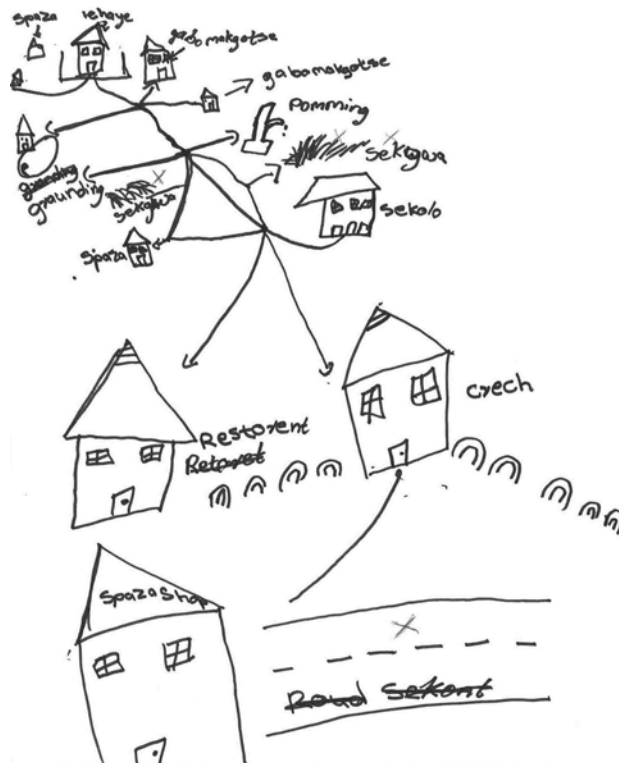


# Soul Buddyz Audience Research

*"We are not feeling well in our hearts"*  
Children's experience of crime-related violence, the psychological trauma that results and their strategies for coping with it.

Glynis Clacherty  
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A child's drawing of the local area. The crosses mark unsafe places.

**SOUL**  
**Buddyz**  
ours  
tomorrow is

***Research conducted for Soul Buddyz by***



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<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b><u>Summary, analysis and recommendations</u></b>	<i>ii</i>
<b><u>1. Introduction</u></b>	4
Introduction to <i>Soul Buddyz</i>	4
The Soul City research and development process	4
<b><u>2. Research approach</u></b>	4
Child participation	4
<i>Ethics</i>	7
<i>Appropriate activities</i>	8
Research aims	10
Research groups and activities	10
Data analysis	11
<b><u>3. Findings from participatory groups</u></b>	12
<i>Theme 1: Causes of psychological trauma for children</i>	12
<i>Theme 2: Children's descriptions of the psychological effects of trauma</i>	23
<i>Theme 3: Children's sense of power over violence in their area</i>	25
<i>Theme 4: How children cope with emotional trauma</i>	31
<b><u>4. Analysis and recommendations</u></b>	36
<b><u>5. References</u></b>	39
<b><u>6. Appendix 1: Statement of Ethics</u></b>	40

## **Summary, analysis and recommendations**

It is clear that the children involved in this study are exposed to significant levels of crime-related violence. This violence differs according to the environment in which children live, but they are all faced with it in some form or another. What is particularly worrying is the fact that the threat of violence is a part of children's everyday lives. The walk to and from school and to the shops is seen by children as a dangerous activity with some children describing how they attempt to make themselves invisible as they walk so as to avoid being targeted by criminals.

According to children in rural areas, townships and informal settlements the perpetrators of most of the violence they fear are young men who 'hang around' the area. The nature of these gangs differs with the area but whether they are the gangsters of the cape flats or the *tsotsis* of the Gauteng township children are afraid of them. What is also clear is that some of these young men are members of the children's families and some of the older boys who participated in the research are already being pulled into these gangs. It is also clear from what children say that the poverty that many of them live with in their families is a clear reason for much of the crime. This illustrates how much the violence is a part of the actual thread of children's and families lives in South Africa and how criminal behaviour has become justified within family value systems. What is particularly troubling is the way in which girls explain how sexual abuse of girls is tolerated within the family for economic reasons.

This research also reveals the high levels of violent crime that children witness, in some areas on an almost weekly if not daily basis. Children describe witnessing stabbings, shootings and violent beatings. Many children also describe being victims of violent crime incidents including armed robbery and rape. The impact of HIV/AIDS is also evident in the research through the fact that many children (especially in rural areas) identify the death of caregivers as a cause of emotional stress.

We know from research (Lewis, 1999, Osofsky, 1997) that being witness to and victim to violence causes psychological trauma in adults and children. The children who participated in this study describe responses that are well documented in the trauma literature. They withdraw, they isolate themselves, they feel angry and sad, they feel worthless.

Yet only two children in the entire group report having received formal counselling. Parents are supportive, some teachers and friends are also supportive but is this enough? It is important to note that children place a high value on confidentiality and will choose who they talk to about their problems.

In fact one of the issues that this work highlights is the extent to which children take control over their own emotional well being and the resilience they show in overcoming the effects of the daily round of violence. The findings here that younger children are more at risk of emotional trauma are corroborated by research (Mason and Killian, 1994). The younger children show a lower sense of locus of control and agency over their lives making them at risk of emotional 'damage'. But the older children, even those who live in violent communities, can engage with why the violence is present, what should be done about it and what is more significant have their own strategies for dealing with emotional stress. Again this kind of response is evident in the research literature (Dawes, 1994).

In conclusion, the levels of violence that children experience on a daily basis and the fact that it places them, particularly the younger children, at emotional risk is an important advocacy issue for the *Soul City* advocacy unit to pick up through the *Soul Buddyz* series. The need for local government to look at liquor outlets and the link between these and shops that children use is another issue, as is the need for better policing in terms of drugs on street corners. A second advocacy issue is the need to provide counselling support programmes for children who have been victims of violence, the example here of the children's support programme based at the Health Centre and the important supportive role it plays in the children's lives is a good model. This points to the importance of the *Soul Buddyz* clubs network as a potential for psychosocial support for children.

The need for recreation programmes for young people is another issue raised by this work, because as one eight year old pointed out “We must learn not to do what they do. Instead find better things to do.”

The *Soul Buddyz* series can also mirror the extent to which children work towards protecting their own emotional health through finding ways to deal with emotional stress and in this way celebrate children’s resilience. There are also clear safety messages, many of which are articulated and applied by children that the series can reinforce.

# 1. Introduction

## Introduction to *Soul Buddyz*

*Soul Buddyz* is a multi media edutainment vehicle created for 8 to 12 year olds by the Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication. It consists of a television drama, radio drama and print materials. The first television drama series was aired on SABC 1 during 2001. Since then two further series have been screened and *Soul Buddyz* has become an important part of life for many South African children, particularly now many of them belong to the *Soul Buddyz* club programme which operates in schools all over the country. A new *Soul Buddyz* series is planned and this report forms part of the formative research for the television series.

The new series of *Soul Buddyz* will deal with the following issues:

- Road safety
- Psychological trauma related to crime and violence
- HIV/AIDS

This report covers the psychological trauma theme.

## The Soul City research and development process

Over the years Soul City has developed a particular approach to the creation of a mass media vehicle such as *Soul Buddyz*. This includes an extensive consultation and research process that ensures that all stakeholders and target groups have input into the materials. The research reported on here is part of the target audience research for the new *Soul Buddyz* series.

This research, along with a literature review and input from stakeholders, will be discussed at a message design workshop. The messages will inform the script writing process for the TV drama. Once the scripts have been written they will be tested with the target audience and only then finalised.

# 2. Research approach

## Child participation

Children participate throughout the creation of the *Soul Buddyz* series. This strong commitment to child participation is motivated by a number of factors.

Firstly, the right of children to participate in issues that will affect them is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), to which South Africa is a signatory.

*States parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child... (Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child)*

Clearly, within the context of the CRC children have a right to participate in the creation of media such as *Soul Buddyz*. It is not enough, however, to say that children have a right to participate. It is also important to understand why they should participate.



Children's participatory rights are legitimated in a number of different ways. The most common arguments are summed up in the following three points (adapted from Kj rholt and Qvortrup, 2000).

1) The first argument for children's participation suggests that participation is in the best interests of children. It contributes to a positive development of individual identity, competence and a sense of responsibility.



2) The second argument for children's participation emphasises the way in which children's social participation constitutes an important area for social democratisation insofar as it represents the extension of some democratic rights to a disenfranchised group.



3) The third argument is that children's participation in social processes gives us access to essential information that we could get from no other source, thereby making society a better place for all of us. The following quote sums up this argument:

*Developing better methods of working with children and enabling their participation is beneficial not only to children. By including some previously invisible groups we are making our research, our programmes and our communities [and our media] more inclusive, more functional and effective. Omitting a large sector of society means that everyone loses and fails to see the bigger picture. If we are unaware of the problems and issues that concern children and young people we cannot hope to devise strategies or solutions [or media] that will address their concerns, and will constantly be struggling to make sense of the world without some of the vital information we need. (Ivan-Smith and Johnson, 1998, p299)*



This last argument is perhaps the most important in the context of the creation of *Soul Buddyz*. If we want a media vehicle that educates while it entertains, it must take into account the real problems and issues that concern young people. We can only do this if we allow them to participate in the making of the media at an early stage in the process.



Boyden and Ennew (1997) point out that if children's participation is to be more than token it needs to be devised in such a way as to take particular ethical issues into account and to make sure the activities are suited to the ages and stages of development of the children and youth. Both these issues were taken into account in this work.

### ***Ethics***

An adapted form of the ethical guideline for research work with children reproduced in Boyden and Ennew's (1997) publication on research with children (see Appendix 1) was applied in this work.

In addition another key ethical principle was applied in this research.

*It is not ethical to expose a child already vulnerable to any additional risk through an investigation that carries no benefit for the child. Interviews about painful subjects should be performed with the principle of 'least harm' (Boyden and Ennew, 1997, p43).*



Researchers who ran the focus group discussions were aware that some of the topics we were exploring could touch on sensitive and difficult issues for many children. The principle of 'minimising harm' was applied throughout.

Practically this meant that researchers made it possible for children to withdraw at any stage, were sensitive about issues which might have caused shame or embarrassment, did not challenge the child about answers given, and did not ask questions which could have been upsetting. They also created an environment in which children could tell just as much of their story as they felt safe to tell. They did not probe about the details of a painful event, nor ask about a child's feelings. What the child offered was accepted, even if not all the details were present. Note that this applies only to information that was potentially painful. In other situations the researchers used secondary questions to probe for details.

In addition, ensuring complete confidentiality of data was another way in which we sought to minimise harm. Particular schools are not named in the research report and descriptors are used to identify quotes.

### ***Appropriate activities***

To make sure the research was truly participatory group activities were devised in such a way that

*...children's ideas and perceptions could be expressed in their own terms without being blocked or misrepresented by the ways adults think and talk. (Boyden and Ennew, 1997, p45).*

This meant that we used techniques that were less dependant on words, for example mapping and drawing.



We also attempted to reduce the power relationships between children and adults in the research process by playing games with children before we began the work and by working in a space where children felt comfortable.



## Research aims

The audience research on road safety aimed to understand:

- How children perceive/understand violence in their local area;
- Whether they believe they have any power over it;
- What they do to protect themselves;
- What kind of violent traumatic events children have been through, with a focus on crime;
- What they do to cope with the trauma and if they have accessed any outside help to cope and what form it took;

Note that the research did not set out to explore the effects of traumatic events with children, though children did talk about this to some extent. This decision was made mostly for ethical reasons. The research groups were short and we did not want to ask a child about traumatic events in any detail for fear of causing distress and not being able to help children deal with it. In addition there is a large body of research literature in South Africa on the effects of trauma on children and therefore this information could be accessed through secondary sources. Researchers were aware of the fact that the issue under discussion could be potentially distressing to children and they did not probe details of stories and willingly allowed children to choose not to tell their story as this quote from a transcript illustrates.

*- I want you to try and remember about a bad thing that happened to you okay. I just want one sentence, not a story, just mention the thing that happened.*

*- I can't say that thing because it will make me cry.*

*- Okay, no problem you don't have to and I am glad you told us.*

In addition the activities ended on a positive note with children playing a game based on resilience theory called "I am, I can and I have" which emphasises children present strengths. Researchers reported that children loved this game and were able to go back to their classes in a positive frame of mind.

## Research groups and activities

The research consisted of a series of participatory discussion groups held with randomly selected children aged between 8 and 12 from a diverse range of environments in 6 provinces around South Africa. The following table outlines the range of groups who participated in the research around road safety.

Province	Age	Area	Language
Mpumulanga	8-10	Middleburg informal settlement	siSwati
Gauteng	8-10	Katlehong	isiZulu

		township	
W Cape	11-12	Mitchells Plain	Afrikaans
W Cape	11-12	Kayelitsha Township and informal settlement	Xhosa
Limpopo	8-10	Traditional rural	seSotho
NWP	11-12	Mining rural	Tswana
NWP	11-12	Suburban Rustenburg	English
KwaZulu/Natal	8-10	Township and informal settlement	isiZulu

Total children: 80

### **Data analysis**

Group discussion took place in the children's home language. All the discussion during the participatory workshops was taped, translated and transcribed. These transcripts formed the data that were then analysed. The transcripts were analysed using a standard qualitative data analysis tool, thematic analysis.

### 3. Findings from participatory groups

The findings are presented under four themes:

- Causes of psychological trauma for children
- Children's descriptions of the psychological effects of trauma
- Children's sense of power over violence in their area
- How children overcome psychological trauma

#### **Theme 1: Causes of psychological trauma for children**

During this research the discussions with children focussed partly around a map they had drawn of the area in which they live. Children were asked to mark on the map "any places where they did not feel safe". Note that initially crime-related violence was not mentioned by researchers. This strategy was used to find out how pervasive crime-related violence was in their lives. Fear of busy roads and cars and crime-related violence were mentioned by all groups of children as things that made their area unsafe. Both were identified by children as significant causes of psychological trauma.

In subsequent discussions suburban children also mentioned divorce as another cause of psychological trauma in their lives. The two rural groups and some children in the Mpumalanga informal settlement and the Katlehong groups also mentioned death of parents and looking after ill parents as a cause of psychological stress. Sexual abuse and the fact that mothers did not always want to report it was another significant issue for girls in the township, rural and informal settlement groups. Each of these causes of psychological trauma is discussed in more detail below.

#### **Road accidents**

Children in all groups identified road traffic as a key hazard on their maps.

*W is the name of the area. I cross a tarred road when I go to my friend. We play ball (soccer) at the ground. We hardly play on the tarred road. A car once knocked off a child who was in this school and he died. (Boy, NWP rural, 11-12)*

*From school I go home then to the shops and then I go to play ball at the ground. The shop is not a safe place because when they fight you get caught up. Roads and streets are also not safe as there are always cars. (Boy, Mpum informal settlement, 8-10)*

*R: why is it unsafe on the road?*

*P: The cars can bump you. (Boy, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

*The road is unsafe to play in the street. I don't want to go and play in the street. After school you must always play around at home or inside the yard at home. On the road the cars are running very fast, you might*

*get hurt if you are going to walk in the street or play on the road. (Boy, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

### **Crime-related violence**

It was clear that alongside traffic accidents crime-related violence was the most common cause of psychological trauma for most of the children in this research. The kind of violence children experienced differed with the area but it was clear that all children were exposed to significant levels of violence. It was also clear that fear of this violence was a part of their everyday lives.

The most common form of violence (experienced by all except the suburban children) they were exposed to was everyday harassment by groups or gangs of usually young people that they called *tsotsis*, *skollies* or gangsters depending on the area.

*There is no way in L that you can walk around without seeing people fighting. At least I know the sun does not go down (a day does not pass) without this. The tavern is always not safe because of the people who hang around there, who harass you if you do not want to talk to them. (Girl, NWP rural, 11-12)*

*This is my home, the shop and my school. Here at the shop the people smoke and drink, at night they fight. The older boys and some men who hang around there call the girls who pass and younger children. The girls drink liquor and they are rowdy.*

*R: Where do they stand?*

*Next to the door.*

*R: Do you ever go to the shop?*

*We do go in the afternoon because then they are not that many. (Girl, Gauteng township 11-12)*

*R: Where is it unsafe for children?*

*At the shop?*

*R: Why?*

*They can take you?*

*R: Who can take you?*

*The 'skollies' (thugs).*

*R: Where else is it unsafe?*

*By the park. Because they can steal you and molest you, and take you away from home.*

*R: Who?*

*The gangsters ...*

*R: I hear a lot of you talking about gangsters. Are there gangsters around?*

*Group: Yes miss. A lot.*

*Across the school, at the shop, they always stand at the corner.*

*In the 'gange'. (narrow passages between the flats and houses).*

*At our house they sometimes fight and in our passage miss.*

*They stand at the corner and they look for when the police come because they sell drugs.*

*They sell drugs and then people stand at the corner to look out for the police then they tell the people selling the drugs...*

*And here at the shop- they rob your money, even if they are your race.*

*R: So is there a lot of crime that happens because of them?*

*Group: Yes.*

*R: Are you scared of them?*

*Group: Yes miss. (Boys and girls, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

*R: Why is it unsafe at the corner?*

*It is because there are people that are smoking in the corners.*

*Sometimes it's unsafe because sometimes you normally meet people who are smoking when you go out of the school.*

*R: What do they do the people that smoke?*

*They are smoking drugs.*

*And why is it unsafe?*

*They are robbing people. (Boy, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

*But I don't like to go to the shops sometimes because what is happening there are people who are running around in the shop you know. They used to take your stuff, the 'tsotsis', you know they steal from us. For me it's scary and I don't like to go to the shop.*

*R: Tell me about the 'tsotsis'.*

*I can say that they are the people who came out of the prison and then some of them they kill people and you can see that they have something on their body (prison tattoos).*

*R: And what type of things do they do?*

*Most of the time you find that they smoking around. You can see now they rape, either they are raping and they do bad things they don't do good things. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

In all instances children linked these corner gangsters to substance abuse. In rural areas they were linked to the taverns though they were not always the patrons. In the township and informal settlements they were "smoking", usually *dagga* but in the Western Cape coloured township children also mentioned *Tik*.

*R: What places are not safe for children?*

*It is at the tarred road and at the tavern. At the tavern people drink and get drunk. When you go there as a child they confuse you with people that they are fighting with and they fight you as well.*

*They fight after they have taken drugs.*

*When they have drunken alcohol. (Boys and girls, Limpopo rural, 11-12)*

*They like fighting a lot at R (name of a shop).*

*They like smoking dagga not far from the store.*



*Even in the woods they smoke dagga and drugs and pills. (Boys, Mpum informal settlement, 8-10)*

*Some of the young guys "TIK".*

*R: What do they do?*

*They use drugs. (Boy, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

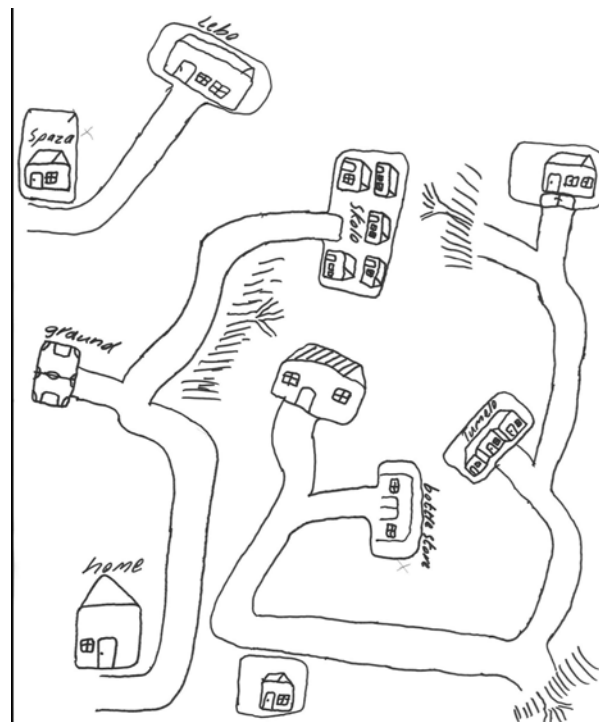
In the rural area the groups of criminals did not seem to drink at the taverns but they hung around there.

*There is also this group of young men. They hang around the taverns. They time people who drink in the taverns. When they stand up to go they follow them and take off their takkies, clothes and they sell them to other people. They even steal hanged laundry on the people's lines. (Boy, NWP rural, 11-12)*

*What I have marked is at the shop. It is dangerous. They play cards there, when the money disappears they fight. They do not sell alcohol here but they play cards. (Boy, Mpum informal settlement, 11-12)*

*One day the two of us were walking. We met three brothers, they took our money and shoes. Mine were new. They took them and they chased us. (Boy, NWP rural, 11-12)*

In the NWP group the taverns and spaza shops were often at the same place and children reported that they were targets because they had money when they went to the shops for their parents.



*They know that parents give us money at the end of the month. When they meet you, they search you. If you do not have money they hit you. (Others laugh)*  
*They tell you to buy them loose cigarettes and if you do not buy them or you do not have money they tell you that they are going to hit you next time they see you and they do not lie when they next meet you they hit you.*  
*They know that parents send us with money.*  
*Or they take your shoes.*  
*R: What do they do with such small shoes?*  
*They sell them (boys in unison).*  
*R: What about you girls? Are you safe?*  
*They take our phones.*  
*And rape. (Boys and girls, NWP rural, 11-12)*

Girls also talked about how boys at the taverns accosted them and forced them to have sex.

*At Makoko tavern there are boys that propose girls. They do not take it when you say no. Then they force themselves on you and do you bad things. So what we do when we go there is to go with older guys from our area. (Girl, NWP rural, 11-12)*

But even walking to the shops with someone you know is not always safe. One girl in the NWP group told a story of being raped. (note: the girl willingly told the story and on following up the researcher found out she had been receiving counselling from a local social worker.)

*They (referring to boys who hang around at the taverns) once raped me. It was at night around 8. They had sent me to the shops. I had gone with my friends we were many. It was me, one girl who was my friend and used to come to school with me, T and others. We did not know what was going to happen. This one boy met us and joined us. We were relaxed because we knew him and he was in school with us. We did not suspect him and he was not troublesome in school either. He raped me around past nine after he had been pulling me around. He pulled me and raped me next to a river. My friends were afraid of him and they did not stop him when he was pulling me. (Girl, NWP rural, 11-12)*

Another crime described by rural children was the kidnapping of children and killing them for *muti*.

*R: Is there any other violence that girls face?*  
*Kidnapping.*  
*Both boys and girls are affected.*  
*R: Does this happen?*  
*Yes it happens a lot. They kidnap people for muti.*

*People disappear and are found dead.*

*This happened to two children from D. They were apparently raped in the car and were later found dead in the river. They were girls. (Girls and boys, NWP rural, 11-12)*

Another form of crime related by rural children was pick pocketing of parents' money in the town. This was obviously distressing for children because of the level of poverty they lived with.

*In town they rubbed on something on my mother's shoulder and one man said to my mum she should look at her shoulder. My mother looked. When we got into the taxi the money was not there. (Girl, NWP rural, 11-12)*

*They robbed my sister in town around Christmas and they took her money. She was going to buy me shoes (there are tears in his eyes). (Boy, NWP rural, 11-12)*

Children living in urban townships and informal settlements also talked about robbery at home and in the street.

*One brother that we know came and broke into our house, he said he wanted money and my mother had enough courage and strength to hit him with an axe on the head.*

*They broke into our house, removed some tiles on the roof and stole the TV, radio and other things.*

*They stole a cell phone on a charger in the kitchen at home. It was broad day light.*

*They robbed my father and took his cell phone.*

*They removed my sister's necklace from her while walking on the street. (Girls and boys, Mpum informal settlement, 8-10)*

*What happened when my eldest brother was walking he was supposed to pick up my sister with her friend on the other side of the road.*

*And they shot my brother on the left or right leg. They shot him in the left hand leg. My brother was using the cell and then he switched it off and then he put it inside the jacket. They asked him "Where is the cell?" They talk to him even they are talking like friends you know.*

*They asked him "Where is the cell that you were using?" And he said "No I don't have a cell". They grabbed the cell inside the pocket and they took the jacket as well you know. They shot. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

*What happened, this happened yesterday at about 10:00 at night. We heard somebody saying "Where is the money, where is the money" and there were two guys. The other one is standing at the corner checking for the police and then he said "No I don't have money".*

*Then he said "What's wrong with you, you never give me your money",*

*they hit him and then they stabbed him 10 holes and also they hit him on the face. They stripped off all his cloths and left him in his underpants and after they took all his valuable things from him, the cellular as well. It was because it was late at night you know, its my brothers friend. There were using fire arm and we couldn't even help him. He was crying and then they told us that somebody had been robbed in our area but we can't help him and there is police around and you know when people have fire arms, you cant ... we had to stay close to home, you know. (Boy, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

Taverns were also a problem for children in townships and informal settlements.

*When I get home from school my mother sends me to the shops to go and buy bread and there are taverns around there but I go anyway. My parents don't send me late to go and buy the bread I am a bit worried to go late after hours to the shop.*

*R: What happens at taverns?*

*In the tavern you find there is violence there. They break the bottle and use the top of the bottle and hurt each other and use knives which is a bad thing and hurting to others and they are drinking and they get drunk and then they just fight and they would never get peace. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

They were also witnesses to violence.

*They broke the bottle and wanted to hurt this sister and wanted to fight with her and stab her with a bottle. I can see what is happening in the tavern because its so close to my home. (Boy, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

One child told a disturbing story of an intentional burning of her home. This event was understandably severely traumatic for the child who kept returning to the story during the group discussion. The local NGO that helped access the children has followed up with this girl.

*What happened the guy just threw the petrol inside of the house. We heard and smelt the petrol. He poured the petrol right around the house and the house started burning. It burnt. All the house, all I was left with was these clothes. I had to start again. We were sleeping in the room but all of us were safe. We managed to get water inside, but the house burnt, all the house burnt. There was money inside, phones, you know a R1,000.00 that was supposed to ... everything is burnt. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

In the Western Cape group run in Mitchell's Plain guns were a significant threat for children even in friend's homes.

*R: Why is it unsafe at your friends home?*

*Because sometimes the people 'gaan aan' (perform in a bad way). They shoot their guns and stuff.*

*R: Oh. Also during the day?*

*Yes miss.*

*R: Do they just shoot anywhere?*

*Not anywhere. They shot so here (directing the gun at other people).*

*R: Do they shoot people or do they shoot in the air?*

*They sometimes shoot people. Sometimes in the air. (Boy, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

*R: Why is it unsafe at the shop?*

*They can shoot anytime.*

*R: Who shoots anytime?*

*The gangsters. (Boy, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

The children in the Mitchell's Plain group told stories of violent crime that were very close to home.

*I saw when they stabbed my uncle Miss. He screamed for help miss, but when we got there we could not help. Then they ran away miss. Then my grandfather took him to hospital.*

*R: Where did this happen?*

*In the passage miss. (Boy, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

One group run in an urban KwaZulu Natal township and informal settlement with 8-10 year olds revealed a particularly violent environment. The following is a verbatim transcript of the children describing where it is unsafe in their area.

*Would you tell us about those places you say are unsafe; what happens there? Could you show you us in your picture where do these things happen?*

*They rape.*

*R: Where is that?*

*In the houses.*

*I go past my neighbours and a slightly dangerous area and then ...*

*R: In this area that you say is dangerous what happens there?*

*They hurt each other, they shoot at each other, they stab each other.*

*R: And then these other places that you have marked, what happens there?*

*Children can get run-over by a car.*

*Well, when I leave my home I go through a bushveld where people take children and kill them.*

*I leave my home and I go past some of the dangerous areas where people shoot at each other.*

*I leave my place for school and then I see people stabbing each other and then there is this house that is being broken into.*

*I go past this road where cars move very fast and then I go past this house with very big and vicious dogs; and then I go past this house where people hurt each other and then I go to this area where people rob each other. I go past this house where they steal and kill children. (Girls and boys, KZN township, 8-10)*

When this group were asked to recount any actual crime-related violence they had seen, they had this to say. Again this is a verbatim transcript.

*One day I was from school and there was this man calling me from the bushes and I simply ran away.*

*My friend's father was shot and killed...*

*R: Did you see him being shot?*

*Yes I saw him.*

*They knocked at my place and then my father called the police- I saw someone being stabbed in the head and he died.*

*R: What did you do?*

*I was at my home standing at the door.*

*R: Were there older people in your home?*

*Yes there were.*

*R: What did they do?*

*They did nothing.*

*A friend of mine was robbed while walking in the evening.*

*A young friend of mine was run-over by a car.*

*R: Where were you at that time?*

*I was nearby and we were all telling him to stop what he was doing but he didn't listen.*

*R: Did he survive or did he die?*

*Ah no, he survived.*

*One day I was sent to buy bread with a R20 note and then came this guy and wanted me to give him the money while I went to call some girl for him; and I simply ran away.*

*R: Did he take money?*

*No, he didn't. I managed to run away with the money.*

*My mother was robbed of her cell phone in the morning while she was from work.*

*R: What happened after that?*

*They also wanted money but she told them she didn't have.*

*I was also called by a man in the bushes and I ran away.*

*The 'tsotsis' knocked at my place one night and my father called the police.*

*R: Did the police find these thugs?*

*No they didn't.*

*Is there something else?*

*I was hurt...*

*R: And then, what happened?*

*Nothing. (Laughter).  
(Girls and boys, KZN township, 8-10)*

Suburban children feared armed robbery in shopping malls.

*At the mall, you can get kidnapped, and at the filling station you can also get kidnapped.*

*R: Did it happen?*

*No, but there in the mall, there was a robbery where they stole the things, so they could have shot someone as well. (Girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

They also had experiences of robbery at home. One child's father had been hijacked and another had been involved in an armed robbery.

*About a year ago they hijacked my father, they strangled him. He was alone and now he never drives alone and if he does he has something with him (a gun). (Girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*We were in Durban when I was in Grade 1, then we slept over at my Aunt, my mother was with my father's sister, they went out, then we stayed with my father's sister's children that are already grown, then it was only her two sons, they are now almost 22 years old, and it were my sister and me. Then we stayed in the hotel, and then we phone the people downstairs to bring us food. Then they brought us food, but when they rang the bell, we first looked, but they were clothed and everything, then we thought it was room service, then when we opened the door, they came inside, and they took out their guns, they almost shot one of my nephews. I was sitting there, they tied us to chairs. Then we were sitting the whole time like that, and when my mother came back, they unfastened us. (Girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*



### **Divorce**

Children in the suburban group talked about divorce as a cause of emotional trauma for children. The self-blaming and confusion of children having to accept new parents is clear in the quote below.

*My mother and father are also divorced, but I was very upset, because I always thought it was my fault ... I always thought it was my fault, because my mother and father got divorced, and they were always fighting over the phone, because my father isn't paying any maintenance, and then sometimes when I am talking to my father and asks him why they got divorced, and can't they make peace, but I still wanted to do it, but I can't do it anymore, because my father got married to another woman. I was very unhappy in the school. My mother and father are also divorced, but I didn't feel sad, I am actually very happy, because I could decide where I want to live. But one thing, I also have something unhappy, because my mother and father got divorced, my sister and me had tried a lot to get it fixed, and we did tell my father, but my mother is now married to another man, but my father is dating someone now, now we don't actually want to, which is actually sad, we don't actually want them to get together, because my teacher explained to me, in my other school, do you want a house with fighting, or a house with peace, but not for them to stay together? But which is sad, is that we don't want to, we want them to be together, but we met another lady which is very nice, so I don't know ... (Girls, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

### **Death of parents**

One of the activities involved a basket of stones as a metaphor for emotional stress. Researchers explained that a basket can get heavy with stones just as our hearts get heavy when bad things happen to us. The children were then asked to identify what the causes of emotional stress or "stones" were. Children in the two rural groups and two township groups identified the death of parents as traumatic and a cause of emotional stress. The transcripts below are typical of the response from these two groups.

*The passing away of my mother.  
My father was knocked down by car in the main street in town. He was admitted in hospital.  
My aunt who lived with me and took care of me passed away.  
They took my father's music system.  
My uncle passed away.  
They damaged my father's car and they broke the windows while trying to get inside. (Girls and boys, Limpopo, rural 8-10)*

*R: What would you call some of the stones that went into your basket when the bad thing happened?  
When a parent passes away. A big stone.*



*Worrying a great deal (ho bua ka pelo).  
Feeling betrayed like when you have been raped.  
When someone at home, who is very dear and important is sick (he cries and goes outside to look for a big stone as the ones in the room are not big enough to represent his sadness)  
Being abused at home and finding it difficult to tell anyone, even the teacher.  
When someone close to you dies at home.  
R: Are there any other things that make your hearts heavy like the basket?  
When someone at home has a disease that does not have a cure. A person that you love. (Girls and boys, NWP, rural 11-12)*

It is clear that the deaths children are experiencing are as significant a cause of psychological trauma as the violence they experience.

### **Sexual abuse**

Another cause of emotional trauma identified in two groups was sexual abuse. Many of the girls in the township and informal settlement groups identified home as an unsafe place. Children in both the NWP group and the Gauteng urban township group mentioned sexual abuse at home and then how hard it was to report this as mothers' did not always listen or do anything about it.

*Some do not report rapers. 'Bomama' (mothers)! Mmm! they say 'bopapa' (fathers) are the ones who bring 'seshabo' (what you eat with your staple food). Where will they get money?  
It is just like if papa rapes me and I tell my mother about it. And then it becomes a matter of how is it going to be like if mama reports papa. As a mother in a family she does not work. When she reports him what will we eat? (Girls, NWP rural, 11-12)*

*What about at home? Who helps you?  
My mother. Some mothers are not helpful when you tell them that something bad has happened to you such as if your step father touches you, you will not feel alright, when you tell your mother will tell you not to tell anybody because he is the breadwinner and what would we do if he left us? When your mother deserts you like that you don't know whom to turn to. (Girl, Gauteng township, 11-12)*

### **Theme 2: Children's descriptions of the psychological effects of trauma**

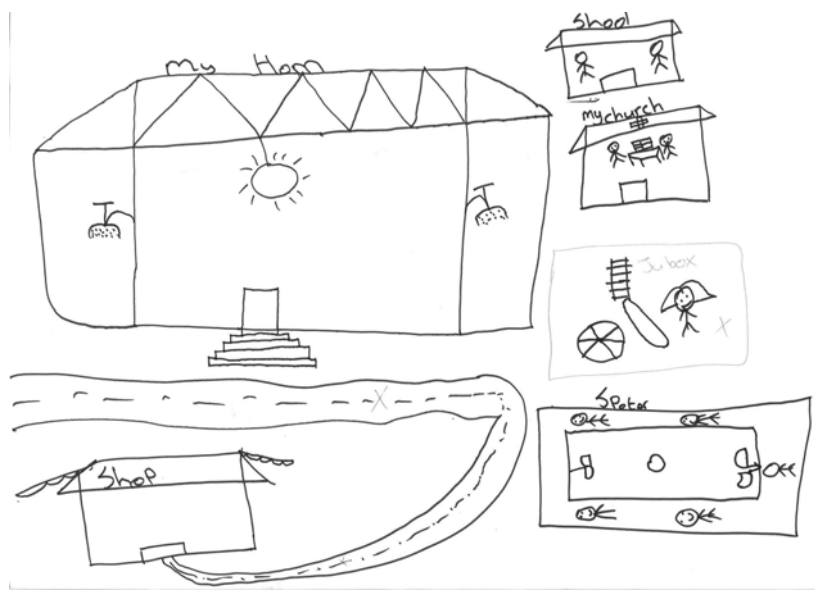
As pointed out above researchers did not probe around the effects of trauma for ethical reasons. The activity with the stones in the basket described above did, however ask children to name the stones i.e. what emotional stress did they experience. This led to some discussion about the effects of trauma.

The emotions and responses children describe included, getting angry, isolating themselves, withdrawing into themselves, wanting to kill themselves, fear and crying. The transcripts below are typical of all the groups.

*We are not feeling well in our hearts.  
Sometimes you do not even want to eat.  
Sometimes you do not want to talk to your friend because they have taken your money and you are angry.  
Sometimes you become angry.  
Sometimes you cry.  
Sometimes you become angry and you do not feel like talking to people at home.  
R: What do you feel like doing when you are not feeling good?  
Sometimes I feel like killing my mother and myself.  
Sometimes I wish something hasn't happened or it could have happened last year.  
Sometimes you feel like banging someone with a stone on the head.  
Sometimes you feel like stabbing someone.  
You feel like killing someone or hurting people who hurt you.  
Sometimes you feel empty, outside of yourself as if you do not have anything.  
Sometimes I cry.  
Sometimes you wish you can get a gun and shoot them. (Mpum rural 8-10)*

*R: How do you feel when all these things happen? What do you feel like doing?  
I feel like escaping.  
R: How?  
Run away from home.  
I feel like killing myself.  
I feel like killing myself.  
To run into the wild (ho ipha naga) meaning run away and be a street kid.  
To just give myself away.  
Selling yourself. Girls do that.  
Prostitution.  
R: Do boys do that as well?  
No. Just girls.  
I feel like praying a little bit. (Ke ikutlwa eka nka rapelanyana).  
I feel like giving them space.  
R: What do you mean?  
Just move from them a bit.  
I feel like throwing myself on to a car in the tarred road.  
I feel like stealing so that I can go to jail and go away from them.  
I feel like raping so that I can go to jail. Isn't it that people who have been to jail say it is nice to go to jail and that the food there is nice and is for free.  
They say they do not buy the food. (Boys and girls, NWP rural 11-12)*

The final comments above are a chilling comment in the context of violence these children live with as it points to a major misconception about crime and justice.



**Theme 3: Children's sense of power over violence in their area**

Powerlessness is a significant emotional stress for children and this is why the issue of power was explored in this research. The issue was explored by asking children if they felt anything could be done about the crime and violence they experienced. In addition children were also asked to describe the protective strategies that they employed. If children could not think of anything that could be done or if they had a narrow range of protective strategies this suggested a level of powerlessness.

The children's sense of power depended on the level of violence they experienced in their area.

*Suburban*

Children in the suburban group had a number of suggestions when asked what could be done. Most of their suggestions involved protective mechanisms such as electric fences, security guards, dogs, high walls and even firearms. In terms of emotional well being it is important to note that these are all solutions that children have little control over – they are things that adults can do and they all involve withdrawing behind barricades.

*There are alarm systems at night that can keep you safe. You can also say, I agree with her, an alarm system, they tried to break in a lot at our house, but the moment they jump the gate or the wall, then the alarm goes off immediately. So, they can't actually, because the alarm goes off the whole time, and they get scared. So they won't try to do something. (Boy and girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*...about a year ago, they hijacked my father, strangled him. He was alone, and now he never drives alone. But if he drives alone, then he has something (a gun) with him. (Girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

When asked about protective strategies the group had a number of things that they did to keep themselves safe.

*When we walk around in the mall, and my parents are eating at Spur, and we want to walk around, we are excited, then my father always tell me, that my sister and I must go together, we cant go alone. (Boy, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*If somebody grabs you or try to kidnap you, then you can scream very loudly, then someone will know something is wrong and they will come and look. But if you keep quiet, and if they tell you not to speak, or he will shoot you, or you may not scream, then you mustn't just keep quiet, then someone will know there is something going on, and they will come, but if you keep quiet then they will kidnap you and nobody will even know about it. When we walk around in the mall, and my parents are eating at Spur, and we want to walk around, we are excited, then my father always tell me, that my sister and I must go together, we cant go alone. (Boy, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*Don't speak to strangers, and if they tell you to come and fetch some sweets or something, you must not accept that, because it can be poisoned, that could leave you unconscious and then they take or kidnap you and you have to run away if somebody comes your way, when he talks to you. And you must not get in any car. Only when your mother tells you to. (Boy, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*If somebody phones and you don't know his voice then you must never give your street and your number you must also never say you are alone.*

*I just wanted to say if you run, you must just scream while you are running.*

*And if somebody knocks at your door and it is a stranger, you must never open the door. (Girl and boy, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*If a stranger knocks on your door, then you must just pray to the Lord. Then the Lord will help you that he goes away. (Girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*I always walk to the Spar with my sister, I never go alone, because once there was a man, just before Spar there is a shop where you come down, there is an alley, you walk through it, then around the corner, there was a man sitting, and he asked me where I live and what is my telephone number, then I didn't talk to him, and just kept on walking, but when I returned, he almost grabbed my arm, so then I ran*

*away. But I didn't go straight home. I ran straight to the corner and then I just stood there, and watched that he was not maybe watching or something and then I went home. (Boy, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*To put in an extra door, like my dad recently, he put in a thing at the door, were you have to do something, before it can open.*

*R: It is like a security door?*

*Yes.*

*We have a camera in the front which records everything, so if we see that there is something that is not supposed to be there, and then we know, then we can do something up front. I don't feel so oppressive anymore, if there is a break-in.*

*My uncle bought a Boerboel, so he gave us one as well, and now there were somewhere something stolen, there at the farm, and now we don't feel so scared as we used to.*

*They once wanted to break into our house, or they almost did, but my father wakes up quickly if he hears something outside, but he has got his gun and everything, but they heard my father is approaching, and then they ran away. Then the next day, my father has a sign of snakes, where he says we have snakes and then it shows a picture of snakes, but we don't really have snakes, and then after that, nobody tried to break in. They think there are snakes. (Boys and girls, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

### *Rural*

Rural children in the NWP had a discussion about what could stop crime when asked what can be done about it. What is important in the context of power is that these children have some sense of agency in relation to crime and violence, though they acknowledge that it is a big problem they are able to discuss it in an animated way showing a sense of locus of control.

Compare this transcript with the W Cape group from Mitchell's Plain below.

The discussion from the NWP group is presented in full below because it shows the children's engagement with the issue but also because it gives interesting insight into a number of issues relating to why crime and violence continue, including how young boys are attracted to crime and how conflicted families are about crime because it often contributes to the family income. Indication of gender is retained here because it seems that boys show more of a sense of agency than girls.

*R: Is there anything that can be done to stop this violence?*

*I think jobs can help. If people can get jobs. B*

*You know some will continue to steal even if they get jobs. G*

*I do not know because even if they arrest them, this does not reduce violence and crime, it does not stop them. When they come back they still do what they were arrested for. G*

*It is a problem. Some who do get jobs at the mines, they steal tools and things in the mines. B*

*They steal screw drivers, cables, iron poles and sell them as scrap. Apparently they get a lot of money for cables. They burn it and sell it to the scrapyards. B*

*They steal people's iron sheets and sell them. They sell them to people who stay in T, S and M. B*

*At M they even vandalize the school and sell things. B*

*R: What do you think can be done?*

*It cannot stop. B*

*Some have been bewitched. B*

*How?*

*Say someone steals for you. Then you go to a witch doctor to make that person steal forever. B*

*You give the person anathema. You make him worse than he was.*

*They make them fight with family members and they make them kill each other. B*

*I do not think the crime and violence will end because if boys grow up where there are these things they do the same when they grow up. G*

*R: What about children? Do you think there is anything that they can do to stop the crime?*

*Yes. (Boys)*

*What you can do is to report someone who approaches you to go and do something wrong with him to the police. You can agree and tip off the police so that they can be nearby as you do that wrong thing. B*

*R: So you will tell the police?*

*Yes. Say they come and tell me let's go and steal at this and this house. I agree and then after they had left I go tell the police the information, that at this and this time we'll be at such a place. B*

*I think there is nothing that we can do. Most of us cannot afford security like Chubb security. Most of the people who can afford this where we stay are whites. People who steal do that on purpose and they target vulnerable families. They know that they are not afraid of anybody in this family and they target it, and they know that there is nothing that we can do. G*

*The other problem is us boys, who run away from school because we think we are old enough, we hang around with 'tsotsis' and become 'tsotsis'. We start seeing school as not so important and we start to steal. We even come to school to steal. Schools should be attractive so we want to stay in school. B*

*Some people, families are afraid to report crime because the tsotsi are the ones who bring something in the families (ke bona ba phandang).*

*G*

*I can report him to the police. B*

*But he is the one who tries (ya o zamelang) to get you sugar. G*

*That's ok but stealing is wrong. It is not ok. B*

*What if there is someone who steals at your home? G to B (NWP rural 11-12)*

Another emergent pattern is that younger children feel more powerless than older children. This was the case in all younger groups. The following quote from children in rural Limpopo illustrates this.

*R: Do you think that there is something that can be done with all this violence?*

*The police should be seen around.*

*Silence.....*

*R: Is there something that children can do to stop this violence?*

*No. There is nothing that we can do. (others murmur in agreement)*

*I think as children we can phone the police so that they come and arrest the offenders.*

*We must learn not to do what they do. Instead find better things to do. (Girls and boys, Limpopo rural, 8-10)*

As the last two comments above illustrate this group did, however, have a number of protective strategies that they employed.

*R: Are there things that you do to be safe?*

*I do not play on the road because I can be run over by cars.*

*By not going to the taverns and being caught up in the fights there.*

*I go during the day to the shops.*

*By staying at home.*

*By staying at home and going to the shops to get only what you want and coming back home quickly.*

*We do not walk in the woods at night.*

*By not walking around at night.*

*... hang around with children who are careful, who are good that they know they can rely on.*

*...be accompanied by their parents if they know they are not going to a safe place. (Girls and boys, Limpopo rural, 8-10)*

#### *Township and informal settlements*

Children in these areas felt that things could be done to keep children safe. These included closing down taverns, arresting the people who 'smoked' and caused trouble on the corner. Children in the group in Kayelitsha referred to a community patrol that had created some security in the area. They were keen for this to be brought back. Most children mentioned that the best way to stay safe was to stay at home. Though this is an effective strategy it suggests that children do not feel safe at all in their local area.

*Another thing that I think that people are safe in their homes because if you stay at home it's really safer. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

*Another thing that can help us is to remove the tavern from the houses (place them further away) so they have their own place and people that are standing around the corner can be removed. Find a way that you*

*can move them, the people that stand around and hang around. (Boy, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

A particularly poignant interaction took place in this group as they described how they tried to avoid violence by making themselves invisible as they walked home.

*R: So and what else do you feel when you are walking down the road?*

*We walk very slowly.*

*R: So you walk slowly why?*

*You don't want anybody to see you. You don't run.*

*R: Okay slowly.*

*I hide myself and walk very slowly.*

*I am scared because I don't know who I am going to meet in front and in the back, I feel worried. (Girls and boys, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

One child in the group in Kayelitsha presented an interesting advocacy idea.

*If we can have posters and placards that invite the people to a meeting in a hall and then in that meeting we nominate one child who is going to speak on behalf of the children. Another for the youth and another for the adults and then a child will explain what kind of violence or abuse that their parents are doing to them and now there is no pressure for them trying to explain, why? How can we do away with the abuse that we have amongst our area and a campaign, a campaign similar to the campaign already done and to do an appeal you know to everybody about the safety of us and why they are doing these things. Actually we are young and how can we prevent that you know. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

This comment shows a centred locus of control and a sense of personal power. It is interesting to note that this child and another one in this group belonged to a Children's Resource Centre children's group. They talked a lot about how the group's Health Centre provided support for them in the violent context in which they lived (see quote below). This illustrates the role that such children's programmes can play for children.

Two groups stood out as having very little power. These children had described the highest levels of violence. They were from the younger group run in the Umlazi area in KZN and an older group in Mitchell's Plain. The quote from children in the Mitchell's Plain area illustrates this.

*R: Do you think children can do anything about this? What can children do about the violence?*

*Period of Silence*

*R: Can children do anything?*

*No miss.*



*Not here miss.*

*Not here.*

*R: Why not?*

*They don't listen to you.*

*They say you're a child.*

*You are too young to tell them.*

*R: So what must children do?*

*They say the black people are taking over so now they do their own thing.*

*R: The gangsters?*

*Yes.*

*If you want to see them they shoot you.*

*They come to you calmly and then they shoot you.*

*R: Do you see all these things?*

*Yes miss.*

*R: With you own eyes?*

*Yes.*

*R: How do you sleep at night?*

*I don't sleep.*

*Restless miss.*

*R: What do you do to keep yourself safe?*

*I stay in the house and away from them.*

*I stay out of their sight.*

*If I see them I walk the other way.*

*If I see them I go home.*

*I rather play at my friends.*

*If they see you standing at the corner they shoot you- there at my grandmother's.*

*R: How do you keep safe?*

*I go away, I walk up and then I go sleep. While they are shooting.*

*Miss I stay at home and I play games.*

*I Stay at home.*

*R: What do you do if you have to go to the shop?*

*I wont go to the shop.*

*R: What if you have to? What if your mother sends you? How would you keep safe?*

*You go quickly miss*

*You have to go quickly miss. (Boys and girls, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

Children were asked who teaches them or talks to them about safety. Parents were most often mentioned in all groups. Though some children also talked about teachers emphasising safety.

#### **Theme 4: How children overcome psychological trauma**

Using the basket of stones again, children were asked if anything or anyone had helped them to take the stones (which symbolised emotional stress) out of their basket.

In three of the groups children said nothing or nobody had helped them to overcome emotional stress. Note that the two groups in the most violent areas and in which children felt most powerless were included in these three groups.

*R: Did someone ever help you get those heavy feeling out of the bucket?*

*Silence.*

*R: Has someone talked to you about how you felt after this happened? Maybe telling you not to worry?*

*P: No.*

*R: No. So those stones are sill in that bucket? And when there was such a lot of shooting outside, does someone speak to you?*

*P: No*

*R: And when you hear there is such a lot of gangsters around. Did someone speak to you about that?*

*P: No.*

*R: Not...at school?*

*Silence. (Boys and girls, W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

*Has anything or anyone helped you to feel better, to take the stones out of your heart?*

*Silence.*

*No one helped me*

*Okay, what do the others say?*

*Silence.*

*Are the stones still here? Do you still think of these things?*

*Silence. (Boys and girls, KZN, informal settlement, 8-10)*

*R: Was there anything that helped you to take those stones out of your heart?*

*Silence.*

*R: Is there someone who has talked to you about the bad thing that happened to you?*

*Silence. (Limpopo rural, 8-10)*

In other groups children mentioned teachers, parents and the church as a source of help to cope with emotional stress caused by a traumatic event.

*My mother helped me to forget it, and then she said to me that she also feels sad because they got divorced, but it wasn't only her fault, it was my father's fault as well, so I must not feel guilty, because it wasn't my fault. (Boy, NWP suburban 11-120)*

*Is the basket still heavy for you or has it got lighter?*

*It is no longer that heavy because there was someone who tried to make sure it does not remain heavy. She tried to encourage me, always when I went there. Even when I was in the waiting room she*

*used to encourage me and sometimes would try to make me forget about what has happened. She would give me ideas.*

*In the waiting room where? In hospital?*

*No at the police Station. (Girl, NWP rural 11-12)*

*R: what or who helped you not to feel sad when the bad thing happened to you?*

*My mother said I should not feel bad things will be ok after they had stolen our TV and furniture.*

*My mother said I should not worry about the money that they took from me.*

*After they had stolen my father's cell phone he said I should not worry he'll get them. (Boys, Mpum informal settlement, 8-10)*

A child from the Kayelitsha group mentioned the children's programme she was part of.

*When you go out and you organise some outings in the health centre, you go for camping and then you walk along the beach and those problems come out like a healing process, the sea, I think the sea is healing. (Girl, W Cape informal settlement, 11-12)*

One child in the suburban group had seen a psychologist and a child who had been raped in a rural area had been counselled at the local police station and was presently receiving counselling.

*In Grade 5, that was the year before, my grandma died, I was very sad about it, because she was more than a grandma. And Ms Hills told me that, she told me all the positive things, like she is in heaven and the Lord is watching after her, and it is better for her there than here.*

*Is she a teacher?*

*Yes. (Girl, NWP suburban, 11-12)*

*... didn't help myself, my mother took me to a specialist, I don't know what you call it.*

*Psychologist.*

*Yes, then they talk to you about the divorce. And that is why, I am not sad anymore about the divorce. (Girl, NWP suburban 11-12)*

In the context of talking to people about what had happened the group of children in the Gauteng township school had a discussion about how important it was to be able to talk to someone who you could trust to keep your story confidential. They thought friends were not so trustworthy.

*If one is afraid to tell the teacher at school he/ she can tell his/her friend what is bothering him/her and the friend can tell the teacher.*

*Your friends can laugh at you when you tell them your problems which are like these heavy stones. If you tell them might agree but then they might gossip about you. They won't tell the teacher.*

*R: So what must they do?*

*The two together can sit down and decide who is the best person they can approach be it a teacher, a parent or the principal. Sometimes your friends won't believe that what has happened to you is true. They might make it a joke and tell other school children what has happened to you. You should not tell any old friend what has happened to you, you should tell a friend that you trust. It should be a friend who also shares what is happening to him with you and both of you should keep each other's secrets.*

*R: So they should keep it to themselves?*

*No. The one should go and tell the teacher about the other's (things that are heavy for him/her inside). Not that they should keep it to themselves. If they don't tell anybody the hurt won't go away. It's better if they tell someone who can help them.*

*R: T, what did you think?*

*I agree with her that they should keep it to tell the teacher butt he teachers should not tell the whole school. Here at school there are other children who have been raped but they won't tell us who. The teachers told us but they said they would not tell us who. (Boys and girls, Gauteng township, 11-12)*



Children were then asked what they did that helped them relieve emotional stress. Here everyone had something to say. Most of the strategies children

used to relieve emotional stress related to playing with friends and having fun. The following quote is typical of the other groups.

*R: when do you forget about your problems? What helps you to forget your problems?*

*Friends.*

*At school when you play and talk you feel happy.*

*In church when you sing.*

*When they have organised you a party. Birthday party. You dance.*

*When they have bought you a bicycle. You forget.*

*Sometimes next door neighbours.*

*Going to play soccer.*

*Playing at the park with your friends.*

*When you have performed well at school and they tell you this you become happy.*

*When you have passed at school you forget about all the bad things.*

*When you play things like volleyball at the Love Life Centre you become happy and forget about all these things.*

*When they have hurt you, you do what you like or enjoy and you forget about what has happened.*

*When you have gone out on a school trip you forget. (Mpum rural 8-10)*

*R: What do you do for yourself to forget about that?*

*You play with your friends .*

*Be happy.*

*R: What makes you happy?*

*When you make jokes with your friends and they play 'lekker' with you. (W Cape coloured township, 11-12)*

Researchers also spent some time discussing with children what they think parents, communities and even government can do about violence. Most groups had some suggestions, many of the older groups had a number of suggestions.

*If they are being abused the government should encourage the police to arrest those who abuse.*

*The police will tell you that they don't have vans to go out and arrest the criminals. It does not help. If someone is being abused they say there are no vans.*

*The government could make the police to respect their work. That way the public would respect the police and believe that they can help them. People don't care for the police anymore. (Gauteng, township, 11-12)*

*R: How can teachers help them (children who are emotionally troubled)?*

*By teaching them.*

*They can help them by taking care of them and checking if they do their work.*

*By encouraging me. Looking at my work and making me feel happy.*

*By talking to them.*

*Making them food parcels that they can take home. (Mpum, informal settlement, 8-10)*

*We will sit down in the community and sit down very nicely with them (troubled children) and find out their problems and try to resolve them.*

*R: Okay so people in the community how can they help children?*

*I had a problem I went to my neighbour and asked for help and he helped me.*

*R: Do you think the government can do anything?*

*Yes.*

*They can call meetings, radio ahead (with a loud hailer) and then they call all the people to come in the hall. You can call them to go in the hall then they have a meeting and they can talk about closing the taverns and shops that are bad. (W Cape, informal settlement, 11-12)*

## **4. Analysis and recommendations**

It is clear that the children involved in this study are exposed to significant levels of crime-related violence. This violence differs according to the environment in which children live, but they are all faced with it in some form or another. What is particularly worrying is the fact that the threat of violence is a part of children's everyday lives. The walk to and from school and to the shops is seen by children as a dangerous activity with some children describing how they attempt to make themselves invisible as they walk so as to avoid being targeted by criminals.

According to children in rural areas, townships and informal settlements the perpetrators of most of the violence they fear are young men who 'hang around' the area. The nature of these gangs differs with the area but whether they are the gangsters of the cape flats or the *tsotsis* of the Gauteng township children are afraid of them. What is also clear is that some of these young men are members of the children's families and some of the older boys who participated in the research are already being pulled into these gangs. It is also clear from what children say that the poverty that many of them live with in their families is a clear reason for much of the crime. This illustrates how much the violence is a part of the actual thread of children's and families lives in South Africa and how criminal behaviour has become justified within family value systems. What is particularly troubling is the way in which girls explain how sexual abuse of girls is tolerated within the family for economic reasons.

This research also reveals the high levels of violent crime that children witness, in some areas on an almost weekly if not daily basis. Children describe witnessing stabbings, shootings and violent beatings. Many children also describe being victims of violent crime incidents including armed robbery

and rape. The impact of HIV/AIDS is also evident in the research through the fact that many children (especially in rural areas) identify the death of caregivers as a cause of emotional stress.

We know from research (Lewis, 1999, Osofsky, 1997) that being witness to and victim to violence causes psychological trauma in adults and children. The children who participated in this study describe responses that are well documented in the trauma literature. They withdraw, they isolate themselves, they feel angry and sad, they feel worthless.

Yet only two children in the entire group report having received formal counselling. Parents are supportive, some teachers and friends are also supportive but is this enough? It is important to note that children place a high value on confidentiality and will choose who they talk to about their problems.

In fact one of the issues that this work highlights is the extent to which children take control over their own emotional well being and the resilience they show in overcoming the effects of the daily round of violence. The findings here that younger children are more at risk of emotional trauma are corroborated by research (Mason and Killian, 1994). The younger children show a lower sense of locus of control and agency over their lives making them at risk of emotional 'damage'. But the older children, even those who live in violent communities, can engage with why the violence is present, what should be done about it and what is more significant have their own strategies for dealing with emotional stress. Again this kind of response is evident in the research literature (Dawes, 1994).

In conclusion, the levels of violence that children experience on a daily basis and the fact that it places them, particularly the younger children, at emotional risk is an important advocacy issue for the Soul City advocacy unit to pick up through the *Soul Buddyz* series. The need for local government to look at liquor outlets and the link between these and shops that children use is another issue, as is the need for better policing in terms of drugs on street corners. A second advocacy issue is the need to provide counselling support programmes for children who have been victims of violence, the example here of the children's support programme based at the Health Centre and the important supportive role it plays in the children's lives is a good model. This points to the importance of the Soul Buddyz clubs network as a potential for psychosocial support for children.

The need for recreation programmes for young people is another issue raised by this work, because as one eight year old pointed out "*We must learn not to do what they do. Instead find better things to do.*"

The *Soul Buddyz* series can also mirror the extent to which children work towards protecting their own emotional health through finding ways to deal with emotional stress and in this way celebrate children's resilience. There are

also clear safety messages, many of which are articulated and applied by children that the series can reinforce.



## 5. References

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## 6. Appendix 1: Statement of ethics

As participatory researchers with children we will:

- respect the rights of children as provided in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ensure that the research is conducted in a way that benefits children's physical, psychological and social development;
- encourage children to speak, and listen to them;
- ask for informed consent of children, and their parents where appropriate, before involving them in research or in disseminating research information;
- honour children's priorities and interests;
- honour children's cultural values;
- treat children as adequate and capable social actors;
- not impose the researcher or the researcher's ideas on children;
- not use any form of abuse or exploitation for research purposes;
- not put children at risk for research purposes;
- not hide information from children;
- not discriminate against children on the basis of age, gender, socio-economic status, caste, religion, language, race, ethnicity, capacity;
- where appropriate, try to involve children in conducting the research;
- ensure research report ownership by children or where appropriate their parents or other related persons;
- not use material without the informed consent from the participants;
- not give out real names of persons or organisations without informed consent; confidentially of all sources will be maintained;
- not use material that will be threatening to the children, even if they have given their informed consent;
- give appropriate weight and value to children's feelings;
- disseminate findings to the group(s) that contributed to the research, in media that they can understand;
- give materials gathered from research participants back to the participants, keeping copies only with their informed consent.

Adapted from a declaration during a course for researchers in participatory research with children in India/Nepal in 1995, as recorded in Boyden, J and Ennew, J (1997).