

# Factors that influenced perpetrators to commit murder in Gauteng province

Nozizwe Tshabalala

*Gauteng Department of Community Safety*  
Street Address: 25 Pixley Seme Street, Johannesburg, 2000  
Corresponding Author: Nozizwe Tshabalala

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Gauteng province records the highest number of murders due to the large population. The crime statistics of 2018/19 show that Gauteng has trended upwards with 4495 (6.2%) cases of murder reported as compared to 4223 cases reported in 2017/18. This article aims to present the motives and rationale of murder perpetrators in Gauteng province. These motives were determined by interviewing inmates who were serving prison sentences for committing murder. The study was conducted by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDSCS). The department saw a need to conduct a study to interview the perpetrators of murder to obtain their opinions in terms of what influenced them to commit murder. A qualitative research **method** was used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with a sample size of 43 respondents at seven correctional facilities. In addition, one respondent from a non-governmental organisation focusing on Men's Social Wellness Programs was also interviewed. The respondents cited robbery, car hijacking, cheating, gender-based violence, unplanned pregnancy, lack of support and fighting for custody, burglary, mob justice, anger, violence and self-defence as the factors that compelled them to commit murder.*

**KEYWORDS:** Criminal Justice System; Murder, Gender-based violence

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

There are various sources of information that depict the extent of murder nationally and in the Gauteng province. The crime statistics presented by the Minister of Police shows that the number of murders in South Africa increased from 20,336 in 2017/18 to 21,022 in 2018/19. On average 58 people were murdered every day (The Citizen, 2019). The national murder rate increased from 35.8 per 100,000 people to 36.4 (The Citizen, 2019). A total of 2,771 women were murdered in South Africa which is a decrease from 2,930 in 2017/18 and 1,014 children were murdered within the same period (The Citizen, 2019). One woman is murdered every three hours in South Africa (The Citizen, 2019). In 2019, the Citizen quoted the Head of Police Crime Research and Statistics who indicated that most of the murders (70%) were committed on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Mondays (The Citizen, 2019). These murders took place between 6pm and 9am (Lancaster, 2017). They happened in the following places: a third (33%) were in urban formal residential areas, 23% occurred in rural formal areas and 22% in informal urban residential areas. One third (36%) took place on streets and roads, and 20% were committed at the victim's residence (Lancaster, 2017).

The data by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) revealed that South Africa had the fifth-highest murder rate in the world in 2015 (BusinessTech, 2018). The data provided by UNODC as well as the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) Armed Conflict Survey shows that South Africa's murder rate is like armed conflict zones in countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Iraq (BusinessTech, 2018). There are thirty (30) police stations out of 1,144 police stations which are the biggest murder hotspots in the country (BusinessTech, 2018). There are eight police stations in Gauteng province (Dobsonville, Ivory Park, Hillbrow, Jeppe, Johannesburg Central, Kagiso, Moroka and Orange Farms) out of thirty stations that recorded high figures of murder.

The above statistics motivated the researcher to investigate the factors that led perpetrators to commit murder in Gauteng.

### **1.1 Aims of the Article**

This article aims at addressing factors that contributed to the high numbers of murders committed in South Africa and Gauteng province.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The study sought to answer the following objective:

- To determine the factors that compelled/influenced the perpetrators to commit these murders

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review was extrapolated from various sources that were drawn from the internet such as journals and newspaper articles.

### **2.1 Motives of murder**

#### **2.1.1 Mob Justice, Retaliation and Arguments as motives of murder**

Mob justice is a traditional way of communities to deal with criminals or the high level of crime in the country (Deutsche Welle (DW, n.d). The SAPS revealed that some people are unwilling to report crime and resort to taking the law into their own hands resulting in what is variously described as mob justice, community retaliation or vigilantism (SAPS 2018: 21). This also has an impact on the murder rate in South Africa, indicating that at least some citizens have learned to live and deal with crime in unconventional ways as part of their daily lives (SAPS 2018:21). Some murders are a result of negative social behaviour generated by circumstances that lead to a violent reaction by the perpetrators (SAPS 2018:21). Many people have lost the skill to solve differences in an amicable way or have never developed such skills because of the violent climate in which they were raised (SAPS 2018:21). Misunderstandings and arguments resulting from social interaction remain a major direct contributor to the murder rate (SAPS 2018:21).

#### **2.1.2 Domestic Violence**

The SAPS conducted an analysis of 4, 095 cases of murder in Gauteng in 2017/2018 which indicated that these cases were related to domestic violence (SAPS 2018:21). South Africans have recently been confronted by various stories about women falling victim to murder in relationships (SAPS 2018:21). Access to firearms, an inferiority complex, infidelity and other factors including an inability to deal with conflict in relationships can be the reasons why intimate partners kill one another (SAPS 2018:21).

#### **2.1.3 Murders related to other conflicts (Taxi Related and Illicit Mining)**

The analysis conducted by SAPS depicts that conflict between separate groups involved in specific activities has been identified as generators of murder (SAPS 2018:22). One of these generators is taxi violence which contributed to 110 (2,6%) murders that occurred in Gauteng province (SAPS 2018:22). Murders of individuals involved in illegal mining were prominent in Gauteng province (SAPS 2018:23). Available data shows that a total of 23 illegal miners were killed on the East Rand and West Rand during 2017/2018 which represents 0,5% of all murders in the province (SAPS 2018:23).

#### **2.1.4 Impact of Substance Abuse on the incidence of Murder**

The analysis conducted by SAPS depicts that substance abuse is one of the generators that can aggravate a specific situation (SAPS 2018:23). It is a reality that the use of alcohol and drugs harms rational thinking and behaving in such a way as to solve an argument or misunderstanding in a peaceful way (SAPS 2018:23). The use of alcohol and drugs also makes people more vulnerable to crime (SAPS 2018:23).

#### **2.1.5 Quest for dominance by men**

Mathews, Jewkes, and Abrahams (2015) cited by Lindegaard (2017: 501) conducted a study on the motivations for killing women based on offender perspectives which revealed that homicides were motivated by a quest for dominance and extreme control over women by men. No similar study was conducted about men who killed men (Lindegaard 2017:501). Studies conducted on violent crime suggested that involvement in violence as well as joining a gang provides status to be regarded as a real man and generation of income (Lindegaard 2017: 501). Violent crimes were also described as a means for social mobility, belonging, and respect (Lindegaard 2017:501). In addition, the participants in the study conducted by Lindegaard (2017: 509) described committing a homicide as a means for dominance and control over their male victim after being challenged in public. They explained their killings as related to a lifestyle that included proving themselves as independent, capable of providing for themselves (and their families), and of being action-oriented (Lindegaard 2017: 509).

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

The qualitative approach was used to collect information and to achieve the purpose of the research. The researcher used in-depth interviews to source information from the respondents. Purposive sampling was

used to select forty-three (43) inmates/participants interviewed. In addition, one ex-offender from the non-governmental organisation focusing on Men's Social Wellness Programs designed to enable and empower men in the fight against gender violence, domestic violence and femicide was interviewed. The study was conducted in the seven correctional facilities in the province<sup>1</sup>.

### **Data collection**

The interviews entailed asking each of the participants the reasons they committed murder. An interview guide with open ended questions was used to collect data. Some notes were taken by the first author during and immediately after each interview. Each interview lasted an average of 60 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

The following steps were followed when analysing the data: categorisation of data and a thematic analysis was undertaken for the analysis of data. Thereafter coding which is the process of grouping evidence and labelling ideas was done so that data can show a broader viewpoint.

## **IV. FINDINGS**

The theme was identified according to the objective of the study which is to determine the factors that compelled/influenced the perpetrators to commit these murders.

### **4.1 Biographic information of respondents**

Most respondents interviewed were males (25) and nineteen (19) females participated in the study. From the 44 respondents interviewed, 38 were Black people, followed by coloureds (2) and whites (3). The majority of respondents interviewed were between the ages of 30 years to 40 years, followed by respondents between the ages of 40 to 50 years. There were a few respondents who were between the ages of 20 to 30 years at the time of the interviews. The least number of respondents were between the ages of 50 years and 60 years. Most respondents (37) mentioned that they are single whereas four (4) stated that they are married and three (3) respondents cited that they were widowed.

### **4.2 Educational background of respondents**

In terms of education, most of the respondents stated that they only attained education at high school level. They have achieved grades eight, nine, ten, eleven and twelve. There were some respondents who indicated that they were scholars attending high school at the time of their arrest. Others mentioned that they were still doing Grade 11 and Grade 12. It was revealed that some respondents did not attend school. There are respondents who mentioned that they have Degrees and National Diplomas.

Most of the respondents stated that they were employed before they were arrested. The respondents indicated that they were employed as domestic workers, teachers, call centre agents, construction workers, admin clerks and medical technologists, among others. This is an indication that anyone can commit murder regardless of the status the person holds in society. Some of the respondents cited that they were self-employed having small businesses such as selling food at the taxi rank. Although there were respondents who were working before the arrest, some stated that they have never worked before they got arrested as they used to commit crimes such as theft and burglary to obtain money.

## **5.1 The factors that compelled respondents to commit murder**

### **5.1.1 House/home Robberies**

Some murders were committed during house/home robberies where guns and knives were used and this resulted in murder. The respondents cited that they committed murder at the scenes where they went to commit robbery either to steal cars, money and other items such as jewellery and appliances. The respondents stated that their targets were businesses and residential premises for the rich as they knew they had the valuables they wanted to take by force. The respondents averred that they were informed by their friends who had previously worked at those properties where valuables and money was kept inside those buildings. The respondents indicated that they did not know the people they killed, however, the co-accused were known by the victims. The respondents added that they forced victims to open safes, after which they were strangled by hand and stabbed with knives to death. Victims were killed since perpetrators did not want them to report the crime to the police. Some respondents revealed that they decided to use hammers to finish off the victims to ensure that they were dead before fleeing the scene of crime. The respondents added that they used firearms to threaten the victims in instances where they refused to give them car keys and open safes. The respondents alluded that using

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<sup>1</sup>The correctional facilities names and the name of the non-governmental organisation were not mentioned due to confidentiality

a firearm resulted in murder which was accidental as the intention was not to kill. However, there were Closed Circuit Television Cameras (CCTV) at the places where they committed robbery, hence the police traced and arrested them.

### **5.1.2 Car Hijacking**

Three respondents highlighted that the motive was not to commit murder, however, the intention was to hijack vehicles. The respondents stated that they usually targeted the cars which carried illegal cigarettes. The crime was often planned two days in advance by a group of four to five people. The mastermind gave the group members orders to plan and observe the place where they planned to hijack the vehicle. In instances where the gang members hijacked a car of someone known to them, the owner or the driver of that vehicle would be killed to destroy evidence. The modus operandi used by criminals in such incidents was to move the victim to a location where they could not be seen when committing the crime.

### **5.1.3 Cheating**

There are five respondents who stated that they killed their partners because they were cheating on them. The respondents mentioned that they acted out of anger and shock because they never anticipated that their partners would cheat. The respondents explained that they found the women they were engaged to be married to and their wives in bed with other men. They also felt betrayed because they had invested a lot of money and time to ensure stability in their relationships. Some respondents indicated that they shot their partners with firearms, however, the intention was not to kill their partners. It was also discovered that some respondents stabbed and killed the men with knives whom their partners were cheating with. Some respondents revealed that when they stabbed their fiancées and the men they were cheating with, they died on the spot.

Furthermore, respondents added that they killed and raped their step children because their mothers cheated on them with different partners. In addition, another respondent stated that she beat up the person who had a relationship with her boyfriend with an axe and killed her.

There are two respondents who indicated that in some instances, petrol was used to burn the victims who then died. The petrol was bought after the respondents found their partners in bed with other people. The respondents mentioned that they locked their partners inside the house and went to the garage to buy petrol. Afterwards they set the house alight and their partners passed away after a few weeks in hospital.

#### **5.1.4 Gender based violence**

There are two respondents who indicated that they committed murder when they were fighting with the spouses of their siblings. They were called by their sisters and nieces to help them because their husbands were physically assaulting them. The respondents stated that they were assaulted by the spouses/partners of their family members upon their arrival at the homes where domestic violence occurred. Some of the partners of their relatives went to an extent of stabbing the respondents with knives. When these incidents occurred, the respondents stated that they wanted to defend themselves from further assault. Thus, they took the weapons (knives) from their assailants and stabbed them.

There are five female respondents who indicated that they were abused by their husbands, as a result, the respondents hired and paid hitmen to kill their husbands since family members and police were not supportive towards them and the abuse and violence they were experiencing. According to the respondents they did not get support from their family members as they were told that their husbands had paid lobola (dowry) and there was no way that the families would allow the respondents to return to their parents' homes. The respondents added that their parents did not allow them to leave abusive marriages because they always received money from the respondents' husbands. The kind of abuse perpetrated by their husbands was emotional, physical, and sexual to an extent that some husbands brought other women into the marital home whilst their wives were there. Some respondents stated that they were approached by men living in their neighbourhoods offering to assist them to get rid of their abusive partners. Other respondents stated that their husbands were killed by their nephews and friends. In addition, respondents highlighted that their friends are the ones who referred them to the hitmen who killed their husbands. These friends said the very hitmen had killed their husbands because they were also abusive therefore, they wanted to get rid of them.

#### **5.1.5 Unplanned pregnancy, lack of support and fighting for custody**

There are two female respondents who shared the same scenarios as the reasons they are in prison for murder. The respondents indicated that they had planned to abort their children on their own in their third trimester. However, the children were born alive but killed by the respondents and their partners (boyfriends). The reason for abortion was that they already had other children. Moreover, they were embarrassed as they were not married and had children with different fathers. Two respondents mentioned that they killed their own children because of the lack of support to take care of them and a custody battle with the father of the child.

#### **5.1.6 Burglary**

There are a few respondents who indicated they committed murder in the vicinity where they perpetrated burglary. The respondents stated that they went to the houses to commit burglary but met people (men) from the area who wanted to forcefully take the goods they stole. These persons were shot with firearms by the respondents and their co-accused. The respondents added that they committed burglary at their neighbours' homes since they were women living alone. The motive was to obtain money because they were unemployed. However, victims were strangled because they did not want the victims to identify them when reporting the matter to the police.

#### **5.1.7 Anger, violence and self defence**

Anger was also mentioned as the factor that contributed to murder. There were a few respondents (two) interviewed who stated that they had stabbed and killed their girlfriends with knives. They also indicated that it was not the first time they committed murder since ex-girlfriends were killed by them and they had previously served five-year sentences in prison. Their girlfriends had wanted to end the relationship but a further reason given was due to the abuse they had suffered. The respondents mentioned that they were angry and therefore stabbed their victims however, they handed themselves over to the police after committing the crime.

Not being treated equally by parents in families was raised as a challenge by the respondents in this study. One example given by a respondent was that her sibling was the favourite of her mother. Consequently, the respondent said she hired people to kill her sibling and her mother because she was angry about the favouritism displayed in her family. According to the respondent, the favouritism was evident in the expensive clothes and better schools her sibling was privy to. However, her mother did not have money to pay for her tertiary education.

There are three respondents who mentioned that violence occurred when they went to the taverns to drink with a group of friends over the weekend. This violence occurred because there were arguments between them and some people at the places where they were drinking alcohol. They got involved in physical fights where they beat and stabbed a person with a bottle of whisky or beer. The following day the police were looking for them and were informed that the people they were fighting with the previous day had passed away. In some instances, hands were used in the violence which led to the death of the individuals who were strangers to the perpetrators.

There are three female respondents who stated that they killed their boyfriends because they were physically and verbally abused when they were drunk over the weekend. The boyfriends also closed and locked the doors of their residences so that they could not escape. According to the respondents, they stabbed their boyfriends with knives because they were defending themselves against physical abuse and wanted it to stop. The boyfriends died on the spot after being stabbed in the neck. The male respondents added that they killed their girlfriends who wanted to stab them with the knives, but the intention was not to kill them.

#### **5.1.9 Mob Justice**

There were few respondents who stated that they acted out of anger by committing murder with a group of friends whilst they were drunk over the weekends. The respondents revealed that they had beaten men who were caught raping young girls in open spaces in the township. The respondents mentioned that they beat those people with their neighbours, because they were not arrested by the police. The men were beaten up because it was alleged that they committed burglary. The respondents further added that they used hands, sjamboks, stones and bricks to beat up the rape and burglary suspects. Some respondents stated that they had beaten the burglary suspects because they wanted the suspects to take them to the places where they sold the goods they had stolen.

The suspects were beaten until they became unconscious. This was done while they were waiting for the police to arrive at the scene to arrest the suspects. When police arrived at the scene they found the suspect in that state and called an ambulance to take the people who were injured to hospital. The suspects died a few days after being admitted to hospital. The people who were involved in the mob were charged and sentenced for murder. The respondents alluded that the murder they committed happened accidentally.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Strategies to assist women trapped in abusive relationships**

The study has revealed that women are paying hitmen to kill their husbands because they felt that would be the only way to deal with their abusive partners. In this regard, government together with the community should develop ways to assist women who are in abusive relationships. The strategies can entail introducing small projects in residential areas for women so that they are not entirely dependent on their husbands for survival. The GBV Command Centre toll free number should be advertised in all public platforms especially social media as this will assist victims of gender-based violence. The revival of green doors for victims of gender based should be accelerated.

### **6.2 Introduction of new laws to regulate the sale of alcohol in liquor outlets**

This study revealed that some murders occurred due to drinking of alcohol. There should be determined efforts by government and municipalities to limit the sale of alcohol at liquor outlets during the week and weekends. This should entail allowing patrons to purchase a limited number of alcoholic beverages. It may assist people not getting intoxicated to an extent of losing self-control, misbehaving and engaging in fights with other customers.

### **6.3 Publicising of adoption centres in the communities**

The adoption centres should be publicised so that the public know about their existence. It would assist women who have challenges raising their children to give them up for adoption instead of killing them. This initiative can be linked to certain houses, non-governmental organisations and faith-based organisations closer to residential areas where women can go and hand over children. The children can then be collected from those places and be transferred to the main adoption centres.

### **6.4 Adoption or utilisation of strategies used in Brazil**

The South African Police Service, Department of Community Safety and Municipalities in Gauteng province can consider adopting some of the initiatives to deal with murder that are used by other countries such as Brazil. The first initiative is Arms Control Policy which deals with the control and reduction of firearms. The second initiative is regulation of the sale of alcohol in bars after 11pm, monitoring of alcohol outlets as well as installation of public lighting and cameras. It was indicated that the regulation of the sale of alcohol contributed to a 44% decrease in homicide in Diadema state. The third initiative is strong leadership which entails involvement of governors, mayors, academic specialists and civil society groups. The involvement of these roles players is key as they are driving the processes of reducing murders. The fourth initiative is Pact for Life: Building a Public Security Policy which is aimed at reducing crime and controlling violence. It was stated that Pact for life contributed to decreases of 39 percent in Pernambuco and 60 percent in Recife respectively in the state capital of Brazil. The fifth initiative is the plan for combatting homicides which was developed by the Department of Civil Police to investigate homicide cases whose perpetrators are unknown. It was revealed that

the plan is successful in achieving a 700 percent increase in the number of murderers put behind bars. It was indicated that the strategies contributed to a huge reduction in homicides/murders committed. This is encouraging and provides food for thought.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The study revealed various motives expressed by the interviewed perpetrators who committed murder. These motivations range from engaging in criminal activities, social issues such as domestic violence whilst some murders were fueled by factors such as anger and public violence. Most of the respondents stated that they were employed before they were arrested. This is an indication that anyone can commit murder regardless of their employment status. The findings of this study substantiate the literature review on mob justice as the reason that influences individuals to commit murder. Most of the perpetrators in this study are males (25), with that said, the assumption is males are more involved in committing crime than women. The findings of the study are indicative that dealing with murder requires a multifaceted approach wherein the community should be involved as well. However, murder is still being committed despite the efforts of law enforcement agencies in fighting crime.

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