

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

Dysfunctional Social Systems, Experiential Traits and Sheer Wickedness: Interrogating the Vicissitudes of Criminal Violence in South Africa

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Abstract

The daily incidents of violent crimes are rampant in South Africa. This incident of violent attacks has placed the country in a bad light in the global ranking of violent countries. Not only has this fact not changed, but it has worsened with recent incidents occasioned by the COVID-19 lockdown. From its description as the world's 'murder capital' and rape capital due to the prevalence of criminal activities, criminal violence in South Africa has grown in intensity. This paper argued that the scourge of criminal violence in South Africa is, partly, a manifestation of a dysfunctional social system that has entrenched the culture of violence as an instrument of interaction in a society characterised by individualistic instinct and consciousness. Exacerbated by the lived experiential traits imbued with wickedness, violent criminal activities have created a society living in fear of instant death and degradation. The research used an interpretivism method from several South African studies, including the culture of violence, criminal violence, and the justice system, to discuss the criminal justice system. This paper submits that a deliberate and conscientious approach, through a reformed criminal justice system as well as societal re-orientation, would be necessary to recalibrate the subconsciousness of citizens to be attuned to the appropriate social order stimulated by responsive and responsible governance structures.

Keywords: criminal violence; culture of violence; dysfunctional social system; criminal justice system

Introduction

Criminal violence in South Africa is a deep-rooted and pervasive problem widely documented nationwide (Altbeker, 2005). It has been estimated that about one-third of all murders, robberies, burglaries, and thefts in South Africa are committed by organised criminal groups (Wilke, 2020; Breetzke, 2020; Yaksic, 2024). The scale of the criminal activity is astounding and has created an atmosphere of fear among citizens. South African officials have identified various factors contributing to the high crime levels in the nation. These include dysfunctional social systems such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and gender-based violence, among others (Yesufu, 2022). These problems are interconnected and create a cycle that perpetuates criminal behaviour. For instance, poverty is often linked to higher rates of drug use and mental health issues that can lead people to resort to criminal activities for financial gain (Cheteni *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, unemployment leads to more desperate individuals with fewer options for legitimate employment who are more likely to turn to crime as a way to make ends meet. In addition, gender-based violence, especially against women and children, places the female gender at greater risks of victimisation, further expanding the potential population from which criminals may draw their victims (Van Hout and Chimbaga, 2020). The South African government has acted in several ways to combat the rising criminal activity. One such measure is the establishment of a National Crime Prevention Strategy, which sets out a comprehensive framework and strategic objectives for reducing crime and victimisation in the country (Ngoveni *et al.*, 2022). This strategy involves

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increasing public awareness and involvement in crime prevention initiatives, strengthening laws related to criminal activities, and focusing on more preventive approaches than reactive responses when addressing crime. Additionally, the strategy calls for greater collaboration between government agencies, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders to increase effectiveness in tackling criminal activities.

The South African Government also recently implemented a National Integrated Plan of Action (NIPA) to combat gender-based violence and other forms of discrimination (Dale *et al.*, 2021). This plan outlines strategies for enhancing access to justice services for abuse victims and improving support services related to legal aid and counselling. It also focuses on developing educational programs that target youth, so they are better equipped with the knowledge to prevent violence against women and girls. Furthermore, South Africa has recently adopted a Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), which seeks to reduce levels of victimisation by providing tailored assistance depending on an individual's needs. This programme offers psychological support, trauma debriefing sessions, and emergency financial support for those affected by criminal activities such as robbery or assault (Tran, 2023). The programme also works with communities to create awareness around vulnerable populations such as older people or persons with disabilities who may be more likely targets of crime due to their perceived vulnerability or lack of resources needed for protection from crime. The government's response to all these issues has been ineffective thus far. Despite efforts from the various law enforcement agencies and other state institutions tasked with curbing criminal activities in the country, it remains as rampant as ever before. This failure may be partially attributed to inadequate resources allocated towards combating crime or a lack of appropriate infrastructure for successful intervention initiatives such as increased policing or community support programs (Singh and Zondi, 2020).

With a Crime Index of 76.86, South Africa has the third-highest crime rate in the world (Crime Index, 2023). South Africa has a notably high rate of assaults, rape, homicides, and other violent crimes. This high rate has been attributed to several factors, including high levels of poverty, inequality, unemployment, social exclusion, and the normalisation of violence. More than 1 in 4 men surveyed by the South African Medical Research Council admitted to committing rape (World Population Review, 2023).

In 2010, South Africa was the rape capital of the world with "132.4 incidents per 100,000 people" but "the rate has dropped to 72.1 in 2019-20" reporting (World Population Review, 2023). In 2022, the Crime Index Ranking, ranked South Africa as the most dangerous country in Africa, with widespread murder and organised crimes (Galal, 2022). Indeed, the five African cities with the highest crimes, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Bloemfontein, are in South Africa (Statista, 2023).

In 2022, the country had one of the highest murder rates globally, registering around 36 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants. Moreover, South Africa's crime scene is also characterised by organised criminal activities, for which the country ranked fifth in Africa (Galal, 2022).

According to the police report, "6,200 people were murdered between January 2023 and March 2023—an average of about 70 murders a day" (Modise, 2023). In addition, 10,500 cases of rape were also recorded, within the same period, an average of 116 cases a day. This is an indication of ineffective crime preventive measures in the country. This paper argues that the scourge of criminal violence in South Africa is a manifestation of a dysfunctional social system that has entrenched the culture of violence as an instrument of interaction in a society characterised by individualistic instinct and consciousness (Fagbadebo, 2021; Mlamla *et al.*, 2021). Exacerbated by the lived experiential traits imbued with wickedness, violent criminal activities have created a society living in fear of instant death and degradation (Lamb, 2021). This paper highlights the prevalence of criminal violence in South Africa and the necessity of reforming the social justice system to combat criminal activities. Additionally, the paper asserts that the re-orientation of society is essential in re-establishing social order in society through reformed government structures.

Aside from the introduction and background, the paper has five sections. Section two presents a brief literature review of violence and crime in societies, followed by a discussion on the culture of violence, dysfunctional systems, and sheer wickedness as drivers of criminal violence in South Africa. The research method is detailed in section three and includes a brief selection of a case of criminal violence in South Africa. Section four discusses the findings, while the fifth section concludes the paper.

Literature Review

Violence is ubiquitous in contemporary society. It is a global phenomenon that transcends all boundaries in different dimensions (Wilson, 2015). Galtung identifies three typologies of violence that explain the various dimensions and sources of violence in society. These are direct, structural/indirect and cultural violence (Galtung, 1969). Scholars have built on this initial classification (Rebbe *et al.*, 2023; Khalid *et al.*, 2023). Galtung (1969: 168) defines violence as “the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is”. It connotes “avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible” (Galtung, 1990: 292). He explains further that it “increases the distance between the potential and the actual, and that which impedes the decrease of this distance” (Galtung, 1969: 168). By this, he meant that avoidable painful situations are classified as violence while unavoidable incidents are not (Galtung, 1969 and 1990; Galtung and Hoivik, 1971). Thus, every society has the potential to prevent and control violent situations. The classification of violence, therefore, is an attempt to distil the avoidable and unavoidable actualities in different societies. Direct violence occurs when there are physical or psychological hurts or injuries or life-threatening occurrences (Galtung, 1969 and 1990; Haile *et al.*, 2023). This is common in all societies where people engage in physical combat and other forms of violent criminal activities that are injurious to fellow citizens (Heinecken, 2020). On the other hand, structural violence is less visible but with the “most lethal” consequence. Lee (2019: 124) refers to structural violence as the harm caused to individuals when social structures or institutions impede the fulfilment of their basic needs. This harm arises from inadequate governance and institutional shortcomings deeply ingrained in the state and government’s structural frameworks. Lee (2019: 123) further defines it as “the unavoidable limitations that society places on groups of people,” which prevent them from achieving a standard of living that would otherwise be possible. Unlike other forms of violence, structural violence is propagated through interconnected economic, political, and cultural mechanisms that obstruct its victims from achieving their full quality of life (Lee, 2019: 123).

These are outcomes of entrenched social, economic, and political inequalities that gave rise to “unjust, repressive and oppressive political, economic, and social structures that affect people’s chances in life” (Heinecken, 2020). Cultural violence is a derivative of the acquired symbolic reference to mores and customs that shape the beliefs and attitudinal dispositions of people (Lee, 2019). Traditions, beliefs, language, and other communal values influence violence to symbolise identities that must be preserved or protected. Societies characterised by a culture of direct violence as an instrument of response to the consequences of inequalities are prone to developing a cycle of conflicts that are inimical to citizens. South Africa, as a nation born out of colonial repression and marginalisation, is a classic example of a society with an entrenched culture of violence (Heinecken, 2020; Magubane, 2020). Thus, the high spate of criminal violence in the country can be explained within the context of the Galtung triangle classification of violence. Criminal violence varies from country to country, ranging from homicides, armed robbery and kidnapping, drug and sex trafficking, and illegal gunrunning to domestic violence (Hultin, 2022; Shen and Sharkey 2022). For instance, the 2019 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) Report estimated global intentional homicides at 464,000 victims in 2017 (UNODC Report, 2019). This report suggested that 54% of homicides were perpetrated using firearms, representing about 250526 victims globally; 22% were performed with sharp objects or weapons (i.e., knives), and 24% were committed using other mechanisms (i.e., dangerous substances), representing about 102080 and 111360 victims, respectively (UNODC Report, 2019). The American and African regions recorded the highest number of homicides, with an average of 31.2 and 21.5 victims per 100,000 population, in the same period, respectively (UNODC Report, 2019).

This phenomenal rise in criminal violence is attributable to several factors, such as homelessness and deprivation, poor governance, corruption, inequality, poverty and unemployment, youth vulnerability and exclusion, and/or marginalisation (Ismail and Olonisakin, 2021). Other factors include the disintegration of culture, poor urban planning, and neglect of public space, which may lead to a gradual integration of delinquency in cities. Hence, the rise of criminal violence has led many countries to implement criminal sanctions against prosecutors. Despite the many security measures implemented to address the daunting problem of criminal violence in South Africa, government efforts have not yielded the expected results. Criminal violence has grown in intensity with the incidents exacerbated by the COVID-19 lockdown. This development has made the country one of the producers of the “murder capital” of the world and its image as the world’s rape capital (Petersen, 2023; Fagbadebo, 2021; HuffPost, 2017). The Global Peace Index (GPI) of 2018 ranked South Africa as one of the most violent and dangerous places to live (GPI, 2018). In the 2021 GPI, South Africa was the second among countries with the

“largest proportion of people who experienced violence” (GPI, 2021). Over 50% of South Africans consider violence the biggest risk to their daily safety, while 79.3% are often gripped with fear of violence.

South Africa has been facing a rising rate of criminal violence in recent years (Statista, 2022). This major issue affects the safety and security of its citizens and impacts economic development due to the loss of human capital and resources (Lamb, 2019; Calitz *et al.*, 2020). In response to this situation, the government has implemented various initiatives to curb crime levels through preventative approaches instead of reactive responses. These include the National Crime Prevention Strategy, Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), National Integrated Plan of Action (NIPA) and educational programs targeting youth, to name a few (Republic of South Africa (RSA) 2012; Dale *et al.*, 2021). These measures were designed to reduce and address criminal activities aggravated by the country’s apartheid-induced structural violence while giving individuals more options than resorting to illegal methods for making money (Forde *et al.*, 2021).

South Africa and the Culture of Violence

The issue of violence is not novel in South Africa, as the country’s history is interwoven with violence and bloodshed. Between 1948 and 1993, colonialists dominated and sustained the apartheid regime through violence and oppression, while the oppressed utilised violence as a mechanism to overcome their oppression (Van der Merwe, 2013). Two features of violence emerged from the apartheid regime. The first is that violence is considered a mechanism for suppression and correction (Hoosen *et al.*, 2022). Black South Africans were daily confronted with the possibility of violence as a way of livelihood and survival. Moreover, the fear and threat of violence became embedded in their psyche to the point that the threat of violence was sufficient to coerce them into submission. Irrespective of whether it was the oppressed or the oppressor who initiated militancy, violence was met with violence. Thus, apartheid institutionalised violence in South Africa, a development that generates unresolved tensions and anger of the past as a pattern of post-apartheid society (Burnett, 2022). The apartheid racial institutions, the socio-economic injustices and the protracted struggle for equality reinforced the structural violence that defined post-apartheid South Africa. Hence, the preponderance of the cycle of criminality and violence is in different dimensions (Maharaj, 2023). Paradoxically, post-apartheid civilian regimes could not discontinue structural violence as the worsening economic situation has reinforced the use of violence as a weapon of public participation (Makonye, 2022; Yende, 2023). The paradoxical nature of South Africa is evident in the fact that, on the one hand, it is the most unequal nation in the world (World Bank, 2022a), with a Gini index of 63 in 2021 (World Bank, 2022b). On the other hand, the country experienced almost two decades of steady declines, stagnant economic growth, and high inflation of 7.5% in 2021, above the upper limit of the South African Reserve Bank’s target range of 3-6% (World Bank, 2022b), and unemployment climbing toward 33.6% in the same period (Statista, 2022).

Consequently, the rise in socio-economic challenges and inequalities has aggravated the level of stress that drives individuals to participate in criminal activities as a protest against oppression and repression. Thus, resistance to oppression legitimised violence to effect change and became the preferred mechanism for expressing dissatisfaction with authority. This has characterised post-apartheid South Africa as the increase in violence and crime is a common feature in both the political and social spheres daily (Van der Merwe, 2013; Makonye, 2022). The transition to democracy has not instantaneously cured the injustices and inequalities of apartheid. Rather, South Africans are still obliged to live alongside those who have benefited through oppression and are constantly reminded of their lack compared to the elite in society. The divide in society fuels the anger and resentment of the marginalised groups, creating the breeding ground for violence and crime. This has reinforced the structural violence coupled with entrenched but dysfunctional social systems that drive a series of violent criminal activities. Societal ills found in South Africa have greatly contributed to increased criminal activities. Structural violence has generated a culture of defiance above societal norms that have recreated humans based on their experiences (Drew, 2022; Yesufu, 2022; Agboola *et al.*, 2022). This culture has been transmitted through generations. The danger of the culture of violence engendered by structural dysfunctions is the prevailing warped social systems.

The experiential traits of criminals in South Africa vary by region but generally include a lack of moral conscience or a higher sense of entitlement (Sui *et al.*, 2022; Ngidi, 2022). Other common traits include a willingness to engage in violent behaviour and an inclination towards risk-taking, often resulting in illegal activities such as theft and drug trafficking (Bougard and Hesselink, 2022). Criminals often share certain psychological characteristics such as impulsivity, low empathy levels, and aggression (Harangozo, 2022).

Scholars and writers have identified different factors responsible for the burgeoning crime rate in South Africa. These include underlying social tensions occasioned by a high level of social and economic inequality, unemployment, poverty, social exclusion; and organised crime and marginalisation amid inadequate government response and weak security intelligence and policing (Panchia, 2023). Easy availability and access to weapons have remained the critical drivers of violent crimes in South Africa. Others are social ills such as “alcohol abuse, child-headed households being drawn into a life of crime, the spread of illegal guns and criminal justice system failures” (Hlangu, 2023).

Security officials have attributed the rise in crimes, such as murders and sexual crimes, to activities at the taverns and other broader social problems. The Police Commissioner in KwaZulu-Natal, for instance, Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi, was particularly irked by the rising criminal activities at Richmond (Hlangu, 2023).

If you look at the stats (you will) see the number of families who are headed by children, where there are no adults. Youngsters who are 15 years or younger are living alone in those houses and turn them into a haven for criminals and all [the] illegal things that are happening in there, like illicit goods. The youngsters become easy prey for the bigger syndicates, like drug lords, who capitalise on that by feeding drugs to these kids who then become aggressive and end up committing bigger crimes (cf. Hlangu, 2023).

Security agencies recognise the problem created by the country’s criminal justice system in addressing crimes and criminal activities. According to the KZN police Chief, some infractions slow the pace of the dispensation of justice.

I’m also concerned about the criminal justice system in terms of the number of cases that go to court compared to the number of cases that actually go to trial. There is too big a gap and we’re going to get to the bottom of why that is and what can be done to correct it. There are also reports of criminals who are in prison still seemingly involved in ensuring that crimes are committed by giving instructions from the inside and that’s something I’m very concerned about (cf. Hlangu, 2023).

Social discipline seems to be a rarity in South Africa given the plethora of legislative frameworks that seek to protect the rights of the children. The lack of control over the social values imbibed by young children has remained a challenge to instilling moral behaviours. It is a common feature to see children having access to weapons and getting involved in drugs and other criminal activities with impunity. For instance, in May 2023, some students of Lamontville High School in Chatsworth, in Durban, “were found in possession of drugs and some dangerous weapons” (Makhanya, 2023). According to Nomarashiya Caluza, the spokesperson of the South African Democratic Teachers’ Union (SADTU), the burgeoning violence criminal violence in primary and high schools in the country was a reflection of what is happening in communities (cf. Makhanya, 2023). Similarly, the president of the South African National Teachers’ Union (NATU), Sibusiso Malinga, blamed the problem on the inability of the parents to control their children.

“The biggest problem we have is that parents are scared of their children and are failing to parent them. There is also no leadership in the communities. Teachers also did not discipline these pupils because corporal punishment was closed but the department failed to provide an alternative to dealing with these pupils” (cf. Makhanya, 2023). Media commentators and writers have blamed these sorts of criminal activities on the dysfunctional social system in a society where insistence on moral upbringing is tantamount to a criminal violation of the rights of children. Poverty, unemployment, and inequality contribute to crime levels, creating a cycle perpetuating criminal behaviours (Mongale, 2022;). For instance, poverty limits access to education and basic needs, resulting in higher levels of drug abuse and mental health issues that drive people to resort to criminal activities for financial gain (Olofinbiyi and Mulaudzi, 2022). Similarly, unemployment leads to more desperate individuals with fewer options for legitimate employment who may turn to crime as a viable option for making ends meet (Mayekiso and Obioha 2022). Additionally, gender-based violence further increases the potential population from which criminals may draw victims due to the increased risk of victimisation for women. The consequence is the entrenchment of unfavourable experiences that gradually become a behavioural norm of victims.

Sheer wickedness contributes to rising criminality rates in South Africa. Scholars have noticed the extent to which wickedness as a human factor motivates criminal activities (Feinberg, 1998; Crofts, 2013; Ballinger, 2019; Sachdeva, 2023). According to Feinberg (1998: 475), criminals who are motivated by sheer wickedness often

demonstrate this through barbaric acts such as multiple dismemberments of murdered victims, “torture, rape, cannibalism, and even necrophilic mistreatment of corpses”. Inhuman behaviours and conducts that depict “diabolic, demonic, fiendish, ghoulish, beastly, or monstrous, manifestation are products of deliberate wicked acts (Feinberg, 1998). Indeed, criminal law recognises wickedness as motivation for criminal activities (Crofts, 2013; Lilleker, 2023; Cowley, 2024). Regarded by character theorists as a “flaw of character”, criminal acts that manifest behavioural impulses of “cruelty, wickedness, dishonesty and indifference” are punishable by law (Lilleker, 2023: 167). An underlying sense of malice and disregard for another person's well-being often drive criminal activities such as robbery, GBV, or any form of direct assault (Sachdeva, 2023; Cowley, 2024). This can range from intentionally targeting vulnerable populations, such as the elderly or persons with disabilities, due to their perceived vulnerability to the use of violence to obtain money. Furthermore, some criminals are motivated by a need for recognition and pleasure derived from causing harm to others; consequently, engaging in aggressive behaviour that often leads to physical conflict and victimisation (Xue *et al.*, 2019). This suggests a growing trend of criminality fuelled by malicious intent rather than simply financial gain.

As shown in Table I, this sort of criminal activity takes different forms. For instance, the Nomia Rosemary Ndlovu case in Tembisa is a manifestation of deliberate wickedness to obtain money (Sibanda, 2022). She abused her office as a police officer to kill members of her family to inherit the money in their life assurance policies (Seleka, 2021; Maphisa, 2021). Similarly, in 2022, Njabulo Ndlovu killed an elderly woman, and raped and killed the daughter and her granddaughter in Pietermaritzburg simply because he was able to overpower them (Simpson, 2022; Chetty, 2022). Other incidents categorised as sheer wickedness in Table I include the killing of Marcia Mazibuko and her sister, Sergeant Pretty Mazibuko (Mashig, 2023), the murder of 10 members of a family in Imbali by Deon Warren Thabo Mathonsi (Bennie, 2023), the murder of a 46-year-old woman Ntombenkosi Sam by her boyfriend, in Khayelitsha, Cape Town (Tshwete, 2023), and the killing of a Mother by the father of her child (Tshikalange, 2023). The implications of this extend far beyond increased security risks for individuals affected by crime. Exposure to violence or aggression can lead to psychological trauma, significantly increasing stress, anxiety, and depression experienced in the long term (Bacchini and Esposito, 2020.). It is therefore vital for all stakeholders involved with tackling rising criminality rates in South Africa to understand the underlying motivations behind criminal behaviour so they can develop effective strategies to curb such activities while also providing targeted assistance for victims through initiatives such as the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP).

Methodology

Based on the literature above, the paper examined the extent of criminal violence because of a dysfunctional social system that perpetuates a culture of violence in South Africa. It employed an interpretive approach, using data from public documents and reports and incorporating observations from multiple South African studies on criminal violence, the culture of violence, and the justice system to shed light on the complexities of the criminal justice system. In terms of the inclusion criteria, the paper focused on a subset of cases published in South African communities within the past decade. It is worth mentioning that most of the victims were close friends and relatives, while the perpetrators included not only close associates and relatives but also cases involving unknown individuals. By including close friends and family members, the paper highlights the increased impact of criminal violence on intimate social networks and recognises its profound effects on interpersonal connections and community interactions. In addition, by incorporating a limited number of cases involving unidentified individuals, the research acknowledges the wider range of criminal violence extending beyond familiar social circles. The study excluded criminal violence cases outside of South Africa to maintain a geographic focus and ensure contextual relevance to the unique dynamics in South African communities.

Findings and Discussion

The table below provides a disconcerting synopsis of a selection of violent criminal murders that have occurred in South Africa over the last decade in diverse locations. These occurrences highlight the widespread presence of dysfunction in the social system, which contributes to abhorrent behaviours, including intentional murders, violence based on gender, and deliberate harm infliction. The cases expose various motivations, such as conflicts arising from personal matters, intra-personal disputes, and pure malevolence. Some perpetrators were apprehended and subjected to legal repercussions, whereas others remained unidentified or untraceable. Instances where violence appears to be perpetuated by dysfunctional social systems, such as fatal familial disputes, are especially alarming.

The challenges at hand have become more pronounced following the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the critical nature of implementing comprehensive societal interventions and reforms to safeguard the welfare of community members and tackle the underlying causes of such violence.

Table 1: Selected cases of some criminal violent killings in South Africa

Date and Place	Perpetrator	Victim	Nature	Category	Consequence
KwaZulu-Natal, January 2023	14-year-old girl	Ex-girlfriend of her boyfriend	She stabbed her to death	Dysfunctional Social System	Arrested at a rehabilitation centre.
Johannesburg, (Sydenham), Gauteng province February 2023	Brother-in-law	Clinton Pillay	The perpetrator stabbed him, and he ran the car over him	Deliberate/Sheer wickedness	Culprit arrested
Uvongo, (Margate), KwaZulu Natal February 2023	Unknown Armed man	Shalima Ramsanker,	An unknown gunman invaded the holiday homestead and shot the victim.	Dysfunctional Social system/Armed robbery.	No arrest.
Ermelo, Mpumalanga Province March 2023	Siphamandla Gift Khumalo (Son)	Father (Bheki Eric Khumalo)	Killed his father because he did not support his dreams (Rall, 2023). His father did not support his music career dream; instead, he wanted him to be an engineer.	Dysfunctional social system	Pleaded guilty and was handed a life sentence
Imbali location, (Pietermaritzburg), KwaZulu Natal province April 2023	Deon Warren Thabo Mathonsi	Killed ten members, aged between 13 and 63 years of the Memela family house in Imbali.	Unknown men entered the home and shot ten family members, including children. Police seized bags of traditional medicine at the scene. It is alleged that these unknown men used muthi for cleansing after the shootout (Bennie, 2023).	Deliberate killing	Charged to court for murder
Khayelitsha, (Cape Town), Western Cape province April 2023	Boyfriend	46-year-old woman Ntombenkosi Sam	She was stabbed and strangled at night (Tshwete, 2023).	Deliberate and sheer wickedness.	Not yet arrested
Durban North (Glen Anil), KwaZulu-Natal province May 2023	Son	Mother	Son stabbed mother to death over an altercation occasioned by "an argument concerning the cleaning of the room" (Marriah-Maharaj, 2023a)	Dysfunctional social system	Son stabbed himself and wounded his sister. Case under investigation
Malibngwe Drive, (Cosmos City) Gauteng Province May 2023	Hijackers	E-hail Taxi driver	Killed, and the body hung on a tree in an open field.	Hijacking/ Robbery/deliberate planned hit.	Suspects unknown
Hillcrest (Botha's Hill), KwaZulu-Natal May 2023.	Son	Father	It is alleged that the victim had an altercation with his son where they assaulted each other, leading to the father	Dysfunctional social system	Son arrested

Date and Place	Perpetrator	Victim	Nature	Category	Consequence
			being stabbed (Marriah-Maharaj, 2023b).		
Bushbuckridge, Mpumalanga province June 2023	Police Sergeant	Mother of his child	Entered the workplace of the woman and fatally shot her after a heated argument (Tshikalange, 2023).	Sheer wickedness and misuse of service firearm Gender-based Violence	Arrested and charged in court
Kanyamazane, Mpumalanga province June 2022	Hlabirwa Rassie Nkuna	Marcia Mazibuko and her sister, Sergeant Pretty Mazibuko	Intentional killing based on an altercation of infidelity	Deliberately killed the girlfriend and her sister	Sentenced to two life terms of imprisonment
Pietermaritzburg, Kwa Zulu-Natal June 2022,	Njabulo Ndlovu	Zanele Ndlela, 65, her daughter Simangele Ndlela, 46, and Simangele's 8-year-old	Intentional Stabbing, rape, and strangulation	Sheer Wickedness	Sentenced to five terms of life imprisonment
Workington Road, Greenwood Park, (Durban) KwaZulu Natal province November 2022	Stepson	Stepfather	It is alleged that while cooking, the man and his 20-year-old stepson argued. It is alleged the son took a knife and stabbed the man in his chest (Marriah-Maharaj, 2022).	Dysfunctional Social System	Police arrested the culprit.
Soweto, Gauteng province January 2021	Flavio Hlabangwane,	Tshepang Pitse	Killed the wife and cut the body into parts, kept her inside the freeze (Rall, 2023)	Deliberate killing	A life sentence for premeditated murder
Delft, (Cape Town) Western Cape province February 2020,	Amie Fakier (55 years old)	15-year-old girl	He raped her	Dysfunctional Social System/ Sheer wickedness	Found guilty
Pretoria, Gauteng Province November 2020	44-year-old-Man (Identity kept anonymous for the safety of the victims)	His children	Fifteen counts relating to rape and other sexual activities involving some of his 14 children (Venter, 2023).	Dysfunctional Social system	Sentenced to 4 Life imprisonment terms
Tembisa, Gauteng Province 2012-2018	Nomia Rosemary Ndlovu Thembisa police officer	Live-in-partner and five family members	Deliberate/intentionally live off their life on funeral insurance policies	Sheer Wickedness	Convicted and sentenced to six concurrent life terms of imprisonment

Source: Generated by the authors from newspaper reports

We presented selected recent cases of criminal violence, their nature categories, and their consequences in South Africa. The crime statistics report for the third and Fourth quarters released by the Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, in February and May 2023, respectively, reinforced the claims that South Africa is a violent country. In the third quarter, October 1-December 31, 2022, South Africa recorded more than 7555 murder cases, which translated to more than 83 persons killed daily (Sithole, 2023). More than 3,000 were victims of gun violence (Khumalo, 2023). This is in addition to 138 daily cases of rape. In the Fourth quarter, January to March 31, 2023, there were records

of 6289 reported cases of murder, 6,192 attempted murder, and 10512 registered cases of rape in three months amid the rising tides of robbery and assault (Mkhwanazi, 2023; Tshwete, 2023). There were also reported cases of grievous bodily harm and common assaults of 43,090 and 49,266, respectively. This burgeoning criminal violence in South Africa does not portray a security-healthy nation, a situation that has thrown citizens into the frenzy of perpetual fear of attacks (Amnesty International, 2022; Rademeyer, 2023).

A series of crimes are reported daily by the police in South Africa, as presented in Table I. Between May and June 2023, Macassar, Somerset, in West Western Cape, witnessed a series of murder cases where three dead bodies were dumped in the community (Rall, 2023). The community has been reeling under the siege of criminal activities because of the frequent power outage. A birthday party on Sunday, January 29, 2023, in Kwazakele, Gqeberha, Eastern Cape, led to the killing of 8 people when gunmen opened fire on the celebrant and the guests (Dasgupta, 2023). In February 2023, Kiernan Forbes, a popular South African rapper, was killed along with his friend, Tebello Motsoane, in Durban (Maseko and Armstrong, 2023). On 22 June 2023, two gunmen, Cheslyn Philander and Zane Geyers, shot and killed Kurtley Rossouw at Lawrence Erasmus Drive, Bloemendal. On 20 June 2023, Johnny Baartman was charged in court for the murder of his ex-wife, Desiree Baartman (Mtumane, 2023). These cases were not accidental; they were premeditated and deliberate. This is an indication of sheer wickedness and a manifestation of dysfunctional social systems that seem to have accepted murder as a way of life (Galgut, 2020).

A comprehensive analysis of criminal violence cases in South Africa reveals a concerning pattern characterised by deliberate and premeditated actions that transcend isolated incidents. The criminal activities, which span from familial strife originating from an unproductive social structure to deliberate homicides, correspond to the complex issues emphasised in the scholarly work concerning dysfunctional social systems, experiential characteristics, and criminal violence (Xue *et al.*, 2019; Harangozo, 2022; Ngidi, 2022; Hlangu, 2023). The frequency of these intentional behaviours presents a challenge to the dominant concept of a nation that is secure and promotes an environment of constant apprehension among its populace, thereby strengthening the theme that was identified in the review of relevant literature (Amnesty International, 2022; Rademeyer, 2023).

The case of Johnny Baartman, who is accused of murdering his ex-wife, is a poignant illustration that demonstrates the systemic nature of such violent acts. It supports the literature's claim that criminal behaviour is frequently deeply ingrained in dysfunctional social systems (Mtumane, 2023). Baartman's conduct serves as a prime illustration of how murder can come to be regarded as a socially sanctioned sign of dysfunction; this underscores the importance of developing a nuanced comprehension of the sociocultural milieu that encompasses criminal violence (Galgut, 2020). Hence, these cases transcend specific incidents and are consistent with the literature's findings regarding the critical requirement for all-encompassing interventions that address the underlying factors contributing to criminal violence (Amnesty International, 2022; Rademeyer, 2023). The literature concerning experiential traits, criminal violence, and dysfunctional social systems emphasises the need for comprehensive initiatives that go beyond traditional law enforcement and judicial approaches. These initiatives should adopt a holistic perspective that tackles the root causes of dysfunctional social systems. By exploring the complex underlying motivations for these actions, governing bodies can devise precise tactics to cultivate a more secure and protected milieu for the populace of South Africa. This, in turn, would advance the welfare and security of society over an extended period, as supported by scholarly works (Galgut, 2020; Rademeyer, 2023).

Conclusion

The analysis of criminal violence in South Africa has revealed that many different factors contribute to this social issue. These include dysfunctional social systems, personal characteristics, and heinous acts. To address this complex problem, governments must prioritise efforts that target the root causes of criminal behaviour. One effective approach to intervention is to focus on socio-economic factors. This means governments should allocate resources towards programs and initiatives to reduce poverty, improve education, and provide employment opportunities for marginalised communities. This comprehensive approach aligns with scholarly research on dysfunctional social systems, personal traits, and criminal violence, which highlights the importance of addressing systemic challenges to reduce criminal activity effectively (Harangozo, 2022; Ngidi, 2022; Hlangu, 2023). Ensuring the safety and well-being of women is a crucial part of this comprehensive approach (Dale *et al.*, 2021). Governments should implement policies that promote a secure environment for women across all sectors of society. By doing so, they can help break down power imbalances that often lead to criminal violence, which aligns with scholarly research. Public awareness campaigns can also be effective in preventing crime. By providing information on crime prevention tactics and resources for personal safety, individuals can take proactive steps to

protect themselves and decrease overall levels of criminal violence. Finally, educational investments targeted at vulnerable populations can be a proactive strategy for reducing criminal behaviour. Governments can disrupt patterns of criminal activity linked to drug trafficking and theft by providing viable income opportunities for individuals living in poverty or unemployed youth.

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