

## General Contributions

### **The State of Violence Prevention: Reflections from the First South African National Conference on Violence Prevention**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

*Our analysis of the state of violence prevention in the country is based on a thematic content analysis of abstracts submitted for the First South African National Conference on Violence Prevention. A description of the constituent features of interventions, as well as the theoretical and evaluative assumptions that underlie them, is useful for identifying gaps, strengths and areas for development in the violence prevention sector. Our analysis suggests that the work presented at the conference, albeit a limited representation of violence prevention initiatives in*

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*the country, may be indicative of the plural forms of violence and is partially responsive to the complex psychosocial drivers of violence. While multidimensional interventions seem to focus on central contributing factors, including gendered cultural norms and practices, hegemonic masculinities, specific vulnerable groups and locations, the structural drivers of violence are not directly addressed. There is thus space and scope for prevention interventions that target socioeconomic and material determinants of violence directly. Likewise, for national implementation science and related efforts to grow, future interventions will have to incorporate theoretical and evaluative frames that help to explain the factors that may optimise intervention success, uptake and sustainability.*

**Keywords:** Violence prevention; Multidimensional interventions; Structural drivers; Implementation science; South Africa

## INTRODUCTION

This critical review arises from a thematic content analysis of the proceedings of the First National South African Conference on Violence Prevention held in August 2016. The co-hosts organised the conference around the theme *Mobilising science, community and policy for violence prevention*. The conference and its programme were structured to draw public attention to the magnitude of violence and, as the theme suggests, to renew the empirical case for collaborative and coordinated prevention and containment responses relating to policy by the science community.

Mindful of the conference theme and its implied focus, we thematically analysed the abstracts, which made up the only available record of the proceedings, to reflect on the composition and range of violence prevention and containment interventions presented at the conference. While the conference attracted a range of presentations related to the various track themes, for the purposes of this article, we primarily focused on those themes that concentrated on interventions for gender, youth and child violence. Whilst the conference proceedings may not be reflective of all the violence prevention work currently underway in the country, we suggest that they do offer some indication of the focus of prevention and containment responses in South Africa. As part of the critical review, we used a thematic content analysis to reflect on whether the prevention responses described in the abstracts are sensitive to the manifestations of violence and responsive to the social dynamics, multiple contexts and risks faced by specific groups vulnerable to violence. In addition, we scrutinised the conference abstracts for evidence of theoretical formulations, evaluation and community engagement in the intervention work described.

In brief, using a thematic content analysis, we reference our critical review against the following three questions:

1. Are the prevention and containment interventions mindful of, and responsive to, the different forms of violence manifest in the country?
2. Do the prevention and containment interventions attempt to address the multiple interacting risks and social dynamics specific to child, youth and gender violence?
3. Are theory and evaluative logic used to frame child, youth and gender violence prevention and containment interventions?

We assume that both theory and evaluation are important for deepening our understanding of the psychosocial dynamics, contexts and triggers of violence and for optimising the outcome and the impact of interventions (Bowman et al., 2015; Craig et al., 2008; Hamby, 2011; Michie et al., 2008; Seedat et al., 2014).

## MANIFESTATIONS AND MAGNITUDE

Violence, in its multiple manifestations, is among the many social and health phenomena that continue to threaten South Africa's developmental visions and aspirations. Despite a decrease in the national homicide rate from an estimated 64.8/100 000 people in 2000 (Mayosi et al., 2012; Seedat et al., 2009) to 38.4/100 000 people in 2009, representing a significant decline, South Africa is still among the most violent countries in the world (Matzopoulos et al., 2015). Homicide accounted for 19 000 deaths in 2009 and has more recently been reported to be on the increase, accounting for over 20 000 deaths in 2018 (South African Police Service, 2019).

The female homicide rate involving intimate partners is still six times the global rate (Matzopoulos et al., 2015). While there are no reliable and regular sources of national data on the prevalence of intimate partner violence, an earlier 1998 population-based study reported a lifetime prevalence of physical violence of at least 25% and past-year prevalence of 10% among adult women, with over 40% of men disclosing that they had been physically violent to a partner (Jewkes et al., 2002). In another nationally representative study on intimate partner violence, one in three South African women reported having experienced physical intimate partner violence at some point in their current relationships (Gass et al., 2010).

South Africa's child homicide rate is more than twice the global estimate (Mathews et al., 2013). Violence against children is reported as prevalent in spaces that are typically considered safe and caring. This is especially the case for young children, aged five years and younger, with child deaths related to abuse and neglect in the home being common (Mathews et al., 2016). Both boys and girls receive beatings from adults, often on a daily or weekly basis; adults often use belts, sticks or other weapons to beat children, and so injury is common (Jewkes et al., 2010; Mathews et al., 2016). The frequency and severity of beatings of boys is reported to be greater than that for girls. However, studies show that 39% of girls report some form of sexual violence, including unwanted touching, forced sex or being manipulated into sex by older men, before they have turned 18 (Jewkes et al., 2010). Children are also often the victims of violence at schools. In 2012, the Second National School Violence Study reported that 22.2% of high school learners, representing more than a million children, were found to have been threatened with violence or had been the victims of assault, robbery and/or sexual assault at school in the past year (Burton & Leoschut, 2013). This exposure is even higher in specific settings, such as Soweto in Johannesburg, where two-thirds of children of school-going age are reportedly exposed to community violence and more than half of all children are exposed to violence in their homes (Richter et al., 2018).

Men, especially young men between the ages of 15 and 29 years, are disproportionately involved in especially fatal violence, as both victims and perpetrators. The average male homicide rate for this age group is 56.7/100 000 people (Matzopoulos et al., 2015). The homicide rate for this group is higher in many communities such as the Cape Flats, where young men are often involved in or affected by gang violence. Gang violence occurs in circumstances marked by easy access to drugs and firearms, and families pressured by poor socioeconomic conditions and overcrowded homes. Where there are limited socioeconomic opportunities and social cohesion is inadequate, gang membership may offer social structure and affirmation (Ward et al., 2012).

The elderly, that is, persons above the age of 60 years (South African Human Rights Commission, 2015) constitute almost 8% of the South African population. The South African Human Rights Commission (2015) has indicated that this group is especially vulnerable to poverty, neglect and economic isolation. Violence toward the elderly is reportedly common and includes physical abuse, verbal abuse, sexual abuse and financial abuse (Buthelezi et al., 2017). Eldercide is nationally reported at a rate of 25.2 per 100 000 persons (Matzopolous et al., 2015). According to a recent Johannesburg-based study by Buthelezi and her colleagues, victims of eldercide are predominantly male (77.4%) and mainly killed by firearms (44.8%) (Buthelezi et al., 2017; Swart et al., 2019). Incidents of elderly

violence, abuse and neglect are reported to be on the increase, with a non-profit organisation reporting a total of 2 497 cases for the period 2012/2013 (The Association for the Aged, 2016).

Notwithstanding inconsistencies in the quality, reliability, coverage and accessibility of available information on public violence in South Africa (Lancaster, 2016), figures indicate a marked increase in the occurrence of public violence, reportedly associated with the overall upsurge in public protests in the country (Alexander et al., 2018; Crime Stats SA, 2018). Whereas in 2007 less than 50% of public protests involved some form of violence, by 2014 at least 80% of protests were characterised by violence perpetrated by both the authorities and protesters (Powell et al., 2015). Acts of public violence in public protests include interpersonal attacks and property destruction carried out by different actors (Paret, 2015).

In recent years there has also been a rise in attacks on foreign nationals and businesses of immigrants (Crush & Ramachandran, 2014). Thousands of immigrants, mostly from African countries, have been attacked by South Africans. Such attacks have occurred predominantly in Durban and Johannesburg (Crush et al., 2017; Desai, 2015). Episodes of collective violence against immigrants and businesses of refugees in various locations around the country escalated in 2010, in 2015 (Desai, 2015) and again in 2019 (Xenowatch, 2019).

Finally, there have also been increasing reports of violence based on sexual orientation and gender identity. A recent study indicated widespread discrimination against the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual or allied) community, including verbal abuse, threats of violence, being chased or followed, physical assault, sexual abuse, rape and murder (OUT LGBT Well-being, 2016). There are, however, limited indicators of the extent of such incidents.

## **PSYCHOSOCIAL DRIVERS AND CONTEXTUAL DYNAMICS**

Everyday acts of interpersonal violence and outbreaks of collective violence occur against the backdrop of structural violence (refer to Galtung, 1990; Harrison, 2000). Structural violence refers to the systematic ways in which political, social and economic arrangements operate to (re)produce and perpetuate forms of social injustice. Differential access to resources, power and social, welfare, educational, legal and health services; poverty; racism; gender inequality; and social norms justifying violence are perhaps among the most noteworthy markers of structural violence.

Over the last decade, the increasing frequency of (non-)violent public protests has been linked to some indicators of structural violence: failures in service delivery, weaknesses in our imagined system of participatory democracy and a lack of opportunities for meaningful enactments of citizenship, among other factors (Mchunu & Theron, 2013; Paret, 2015; Von Holdt et al., 2011). Likewise, public protests have highlighted limitations in our dispute resolution and conflict management systems (refer to Day et al., 2019; Malherbe et al., 2020). The regular deployment of militarised policing is perhaps the most telling indication of the country's failure to respond to real socioeconomic issues and the material conditions of the poor. The majority of the African population lacks access to meaningful ways of shaping decisions that affect the structure and functioning of public services and the overall quality of life in their communities. The anger and rage that characterise so many of the public protests and everyday acts of violence may be suggestive of psychological pain and the intergenerational transmission of trauma traced back to encounters with colonialism and apartheid. Structural arrangements, dominant discourses and everyday living conditions render particular contexts, and individuals who live in such contexts, vulnerable to violence (Alexander, 2010; Alexander & Pfaffe, 2014; Duncan, 2016; Von Holdt et al., 2011).

The underlying social dynamics suggest that violence remains rooted in the country's socio-political, communal and familial structures and is manifest at both the collective and interpersonal levels, as well as in public and domestic spaces. Communities living in conditions of disadvantage, males, and youth remain disproportionately vulnerable to violence.

## **THEORY AND EVALUATIVE LOGIC**

Craig and co-authors (2008) indicate outcome evaluation and the incorporation of theory as two of the nine features of effective interventions. The other seven characteristics of effective interventions are comprehensiveness, the inclusion of multiple teaching methods, appropriate allocation opportunities for positive relationship building, suitable timing, sociocultural acceptance and skilled intervention teams. Others, like Nation and colleagues (2003), support the assumption that effective interventions are theoretically based. Both theory and evaluation are valuable for explaining what works and what accounts for successful interventions across circumstances, geographies, populations and types of violence (Michie et al., 2008). In a more recent justification for theoretical work, Bowman and colleagues (2015) point out that there is a gap in our understanding of how pathways of violence are

formed and the processes by which risks are triggered to effect violent enactments. In agreement with Hamby's (2011) notion of the 'second wave' of violence scholarship, Bowman and colleagues (2015) argue that case or incident analyses may help to deepen our knowledge about the mechanisms through which multiple risks interactively translate into triggers of violence. Bowman and colleagues (2015), in elucidating Hamby's (2011) 'second wave' of violence scholarship, suggest that theory, combined with small-scale and detailed data-driven analysis, may help explain, among other things, the role of subjectivities and interconnections across the multiple manifestations and enactments of violence. Such an approach may also prompt a reconsideration of the prevailing definitions of violence. Perhaps partly in agreement and partly in variation, Seedat et al. (2014) see merit in both large- and small-scale studies, as well as in theoretical work. Coordinated interinstitutional and cross-disciplinary large-scale research on the magnitude, drivers, costs and consequences of violence is important for the ongoing mobilisation of financial and policy resources. Critically oriented theoretical analyses can contribute to surfacing problematic values, epistemologies, formulations and methodological claims underlining violence prevention research and interventions. One could, for instance, undertake a theoretical analysis of discursive traditions produced in academic work and powerful institutions such as the media that often mask the contestation and struggle for representation and material resources. Critical theoretical work, constituting a form of 'talking back' to the violence prevention research, policy and practice communities, may also help to generate analyses of the effects of knowledge claims, intervention choices and policy decisions. Theoretical analysis rooted in critical thought, in tandem with both large-scale quantitative and smaller qualitative focused studies, could support the articulation of distributive, substantive and epistemic justice in policy and intervention work. Distributive justice is concerned with the equitable allocation of resources among members of society; substantive justice emphasises fair outcomes; and epistemic justice calls for marginalised populations' ownership of and control over participatory processes and involvement in (counter-)knowledge production.

## METHOD

### DATA CORPUS

The *Abstract book* (First South African National Conference on Violence, 2016) and the three authors' notes, which reflect their individual observations of conference session discussions, were the only available written records of the conference proceedings. In the absence of full paper presentations, the *Abstract book* contains 173 abstracts (138 oral and 35 poster abstracts), 140 of which constitute the

focus (i.e., child, youth and gender-based violence) and primary data corpus for our analysis (refer to Table 1). The excluded abstracts pertain to the plenary, keynote, invited and state-of-the-art addresses.

Category	Frequency	Percentage of Total
<b>Interpersonal violence</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>79.3%</b>
1. Child and youth violence	49	27.4%
2. Gender-based violence	91	50.8%
3. Elderly abuse	2	1.1%
<b>Public and collective violence</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>16.2%</b>
1. Xenophobia	1	0.6%
2. Protest violence	5	2.8%
3. Community violence	17	9.5%
4. Gang violence	4	2.2%
5. Religious violence	2	1.1%
<b>Structural violence</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>Self-directed violence</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1.7%</b>
	<b>179</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1: Abstracts by Violence Category (N=179)

The abstracts were invited through a series of open calls, distributed from 2015 through a public advertising strategy by the conference secretariat. The calls encouraged abstract submissions in one of the following track themes: child abuse and neglect and violence; elder abuse and violence; epidemiology, data and information systems; gender violence; public and collective violence; school and youth violence; science–community–policy partnerships; suicide and self-directed violence; and trauma and trauma care. These tracks were structured to be inclusive of the main forms of violence, as well as cross-cutting public health and advocacy-based approaches to prevention.

## DATA ANALYSIS

We first undertook a frequency analysis of the abstracts per conference track theme to obtain an account of the areas that had attracted priority attention among the conference contributors and to establish whether conference abstracts were reflective of the manifestations of violence in the country.

We then subjected the abstracts to thematic content analysis to determine whether they focused on prevention and containment interventions in an attempt to address the multiple interacting risks and social dynamics specific to child, youth and gender violence, and whether theory and evaluative logic



were used to frame the indicated child, youth and gender violence prevention and containment interventions. This focus was justified by the magnitude of these forms of violence in South Africa, as well as the attention they received at the conference. We used gender violence as defined according to global conventions and noted that most acts of interpersonal gender-based violence are committed by men against women, with the men perpetrating the violence often known to the women, such as partners or family members (World Health Organization, 2005). Our classification of ‘children’ or ‘youth’ followed the authors’ use of the terms ‘children’ (including adolescents) or ‘youth’ in the abstracts. In some instances, studies included both terms and it was decided to adopt an operational definition of ‘children and youth’ that is inclusive of the ages 0 to 25 years. We used the thematic content analysis to support a critical account and review of the constituent features of gender, youth and child violence prevention interventions.

Following the scope of our study, the thematic content analysis explicitly centred on interventions focused on gender and intimate partner violence, primarily violence by men against women; child abuse and neglect; and school and youth violence. We excluded abstracts that focused on topics outside of the study scope, such as those listed under epidemiology, data and information systems, trauma and trauma care, and science–community–policy partnerships, and the other violence-focused themes, that is, elder abuse and violence, gang violence, public and collective violence, and suicide and self-directed violence.

As a first step in the thematic content analysis, one of the authors read all the abstracts that were located within the gender (91) and youth violence and child abuse and neglect (49) thematic tracks, applying broad codes, whilst being mindful of the aims of the article. Through an iterative process and deeper reading of all the abstracts listed under the gender, youth and child violence tracks, the author-analyst identified specific themes embedded in the abstracts. The author-analyst then collated a list of themes and subthemes and discussed the listing with the other authors to ensure that the category labels were sufficiently reflective of the specified thematic content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In order to minimise the likelihood of bias and errors in the analytic process, the second and third authors randomly selected and analysed 10% of the abstracts to check for possible misallocations and biases in the thematic content analysis process. There was disagreement in a small minority of cases, and the authors reached consensus through discussion among themselves. Overall, there was a 95% inter-analyst agreement. Once the authors reached consensus on the list of themes and subthemes, the lead author recruited and trained a doctoral research assistant to verify the frequency analysis and thematic content analysis of the abstracts.

## **THE CONSTITUENTS OF GENDER, YOUTH AND CHILD VIOLENCE AND PREVENTION**

Below we discuss and reference the outcome of our thematic content analysis against our stated objectives to establish whether the prevention work described in the abstracts is responsive to the multiple manifestations of violence and their associated contexts, circumstances, demographics and psychosocial dynamics and whether it is grounded in theoretical and evaluative logic.

### CONTENT AREAS AS REFLECTIVE OF MANIFESTATIONS OF VIOLENCE

At the level of content, the work featured at the conference and as described in the abstracts was reflective of the multiple manifestations of violence. Presentation abstracts featured work on gender and intimate-partner violence, youth violence, child abuse and neglect, collective violence, and elder abuse and eldercide. However, interventions targeting xenophobic and LGBTQIA-related violence did not attract sufficient consideration.

These content areas attain salience when we read them in the context of the three conference objectives: 1) to draw attention to violence and its prevention as a national priority that merits greater political will, financial resources, research, service delivery and policy commitments; 2) to review and reflect on the state of violence prevention work, including research, intervention practices and policy developments in the country; and 3) to explore ways of forging meaningful science–community–policy partnerships and according attention to the importance of adopting a national framework as one possible way of prioritising violence prevention and building partnerships.

From our analysis, we may surmise that the conference seemed to have attracted the relevant presentations that gave substance to its three-fold objectives and that were reflective of the multiple manifestations of violence. Based on our observation of and participation in thematic sessions and plenary discussions at the conference, we further surmise that conference delegates focused on the profiling of violence as a priority public health, psychosocial and human rights issue; considered what works for violence prevention, containment and trauma care; and discussed obstacles, opportunities and national mechanisms for forging intersectoral partnerships and deepening coordinated prevention

responses. In this respect, the conference seemed to have functioned as a space for critical discussions about interventions and research concerning violence prevention.

## RESPONSIVENESS, THEORY AND EVALUATION

Our thematic content analysis shows that the interventions dealing with gender and intimate partner violence, school and youth violence, and child abuse and neglect (refer to Table 1) constitute multiple strategies. The strategies target various interacting risks and contributing factors, inclusive of psycho-emotional, attitudinal-cognitive, behavioural and environmental risks, as well as the contextual dynamics underlying violence. The interventions are sensitive to the vulnerabilities faced by specific groups, such as women and men, the LGBTQIA community, foreign nationals, the elderly and youth, and at-risk environments, such as informal settlements, underserved rural communities, schools and tertiary educational facilities, homes and places of entertainment. Across the focus on multiple risks and social dynamics, the interventions are varied and located at different ecological levels. Those interventions that target vulnerable and at-risk individuals focus on the provision of psychosocial and emotional support in the form of individual and group counselling and educational training dealing with attitudes and beliefs. Interventions targeting populations include public campaigns meant to raise awareness about the magnitude of violence and the associated underlying social dynamics. These campaigns seem to stress the role of patriarchy, masculinised and problematic gendered norms, and the interactive effects of poverty and inequality on violence. Interventions directed at larger social structures within which violence is nested raise the importance of supportive social and health policies and environments that can enable the prevention and the containment of violence. These interventions are directed at mobilising appropriate services across multiple systems for victims and survivors of violence. Through the mobilisation of public pressure, these campaigns represent a demand for affordable, accessible and gender-sensitive services within the criminal justice, health, educational and social welfare systems. Below, drawing on our thematic analysis, we elaborate on how the analysed interventions seem to address multiple risks to gender, child and youth violence and how, in a minority of cases, they are framed by theoretical and evaluative logic.

## GENDER VIOLENCE INTERVENTIONS

The gender violence track included 91 presentations. The abstracts in question focused on intervention development and implementation; males' problematic meaning-making of violence; psychosocial

factors that explain why some women remain in abusive relationships; and risks for gender-based violence. Our analysis suggests that the presentations in the gender violence track addressed the social dynamics surrounding gender violence.

Abstracts explaining these social dynamics stressed the contributory influences of patriarchy, corrosive masculinities, gendered cultural norms, heteronormative beliefs, and poverty and inequality on intimate partner and gender violence. A few abstracts highlighted the nexus of HIV disclosure violence and sexual orientation violence. Those adopting an explicit critical feminist lens rightfully problematised men's meaning-making of gender violence, namely, the justification and naturalisation of hegemonic masculinities and the routine use of violence by men in heterosexual relationships. At least three abstracts spoke to the harmful impact of patriarchal interpretations of theological texts justifying gender violence.

The interventions that were aimed at reducing and preventing gender violence ranged in makeup, targeted group, location and theoretical and evaluative logic. Interventions that engaged women directly combined public or community-wide campaigns to raise awareness about the dynamics and consequences of gender violence and a range of psychosocial strategies aimed at mobilising key social actor support, deepening prevention capacities and promoting solidarity. For instance, the Viva Foundation, which implemented the South African People's Response Initiative (SAPRI) in an informal settlement in Mamelodi East, Gauteng, combined a community-level information campaign and the distribution of 200 panic buttons that users could activate to sound an alarm and send notifications to trained respondents to request urgent help (Kriel, 2016). The respondents were trained in a six-module course to manage the reactions of neighbours, families and other bystanders, to persuade perpetrators to desist from violent and/or aggressive behaviour and to convey to all persons present at an incident that the police are on their way (Kriel, 2016). In part, this intervention was also aimed at reducing incidents of mob justice. Similarly, the Soul City Institute initiated the Rise Young Women's Club to promote solidarity and intragroup support among young women vulnerable to violence (Goldstein, 2016). The clubs, conceptualised as a vehicle for developing social cohesion, self-efficacy and resilience among participating women, addressed the influences of gendered norms and patriarchy on the perpetuation of violence and the HIV–violence connection. Other similar multistrategy interventions, such as the one conducted by the Higher Education and Training HIV/AIDS Programme, capacitated peer educators to support young women on university campuses (Ahluwalia, 2016a). This intervention combined peer educator support, campus-level dialogues and peer group support to provide psychosocial assistance to female university students.

Several abstracts dealt with interventions that engaged men alongside women. These, too, varied in location and makeup. An intervention that assumed a multiple-social-actor approach within under-resourced rural areas incorporated the participation of male youths, traditional leaders and the wider community. The intervention engaged male perpetrators and their families specifically. This intervention adopted mediation and small group dialogues with men, implemented awareness campaigns to highlight legal resources available for victims and mobilised appropriate medico-legal services for survivors of violence. Sonke Gender Justice, a well-established South African nongovernmental organisation, introduced the Change Trial Intervention in an urban informal settlement located on the western boundary of Johannesburg (McBride, 2016). The intervention included the creation of community action teams capacitated to respond to and contain gender violence, and public campaigns encouraging equitable gender relations. Another project of Sonke Gender Justice, the One Man Can Initiative (OMCI), deployed in male university residences, assumed a primary educational focus and so addressed problematic gender norms, and understandings and enactments of hegemonic masculinities (De Villiers, 2016). It also highlighted the roles of bystanders in instances of gender violence. An intervention named Legends Against Gender-based Violence used industrial theatre, cultural performance and several media platforms as part of its public campaigns to raise awareness about the dynamics and occurrences of gender violence and encouraged reporting by communities (Ratsaka-Mothokoa, 2016).

A few of the abstracts directed the prevention gaze at the larger policy and macro service-provisioning level. These abstracts emphasised national and other frameworks that are critical for guiding service provision, budget allocation and prevention choices. One abstract, describing a civil-society-led national strategic plan for gender violence, made a case for a comprehensive definition of gender-based violence policy and legal reforms, the expansion of existing psychosocial services, and prevention research (Rehse, 2016). The advocates of this plan view the national strategic plan as a mechanism by which to encourage government accountability and to assure resources for the prevention of gender violence. Other abstracts that reiterated government responsibility included a review of Sexual Offences Courts in South Africa (Bodenstein, 2016), the Department of Social Development's strategic and annual performance plans (Keller, 2016) and the function of the criminal justice system in relation to violence (Watson, 2016). All these presentations underlined institutional lapses, capacity challenges and budget limitations.

## YOUTH AND CHILD VIOLENCE PREVENTION INTERVENTIONS

As in the case of the abstracts dealing with gender violence interventions, the conference abstracts that focused on youth-based and child violence prevention interventions also differed in location, composition and risk sensitivity. Many assumed a psycho-educational and social support orientation. For example, the Sinyovuyo Teen project that was implemented in urban and rural Eastern Cape, in recognising youth as particularly vulnerable to both violent victimisation and perpetration of violence, combined parenting programmes for caregivers (of adolescents) and social support to foster positive parent-child relationships, to reduce conflict and to prevent violence (Meinck, 2016). The HEAIDS Big 7 project, targeting violence on university campuses, provided curricula material regarding the dynamics and risks underlying intimate and sexual violence and information on support services, counselling and peer education (Ahluwalia, 2016a; Ahluwalia, 2016b; Kapp, 2016). Another project, the Psychosocial Wellness Initiative, worked with out-of-school youth to help them understand the psychological drivers of their violent behaviour and undergo personal psychological healing (Sesanga, 2016). In the Wellness Initiative, the youth were encouraged to focus on their interiority and their formative experiences with violence, the assumption being that inner healing, self-awareness and knowledge create a pathway for self-management and positive relational engagement. These psycho-educationally oriented interventions were based on the assumption that violence reduction may be supported by education, skills enhancement, and emotional and social support. Similarly, a SAMRC-Unisa Violence, Injury and Peace Research Unit (VIPRU) project was based on the supposition that the mobilisation of spiritual capacities (compassion, care, respect), religious assets (places of worship, congregational prayer) and nonhegemonic masculinities are facilitative of nonviolent youth behaviours (Taliep, 2016).

Interventions for the prevention and containment of child sexual violence and abuse also adopted a psycho-educational focus. Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN), a child-rights advocacy group, implemented the Children are Precious Project in Lavender Hill, Cape Town (Lentoor, 2016; Nomdo, 2016a; Nomdo, 2016b). The project, which focused on capacity building, mentoring for community-based organisations, parenting skills, dissemination of social messages by children and youth, and therapeutic services, was aimed at improving the quality of services for survivors of child abuse. The Safe Body Land project provided curricula, including virtual games and information on the drivers, dynamics and management of child sexual abuse in schools, for teachers (Stierlin, 2016). The project was based on the premise that the provision of information was critical for strengthening teachers' responses to child sexual abuse in school settings.

A minority of presentations described children and youth as meaning-makers and activists. This youth-centred work used modalities such as digital stories, photovoice and drama that are reflective of participatory engagement approaches to encourage children and youth to articulate and represent their experiences of violence and safety. For instance, a project conducted in Delft, Cape Town, was centred on the idea of inclusive and safe cities and combined digital storytelling, collective analysis and participatory film-making to encourage community–policy dialogues and to lobby for relevant policy support (Wheeler & Liedeman, 2016).

One presentation argued for a National School Safety Framework for establishing minimum standards, monitoring levels of safety and evaluating the impact of safety interventions in schools (Makota & Somwe, 2016). This work resonated with the focus on policy and gender violence, and the need for national and other frameworks that may guide service provision, budget allocation and violence prevention choices.

## **CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND RETURN TO THE THREE QUESTIONS**

Regarding the three questions that constituted the focus of our analysis, we observed that, at a content level, the presentation abstracts, in part a mirror of the national body of work, reflected the multiple forms of violence evident in the country. The abstracts included in the analysis described work focused on gender and youth violence, child abuse and neglect, collective violence, including gang and protest-related violence, and elder abuse and eldercide. The conference attracted limited contributions focused on xenophobic and violence directed at the LGBTQIA community.

With respect to the constituent elements of violence prevention, the interventions tended to be multidimensional, combining psycho-educational, social support and public campaigning strategies. The abstracts described work marked by an ecological mindfulness and a responsive focus on issues such as gendered cultural norms and practices, and hegemonic masculinities. However, the conference did not seem to attract intervention work that directly addressed the intersections between poverty, unemployment, social inequality and violence. Despite campaigns that raised public awareness about the social drivers of violence, interventions that addressed the social determinants and material base of violence did not feature at the conference. Given the public and social science orientation of violence

prevention, we assume that there is insufficient multidisciplinary engagement with bodies of work located in the economic and management sciences that focuses on poverty alleviation, structural reform and social justice – all the key social drivers of violence prevention and peace promotion.

Even though theory and the assumption of evaluation are considered important for optimising the adoption and effectiveness of interventions (Michie et al., 2008), only a minority of presentation abstracts referenced human rights, critical feminist theory and methodologies of evaluation. Most of the presentations did not engage with theory explicitly to explain intervention design and the envisaged change that may follow. Those that referred to theory did so to stress the risks and psychosocial dynamics of violence, including the influences of corrosive masculinities, heteronormative practices and gendered norms. The conference did not, for instance, attract a substantial body of critical work that examined the persistence of the coloniality of power, being and knowledge and epistemic violence as elaborated on by Maldonado-Torres (2007; 2016), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) and others, which was indicative of inadequate theoretical engagement. Resisting the inordinate focus on formulaic methods for prevention work, a small minority of abstracts, exemplifying a decolonial attitude, seemed to challenge assumptions and notions of what constitutes legitimate research or knowledge on violence prevention, and who the legitimate knowledge producers or experts are. They spoke very directly to the coloniality of knowledge and practice traditions in this area of work, and equally to the idea of epistemic dominance. They also embodied participatory forms of researching violence to enhance our understandings of its prevention. As such, this kind of work needs to be relocated from the fringes to the centre of violence prevention work, where the voices, knowledge and agentic capacities of subalterns are affirmed, included and respected, even as we recognise the power divides that exist in the intersubjective contexts in which we undertake research.

The abstracts, limited by a word count, may not offer a full account of the actual conference presentations and deliberations on violence prevention. Likewise, the proceedings from one conference cannot be representative of all the work done in the violence prevention research and practice sector nationally. Since the conference, and in view of the intensifying public attention to gendered violence, in particular, there may have been shifts in the prioritisation and patterns of interventions. Notwithstanding these limitations, our circumscribed analysis of a part of the conference proceedings, namely, abstracts, suggest that the incorporation of methods of evaluation, including randomised control trials and qualitative designs in a minority of the presented work, is perhaps one marker of the slow yet growing influence of the logic of implementation science in the national violence prevention sector. Both communities of practice and communities of research seem to be contributing, often with



limited resources, towards growing South Africa's science base and offering illustrations of what works. Over the last four years, there has been an intensified focus on gender violence, in particular, as is evident in the South African articulations of the MeToo Movement and the range of interventions that President Cyril Ramaphosa committed the government to in 2019. President Ramaphosa's respective 2019 and 2020 State of the Nation Addresses foregrounded violence prevention as a national priority. The COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdown measures also revealed the violence–alcohol nexus on a national scale. In looking ahead, we propose that both communities of practice and communities of research build on the national prioritisation of violence prevention. We suggest that these communities collaborate to conduct theoretical work that explains the processes and pathways of intervention success and adoption and to strengthen the outcome- and impact-evaluation-oriented violence prevention that addresses the social determinants of violence and the complex interface between structure and psyche.

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