence Propensity Scale: A tool for
scoring violence risk and change among youth in
high-violence contexts

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overview

- The violence/the problem
- The data (challenge)
- The need (for solutions-interventions and evidence)
- The Youth Violence Propensity Scale and Practitioner Version
- Way(s) forward
- ?s for you:
 - 1) Do these challenges resonate (with your work, your communities)?
 - 2) What can/should be (is being) done to change trajectories?



The nature of violence in South Africa

- everyday, un-organized violence (in part)
- interpersonal, (often) known victims, economic and hegemonic motivations
- violence driven by inequality, relative deprivation
- young males from black and coloured groups are most common victims and perpetrators
- poor policing and rate of conviction



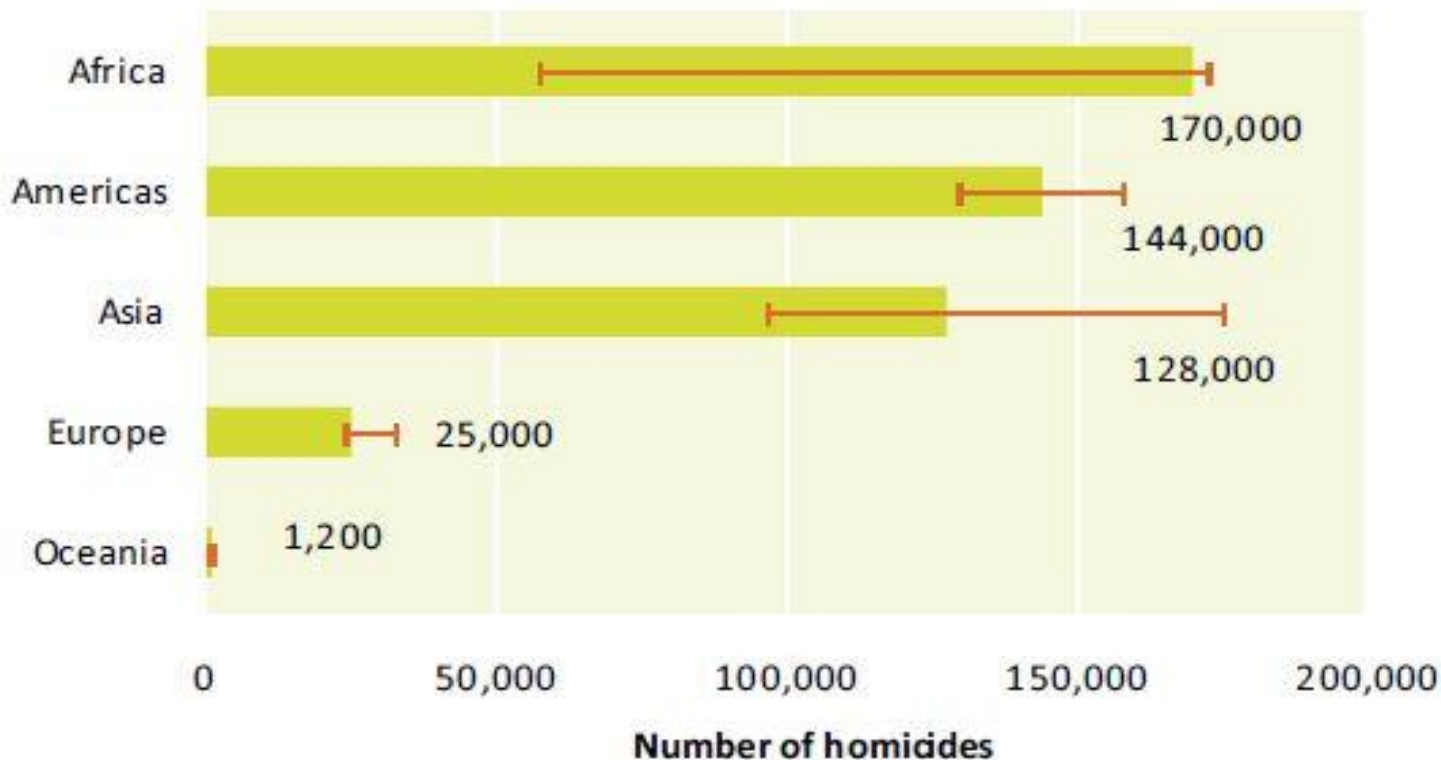
The Problem: young people (12-21 year-olds) in S. Africa:

- are assaulted at 8 times the adult rate, theft at 5 times and robbery at 4 times the adult rate.
- 76% of all young offenders have been victims of violent crime.
- While SA murder rate dropped from 66/100,000 in 1994/5 to 40 in 2006, violent crime against children increased from 2002 to 2005: rape up by 55%, murder by 45%, and serious assault by 50%
- The total number of murders in Khayelitsha (3 police precincts) is consistently 325-360/year
- overall: 9 male homicides for every one female victim (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention)



Imprecise homicide estimates, esp. for Africa

Fig. 1.1: Total number of homicides by region (2010 or latest available year)



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UNODC Global Study on Homicide 2011



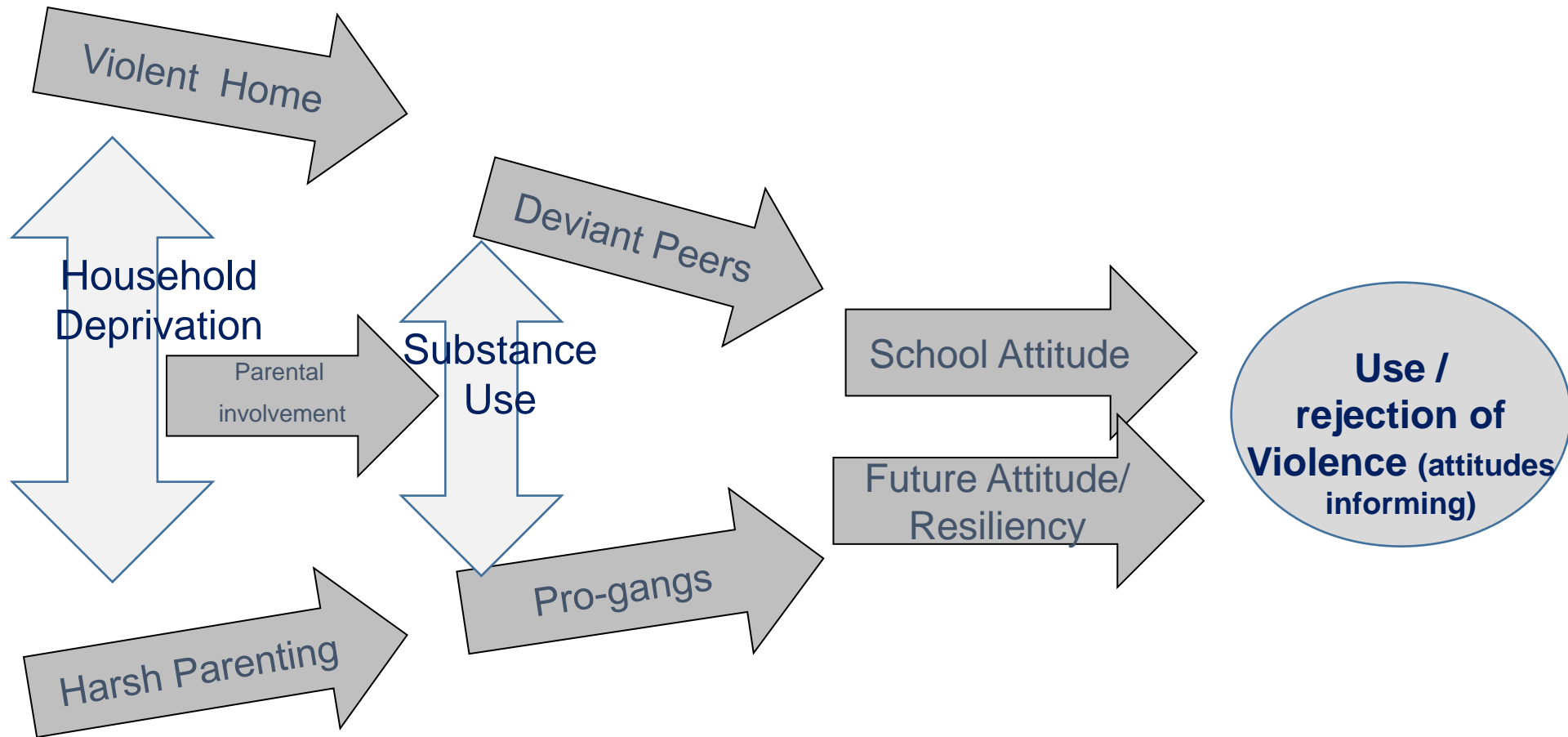
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The 'measurement challenge'

- Crime stat 'fudge', size of the 'real problem'?
- Eg. Khayelitsha Commission: breakdown betw. Community/police, youth 'unconvinced' about reporting crime to police. Only approx. 1% of homicides in Khayelitsha seem to result in successful investigation and conviction, what about less serious, more common crimes?
- Uneven and under-reporting of youth offending (incidence of youth deviance and offending at provincially-representative level differs wildly across 2 measurements. NYLS: 0.5% (22 of 4,000) ever used force, threats, weapons to steal vs. YRBS: 9% threatening/injuring someone with a weapon in the past month
- Tenuous/temporal connection between attitudes and behaviors



Theory of Youth Violence



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The Youth Violence Propensity Scale (YVPS)

19 items/3 factors/Psychometrically 'sound'.

1- 7 peer deviance/criminal associates items $\alpha=0.94$

2- 6 pro-instrumental violence attitude items $\alpha=0.94$

3-6 pro-gangs attitude items $\alpha=0.89$

Temporal measurement stability: wave1 to wave2 YVPS
(corr.=0.18, $p<.01$), no mean difference (-0.06, $p=.583$).

Factor1: 7 peer deviance/criminal associates items (0-28 pts)

(response options: 0= never/none of my friends, 2=once or twice/1 or 2 of my friends, 3= often/3-4 friends, 4=Every day/5 or more friends). $\alpha=0.93$; $\Omega=0.93$

Q1- Have any of your friends bought drugs in the past year?

Q2- (no details but) do any of your friends regularly use or sell drugs?

Q3- Have any of your friends dropped out of school?

Q4- Have any of your friends skipped school a lot without permission?

Q5- Do any of your friends smoke cigarettes on a pretty regular basis?

Q6- Do any of your friends go out in the evening with their parents' permission?

Q7- Do any of your friends drink wine/alcohol fairly regularly?



Factor2: 6 pro-instrumental violence attitude items (0-24 pts)

(response options: 0=strongly disagree, 1=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree). $\alpha=0.93$; McDonald's Omega=0.93.

Q8- It is sometimes okay for people to be discriminated against or physically harassed because of their nationality.

Q9- A guy shows he really loves his girlfriend if he gets in fights with other guys about her.

Q10- People from other races, sometimes deserve to be discriminated against or physically harassed.

Q11- If people do things to make me really mad, they deserve to be beaten up.

Q12- It is sometimes okay for people to be discriminated against or physically harassed because of their sexual orientation.

Q13- If you mess with me/my friends, you will get hurt



Factor 3: 6 pro-gangs attitude items (0-24 pts)

(Response options: 0=strongly disagree, 1=disagree, 3=agree, 4=strongly agree).

$\alpha=0.89$; McDonald's Omega=0.89

Q14-I think you are safer, and have protection, if you join a gang

Q15- I will probably join a gang

Q16- Some of my friends at school belong to gangs

Q17- I think it's cool to be in a gang

Q18- I belong to a gang

Q19- People think I'm a gangster

Factor 4: *How many physical fights have you been in within the past year?*

(scored as 0= none, 5=one fight only, 10=two or three fights, 15=four or five fights, 25=six or more fights)

Guidelines for score evaluation:

- A total score between 15-19 is a potential concern
- Score of 20 is assoc. with mean of 1 self-reported violent offence
- between 20-39 serious concern, and
- above 40, likely actively engaged in serious violent and criminal behaviours.
- In wave 3, there are 32 subjects (10%) with scores of 40 or higher with a top score of 70 and 103 (32%) at 25+.



Guidelines for Change Scores:

- Within-subject Change Scores can be constructed by subtracting the pre-test score from the post-test score and described as a percentage point change.
- Average change across a treatment group can also be easily tabulated and evaluated (group effect).
- Risk-propensity can be compared across sites/interventions and against reference (control) group(s)



Publications

- Edelstein, I. (2018). Pathways To Violence Propensity- Results from a Two-year Study of Young Males in Urban South Africa. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*, 28(2).
- Edelstein, I. (2018). Development and Validation of the Youth Violence Potential Scale. *Violence and Victims*, 33(5).
- Edelstein, I. & Adonis, C. (2019). The Youth Violence Potential Scale for Practitioners. Human Sciences Research Council Policy Brief. HSRC. Pretoria.



Recommendations / Way Forward

- Use Scorecard/test in other contexts, compare risk and change/impact
- Integrate basic research-evaluation capacity into local organisation(s)/youth development practitioners

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