

## **Factors that Inhibit the Effectiveness of the Youth Crime Prevention Desks**

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**ABSTRACT:** Youth Crime Prevention Desks (YCPD) were originally established by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety in 2002 with a view to improve co-operation between the police and youth in the fight against crime. The aim of this article is to present the findings of the factors that inhibit the effectiveness of YCPDs in Gauteng province. The YCPD is a structure that comprises of youth volunteers established through the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Community Policing Forums (CPFs), in partnership with the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDCS). The qualitative **method** approach was used for the research. The data was collected through focus group and semi-structured interviews. The sample size for the qualitative research was 15 respondents which consisted of the South African Police Service Social Crime Prevention Coordinators and YCPD executives. The study shows that the majority of the respondents felt that the YCPDs are effective. Additionally, the respondents mentioned inadequate financial support and poor structuring of the YCPD program implementation, which affected effective implementation. Furthermore, the study also sought to identify factors that impede the effectiveness of the YCPD structures. The two top factors that impede the effectiveness of YCPD structures were; lack of resources as identified by the respondents followed by a lack of knowledge on the role of the YCPDs among communities. Finally, the suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the YCPD included offering YCPD members' platforms to connect with employment opportunities to discourage young people in communities to desist from criminal activities and improve YCPD participation. In addition, since YCPD members are unemployed volunteers, providing them with a stipend to cover basic costs such as food, transportation to and from the police stations or to meetings may be motivating factors.

**Keywords:** Youth Crime Prevention Desk, Crime prevention, Social Crime Prevention Coordinators, Volunteers

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Crime and violence remain one of the most serious social problems facing South Africa. Crimes such as rape, domestic violence and assault against children and women remain high (Gould, 2014). In May 1996, the cabinet of South Africa approved the National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) of 1996 (Palmary, 2001). The NCPS articulated a new direction in the way crime is to be understood and managed. The South African government has adopted the four-pillar approach as a model which sets out the different areas in which crime prevention strategies should be developed (Palmary, 2001). Pillar number three of the NCPS of 1996 explains the importance of crime prevention through public values and education. This pillar emphasizes the concerns and initiatives aimed at changing the way communities react to crime and violence. It further involves programs which utilize public education and information to facilitate meaningful citizen participation in crime prevention initiatives (Palmary, 2001).

Youth desks were originally established in the Gauteng province in 2002 with the aim to improve co-operation between the police and youth in the fight against crime (GIZ, 2013). The YCPDs were established by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDCS), in partnership with the South African Police Service and are located at various police stations in Gauteng province. The purpose of the establishment was for the youth to assist their community by identifying, developing and implementing relevant projects to address youth safety challenges (GIZ, 2013 & GDCS, 2010). The Youth Crime YCPD is a structure that comprises of youth volunteers established through the SAPS and the Community Policing Forums (CPFs), in partnership with the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDCS) (GIZ, 2013). The said structure comprises of community-based youth organizations and it is established under the auspices of Community Policing Forums. There are approximately 95 functional YCPDs across the three metropolitan and district municipalities of Gauteng province (GIZ, 2013).

These youth desks receive resources and training from the GDCS to enable them to design and implement social crime prevention programs to reduce youth criminality. Furthermore, young people are

engaged through seminars and <sup>1</sup>Izimbizos in an attempt to find solutions to overcome youth criminality. To assess the effectiveness of these YCPDs, the Gauteng Department of Community Safety commissioned a study to evaluate its effectiveness in March 2018. The factors that inhibit the effectiveness of the YCPD program such as lack of support, transport, non- attendance of meetings, lack of funding and lack of induction will be discussed in the article.

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

The aim of this article is to present the findings of the factors that inhibit the effectiveness of YCPDs in Gauteng province. This aim was achieved by determining the factors that inhibit the effectiveness of YCPDs.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Are the YCPDs effective?
- Which factors impede the effectiveness of the said structures?

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review contains information which was extrapolated from various sources which were taken from the internet. The summary of the literature review is aligned to the research objectives as discussed above.

### **2.1 Youth Crime Desks best practices elsewhere**

#### **2.1.1 The Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project**

The Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Project works with two distinct groups of youth in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The first group is street entrenched, sexually exploited or homeless youth at risk of the gang and criminal involvement. The second group is South Asian youth who are at risk of joining or who are already members of gangs, have gang-like behavior and/or criminal activity. The project promotes youth crime prevention through an integrated approach, mentoring and outreach services for them and their families (Public Safety Canada, Undated). The project is supported by Public Safety Canada, the National Crime Prevention Centre's Crime Prevention Action Fund and is delivered by Abbotsford Community Services through South Asian Community Resource Office (SACRO) and Wrapping Abbotsford Youth with Support (WAYS) program within the Youth Resources Centre (YRC) (Public Safety Canada, n.d.). The SACRO provides services for youth in the South Asian community. The YRC provides services for youth involved in or at risk of sexual exploitation, drug abuse, gang involvement, or homelessness (Public Safety Canada, n.d.). The project was initiated in April 2009 and was to be piloted and evaluated through June 30, 2012 (Public Safety Canada, n.d.).

#### **2.1.2 Youth Desk in the Presidency**

The Youth Desk in The Presidency in South Africa is responsible for monitoring and policy development. The Youth Desk also provides support and advisory services on youth development issues to political principals (Social Development Department & the World Bank 2012). In addition, it coordinates the activities of government departments through the government cluster system (Social Development Department & the World Bank 2012). The coordination of youth development activities across government spheres is also the responsibility of the Youth Desk in the Presidency (Social Development Department & the World Bank 2012).

#### **2.1.3 School-Based Prevention programs (SBP) in Washington D.C**

In Washington D.C they have the School-Based Prevention programs (SBP) which include interventions to prevent a variety of forms of problem behavior such as theft, violence, illegal acts of aggression, alcohol or other drug use, rebellious behavior, anti-social behavior, aggressive behavior, defiance of authority and disrespect for others. Some of these include building school capacity, setting norms for behavior and rule settings, managing classes and counseling and mediation amongst others (see Gottfredson, n.d.).

#### **2.1.4. Community-Based Prevention programs in Australia**

According to Greenwood (2008), community-based programs can divert first-time offenders from further encounters with the justice system. The most successful community programs emphasize family interactions and provide skills to adults who supervise and train the child (Greenwood, 2008). In these programs, the adults play a very important role to make sure that their children are taught family accepted norms and supervised to ensure that they do not participate in criminal behavior (Greenwood, 2008). This can be

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<sup>1</sup>Izimbizos are plural form of Imbizo which is a forum for discussion of policy

achieved through proper planning of families to allocate the daily task of each member in early youth crime prevention and post-youth crime prevention in their families (Greenwood, 2008).

Furthermore, Greenwood also explained the importance of home-visiting programs that target pregnant teens and their at-risk infants and preschool education for at-risk children that includes home visits or work with parents. Successful school-based programs can prevent drug use, delinquency, anti-social behavior and early school drop-out (Greenwood, 2008). This community-based program needs every member of the community to participate actively especially when it comes to the identification of youth that is at most risk (Greenwood, 2008).

### III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a qualitative approach to collect information and to achieve the purpose of the research. The researcher used focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews to source information from the respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select 11 participants i.e. independent experts or practitioners in youth safety programs, members of the SAPS social crime prevention unit and GDCS officials responsible for the YCPD forum. Additionally, a total of four focus group interviews were completed with executive committee members of youth desks in the areas of Gauteng province in South Africa: Dube, Kagiso, Tokoza and Orlando.

#### Data collection

The interviews involved asking each of the participants their views on the factors that impede the implementation of the youth desks. Probing and follow-up questions were also used to clarify issues and to acquire more information from them. Probing was also used to encourage participants to talk more about their views. Some notes were taken by the first author during and immediately after each interview. Each interview lasted an average of 45 minutes.

#### Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to the units of relevant meanings extracted from each interview. Those units considered to be obviously redundant were eliminated. This was done by consultation and consensus between the authors. At the end, themes were formed. After that validation was conducted by returning to each of the participants transcripts to determine if the essence of the interview was correctly captured.

### IV. RESULTS

The themes were according to the objectives of the study and they were 1) Establishment of the effectiveness of the YCPDs and 2) Determination of the factors that inhibit the effectiveness of YCPDs. Sub-themes were developed from the two main themes.

#### 4.1 Effectiveness of the YCPD programs

In terms of the effectiveness of the program, respondents were requested to mention activities that are being implemented by the YCPD. The following activities were mentioned: school visits, crime prevention, sports against crime, school searches, entertainment events for youth, back to school programs, dialogues and debates, visits to old age and orphanage homes as well as women's month campaigns. Respondents also indicated that these activities are conducted on a quarterly basis. The activities below were identified by the participants, the roles that they play per activity as well as the effectiveness of each activity.

**School visits** - this is where young people are addressed about issues such as drugs, teenage pregnancy, career guidance and crime. In addition to school visit programs, participants also mentioned dialogues and debates which also form part of this activity. Topics that are being debated are safety-related topics, teenage pregnancy and alcohol abuse. Participants also indicated that the school visit activities are effective because the abused children from different families are now able to speak out and get assistance through counseling. Back to school is also conducted under this activity. This is where the YCPD does lots of pre-school and primary school visits where children are addressed on several safety issues such as prevalent crimes in the area and rape. Although some participants mentioned that the program is effective, most of the respondents stated that awareness campaigns on domestic violence are not effective because most domestic violence cases occur due to alcohol abuse on weekends from Friday to Sunday.

**Crime awareness** - This is where pamphlets are distributed in crime-ridden areas in the policing precincts to sensitize people about crime.

**Crime prevention** - This is in where the youth desk members wear reflector jackets at malls to increase the visibility of policing in the areas. With regard to visibility of YCPD members, respondents mentioned that it is very effective because people used to ask what is happening at malls when police were there in high numbers.

**Sports against crime** - This is an activity where youth desk members play sport against police officers. This activity takes place annually in June during youth month. In addition, respondents stated that during this activity

there are entertainment events planned by the YCPDs where celebrities such as musicians are invited and gifts such as t-shirts are handed out as a way of marketing the YCPD program. This activity was viewed as effective as YCPDs involve different stakeholders and consequently, some drug addicts are referred to rehabilitation centers during these events.

**School searches** - The purpose of conducting school searches is to determine if learners are not in possession of illegal substances and weapons. This is conducted with the police officers and the patrollers assist. Additionally, respondents mentioned other activities that they are doing once a year such as Nelson Mandela Day which was as an additional program conducted by YCPDs. Some youth desk executive members interviewed said they do visit hospices as part of the 67 minutes' initiative.

The respondents also stated that they conduct women campaigns such as women's talk and women's dialogue which is organized for the youth. However, it was mentioned that these are only conducted annually in the month of August. There are also programs where young men are taught about the importance of not just being reactive but being proactive when it comes to women and children abuse. The program was reported as effective because abused women can report domestic violence cases during this activity.

Generally, respondents indicated that the YCPD programs are effective. The respondents also mentioned that the YCPD serves as a link between the police, principals and social workers in instances where abused children are referred for counseling. Furthermore, they understand their communities better and they also have easy access to the information through them. Lastly, YCPD members also assist children who are afraid of the police to ensure that the children have an understanding that police officers are there to protect them and not to arrest them without just cause. The respondents also highlighted that the YCPD program is very effective because the SAPS do not have enough manpower. The findings of the study corroborate with those of Saferspaces which indicated that one of the key roles of the YCPD is to develop cooperative relations between SAPS and the youth. The YCPD programs allow young people the opportunity to help in the identification of the causes of youth violence, crime and to work together with other role-players to design and implement relevant social crime prevention interventions (Saferspaces, 2017).

According to Pretoria News (2012), the youth desks comprise of young people from youth organizations, schools and the general public. It is a program which engages young people through seminars and Izimbizos in finding solutions to crime challenges within the province. The main objective of these youth desks is to increase co-operation between police and youth in the fight against crime. In addition, it also functions as a platform for the delivery of developmental training for the youth. Furthermore, it assists in identifying youth safety challenges and they develop and implement relevant projects to address these issues. These youth desks get resources and training to support them in designing and implementing social crime prevention programs addressing crime challenges in their area. Pretoria News (2012) further stated that youth desks get resources, however, it is not indicated which organization is responsible for the resourcing of youth desks. The kinds of resources being received are not clearly outlined.

#### **4.2 Perspective of youth safety programs practitioner on the effectiveness of youth crime prevention desks in Gauteng province**

The respondent interviewed stated that YCPDs are not as effective as they should be and the structure is not fully functional. The respondent also mentioned that the support structure is not strengthened and young people do not get resources. The participant further added that young people are not there to entirely build safer communities. Consequently, the membership of the structure has a high turnover and sustainability is compromised which results in constant re-establishment of the structure. The study by GIZ found similar issues wherein it was indicated at times there is a challenge for the youth desks to retain their members for years since most of them secure jobs elsewhere after receiving skills. Therefore, it is not feasible to retain youth desk members as the job is not permanent (GIZ, 2013: 24). When members get permanent jobs with benefits they leave the youth desks as they are looking for long term job security. The high turnover of YCPD members can be dealt with if the structure can also encourage members to remain active in the structure even if they are permanently employed elsewhere. They can be involved during their spare time in the planning of programs for the YCPD.

#### **4.3 Factors that inhibit the effectiveness of the structures**

##### **4.3.1 Lack of support**

Respondents interviewed cited various challenges experienced by the YCPD structures. It was indicated that YCPDs do not receive support from police management and the GDCS. Participants revealed that there are no funds and cars allocated thus they rely on food donations received from local businesses. The researcher is of the opinion that YCPD members should take initiatives to source funding for themselves. The findings of this study are similar to those conducted by GIZ. The study by GIZ revealed that the YCPDs still

experience challenges in regard to the following: support structures, recruitment, branding, recognition and identity building, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation and communications (GIZ 2013: 26). The researcher is of the opinion is not a bad idea for the YCPD members to get food donations from local businesses. Some of those businesses do not mind giving back to the community by offering something to community structures that do not receive funding from the government. In fact, this effort should be strengthened and coordinated by GDCS and SAPS.

Several studies about the youth desks effectiveness were conducted in the previous years, e.g. GIZ conducted a study of this nature in 2013. The findings of the study corroborate with that undertaken by GIZ about the progress made by YCPD structures since the assessment done by the GDCS in 2008. It was indicated that most of the activities of the youth desks are still being carried out and continued. Members were asked to provide evidence of the activities that they had accomplished in the last couple of months and the following activities were identified: the findings show that YCPD members could apply their creativity in implementing their activities despite the lack of resources. The supporting documents provided by the structures were pictures, posters, hand-painted flyers and short videos amongst others GIZ (2013:26). Considering the fact that the study was conducted 5 years ago and the findings of these studies are still corresponding, it is a clear indication that there is still a challenge in supporting the YCPD members in Gauteng province.

#### **4.3.2 Transport**

Transport is an issue for many South Africans. Similarly, YCPD members have a problem when it comes to transport and commuting to and from the police stations and events. It is a serious issue because other members of the youth desk are unable to attend meetings due to lack of transport. Some members of the YCPD in other areas reside approximately 10 kilometers away from the police station. The long-distance to the police stations also affects community members who must report any criminal activities. The YCPD members can organize meetings in their respective places where they are residing. They can also arrange with school principals and pastors to offer them a place to hold meetings. Transport can then only be arranged for them by the SAPS and GDCS coordinators when they are attending events.

#### **4.3.3 Non-attendance of meetings by YCPD members**

For YCPDs to be functional, there are regular meetings that they are supposed to attend. Non-attendance of the meetings was mentioned as one of the factors that impede the effectiveness of the YCPD. The respondents interviewed stated that some members of the youth crime prevention desks do not attend meetings but most of the time it is because they receive a stipend. Provision of food in YCPD was also indicated as another challenge. Another challenge mentioned by respondents is having to provide catering to YCPD when there are meetings and YCPD members get angry when they are not given food during meetings. This can be averted by the YCPD members eating at home before going to meetings. The YCPD executives and SAPS coordinators should ensure that the meetings do not take place for more than two hours. According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs with specific reference to the Physiological needs, these are biological needs which consist of the need for oxygen, food, water and relatively constant body temperature. They are the strongest needs because if a person were deprived of all needs, it is these physiological ones that would come first in the person's search for satisfaction (Maslow, 1954). It is therefore important to satisfy the physiological needs of the YCPD member before or after the meeting so that they can be active.

#### **4.3.4 Lack of funding**

Lack of funding was also mentioned as one of the factors that impede the implementation of the YCPD. All youth crime prevention desk members interviewed mentioned that they do not obtain funding. However, when they are planning events they approach local businesses by writing letters requesting specific support in their areas. These businesses support them by offering refreshments for the events. In certain instances, YCPDs receive tools for projects they undertake. The YCPDs should have a year plan which indicates when all events will take place and attach the plan to the letters when making a request for funding. This might assist as some businesses approached may not be in a possession to assist at the time when the request is made and can only assist when another event is taking place later in the year.

#### **4.3.5 Lack of induction**

Some YCPD executive members interviewed mentioned that they were never inducted into the youth crime prevention desk and the duties of each member. The participants interviewed indicated that they learned everything about the job on their own. In some areas, the youth desks were never launched since the executive members joined the structure. Respondents also highlighted that it is only a selected number of executive members who have an opportunity to attend training. It was also highlighted that in most instances, only two executive members are recommended to attend training and the rest of the executive members do not do

so. Those who have attended training can also bring brochures and study material to those members who did not have such an opportunity. Induction is very important in the type of work or programme as it assists the implementers to understand how the programme should be implemented. From the findings, it was clear that YCPD members are deprived of an opportunity to be inducted about the programme.

## **V. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations have been suggested to improve the effectiveness of YCPD in Gauteng province.

### **5.1 Training of YCPD members**

The GDCS should ensure that all YCPD members attend training. It became apparent when this study was conducted that it is only a selected few who have an opportunity to attend training. The Directorate: Promotion of Safety is responsible for coordinating YCPDs in the province and should allocate enough budget for training all active youth desks. In addition, the GDCS should ensure that new YCPD executive members are inducted. The YCPD members who get an opportunity to attend training can share information with those who did not get a chance to attend training. Those who have attended the training courses should bring brochures and study material back for members who did not attend to read.

### **5.2 Formal arrangement sponsorships by the Department of Community Safety**

The Department of Community Safety and SAPS should make a formal arrangement to request sponsorship for YCPD events and meetings. The sponsorship for food can be requested from local businesses when they are planning and hosting events in the communities. The taxi organizations can also be approached to assist with transportation of YCPD members to the police stations because some YCPD members interviewed stated that they struggle to get to police stations to attend meetings. The YCPD can also assist to identify potential sponsors of the program within their respective locations, then the GDCS can step in to assist and negotiate with responsible persons.

### **5.3 Stipends/ Incentives for YCPD members**

The issue of rewarding dedicated youth desk members should be considered. Perhaps the Department of Community Safety can offer vouchers, food parcels and even stipends to YCPD members. Only dedicated YCPD members should be rewarded. The GDCS should exercise its discretion on how the YCPD will be rewarded. Rewarding YCPD members might create problems in the various policing precincts, as many unemployed youths may join the structure on the basis that there are benefits at stake.

### **5.4 Funding**

YCPD members are volunteers with most of them being unemployed as the programme targets the youth - the largest unemployed population group in South Africa. However, provision of funding should not only be the responsibility of the GDCS, but the YCPD members can also source funding from local organizations such as churches and businesses.

### **5.5 Screening of YCPD members**

The GDCS should ensure that the YCPD members are vetted. This will ensure that anyone who joins the YCPD does so for the right reason. Then stipends would not be much of a problem. In addition, this will allow many LEA's to have a pool of possible recruits to choose from when they are recruiting personnel. This will have many advantages as the YCPD members already have knowledge about policing and will contribute to ensuring professional officers.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

Taking into account the results, the study has concluded that the majority of respondents have revealed that the YCPDs are effective. Although the YCPDs seem to be making strides in the right direction, low levels of funding remain a concern as this impedes the effective implementation of the program. The study has revealed several challenges which impede the effectiveness of YCPDs within the province. One of the issues is that the YCPD members do not remain in the structures for a long time. Once they get employed they refrain completely from being part of the YCPD. This challenge of high turnover can be overcome if the structure also attracts young working professionals. The young working professionals can participate in the YCPD programme during their spare time or during the weekends and they can volunteer to buy refreshments during events for fellow YCPD members who are not employed. Another challenge is that members do not receive a stipend, thus at times they are unable to attend meetings at the police stations since they do not have money for transport and food. The YCPD in Gauteng province can also adopt some of the practices of the Abbotsford Youth Crime

Prevention Project, school-based prevention programs (SBP) in Washington D.C and Community-Based Prevention programs in Australia which have been highlighted in the literature review.

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