The experiences of traditional leaders in the execution of crime prevention strategies in the rural settings of the OR Tambo District Municipality, in the Eastern Cape province

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Abstract: Crime continues to thrive and affects most members of the rural community. In response, different crime prevention strategies are undisputable, as crime thwarts the community development initiatives and leads to urbanisation of many skilled, rural dwellers. The traditional leaders, as agents of community morals and values in the post-apartheid South Africa, are surrounded by conflicting value systems, which are characterised by people with behavioural traits that would be breeding grounds for criminality. Lusikisiki, in the OR Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM), Eastern Cape province of South Africa, is declared to be a hub or the capital of rape. Women in the area, on daily basis, are traumatised because of their gender; the lack of morals amongst certain community members and measures that are put in place seem insufficient for absolute prevention. The victimisation that women and the general community suffer is painful and characterised by prolonged psychological traumatic experiences. Subsequently, women remain dissatisfied by the criminal justice system process and seek other alternatives to guarantee protection and alleviate fear. This element of lack of satisfaction is found to flourish in the community, despite many awareness campaigns about the functioning of the criminal justice processes. This article sought to examine the role of traditional leaders in the situational crime prevention approaches in the communities of ORTDM (KSD, Ingquza Hill, Nyandeni and Port St Johns local municipalities). Interviews were carried out with 58 traditional leaders (chiefs, village heads and headmen) as key informants and custodians of the customs of the members of various communities in their areas of jurisdiction. The findings reveal that traditional leaders perceive that the criminal justice system does not prioritise the victims' rights. The findings also point out that traditional leaders are involved in the development, implementation and monitoring of the tactics of crime prevention. In addition, traditional leaders argue that the identification strategies of the risk behaviour should be strengthened during early childhood. The findings also highlight that traditional leaders play an integral role in the recruitment of members for participation in crime prevention strategies in their areas of jurisdiction. However, their crime prevention initiatives are limited due to a lack of government funding. It can be concluded that crime prevention is a long-term goal. The investment in traditional leaders may lead to the improvement of the quality of life in society.

Keywords: crime, crime prevention, criminal justice system, gender-based-violence, juvenile delinquency, traditional leadership, victimisation

Introduction

In the South African literature, there are few studies which report experiences and the role of traditional leaders in crime prevention in rural areas (Zenzile, 2021). This aforementioned situation happens despite that the Republic of South Africa is having a Department of Traditional Affairs which is being constitutionally governed by a legislative framework and policies (Mabunda, 2017; Department of Traditional Affairs, 2015). This department has a duty to: (a) democratise local governance; (b) restore the dignity of the people through the delivery of basic services; (c) cultivate an environment that is conducive for doing business; and (d) promote job creation within municipalities (Department of Traditional Affairs, 2015). However, the case of the Republic of South Africa is not unique but Ceccato and Dolmen (2013) report that there are few studies in the international literature on crime prevention in rural areas.

Bunei, et. al. (2013) also attest to the fact that worldwide, there are only a few rigorous crime prevention measures that have been assessed.

This article assesses how traditional leaders in the OR Tambo District Municipality (ORTDM), Eastern Cape, South Africa, handle issues of crime that are brought to their attention by residents in their rural areas of jurisdiction. Crime, specifically in rural areas, is multi-faceted (Harkness, 2017). Ceccato and Dolmen (2013) opine that there are diverse communities in rural settings, with different characteristics and needs, but that share common qualities and challenges. When crime occurs, it victimises and has a serious impact on the entire rural community (Harkness, 2017; Harkness, 2015).

This article is premised on the idea that the responsibility of crime prevention is primarily in the hands of citizens (Schneider, 2010; Newburn, 2013). The researcher attests to the fact that in South Africa, citizens in rural areas are predominantly led by traditional leaders. According to Teffo-Menziwa, Mullick and Dlamini (2010:1), traditional authorities reach thousands of people in their communities. They reach them through *imbizos/lekgotlas* or community dialogues. They further advise government on traditional affairs and influence policy making that affects the lives of millions of people in mostly rural populations, which are under their custody.

In the ORTDM, hardly a day goes by without media reporting crime in the rural communities. Feni (2022) reports that Lusikisiki, a small rural town at Inguza-Hill local municipality, which falls under ORTDM, is declared to be the rape capital of South Africa. A magistrate's court was opened at Bityi, Mthatha, under King Sabatha Dalindyebo local municipality (KSDM), under ORTDM, in response to the high rate of crime (Department of Justice & Constitutional Development, 2019). This initiative was to increase chances of realising justice in the surrounding rural communities, in response to crime, which is engulfing communities. It can also be viewed as a goal of crime prevention, which is sought to be realised in the Eastern Cape through legislative changes, NCPSs and provincial safety strategies (Department of Safety and Liaison, 2016). Rogers (2012) opines that crime affects any community, regardless of location or the people who live in it.

Rural areas continue to suffer from limited police resources (Bunei, et al., 2013). This problem can largely be attributed to unique socio-demographic factors, which include remoteness of villages in the rural settings (Harkness, 2017). This situation also tends to make crime statistics to be skewed towards urban areas (Hogg & Carrington, 2006).

Rationale of the study

Crime is astonishing in the ORTDM, and criminals are still escaping the legal system. A call is made for traditional authorities to intervene. They are deemed as representatives of the general community in rural villages under their jurisdiction. Furthermore, traditional leaders are entrusted with an important responsibility, namely that of harmonising community customs and traditions. When executing their functions, they are guided by the ethos of the Constitution (South Africa, 2003b). These constitutional guidelines make traditional authorities not to be seen as unilateral decision makers. They are required to consult with their communities about matters that will particularly affect the community's customs and traditions (Mmusinyane, 2008). The Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (South Africa, 2003b), further governs traditional leadership at national or provincial government, as the case may be, through legislative or other measures and provides a role for traditional councils or traditional leaders in respect of safety and security. O'Neil and Cammack (2014) opine that although that may be the case in South Africa, the situation is bleak in other countries. In Africa, countries like Malawi's traditional authorities are failing and this paves a way for dysfunction due to lack of accountability. Burton (2007) notes that the aforementioned situation is further complicated by accentuated insecurity. Many people feel unable to prove or improve their social positions. However, Mudimeli (2018) has a different supposition, in Mozambique, traditional leaders are still trusted. Subsequently, they are assigned the responsibility of resolving local conflicts, land tenure issues, community disputes and so forth, as is the case in rural settings in South Africa (Zenzile & Mofokeng, 2021).

Literature review

Brief overview of the concept of crime prevention

Crime prevention, in essence, is a broad concept. It encompasses all initiatives or strategies that intend to control, reduce, prevent and address the impact of the offending behaviour (Harkness, 2017). It has characterised itself with three common approaches (Hughes, 2001), namely: a) Crime prevention through social development (CPSD) involves a number of different strategies, including community development, school-based prevention, public education campaigns and developmental prevention (Bull, 2007; Fraser, 2011); b) Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) focuses on identifying and analysing plans for responding to conditions which makes the area more

prone to criminal behaviour; and c) Situational crime prevention (SCP) focusses on reducing opportunity for an offender and potential offender (Harkness, 2017; Fraser, 2011). SCP also intends to involve increasing the risk of detection and reducing the reward for crime (Fraser, 2011).

Traditional leaders in crime prevention in rural areas

In South Africa, there are concerted efforts to address the problem of crime, as it affects every member of the society, under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders and elsewhere in the country. Traditional leaders serve as the symbol of tribal unity. According to Thornhill (2005), they are also the central figures around which the activities of whole communities and their lives revolve. It is also stated that with the past regime, traditional leaders played many roles, namely legislatures, rulers, judges and preservers of welfare (Kuye, 2006; Chiweza, 2007). They rendered such services in areas that are also characterised by poor infrastructure and a lack of access to economic opportunities and basic services. Zenzile (2021) attests that in an effort to give reasons for these unbearable conditions, while not shifting the blame away from traditional leadership, the situation can largely be attributed to the legacy of colonialism. It has been established that during the previous dispensation, there were policies that served as measures of systematically consigning a large majority of African people to conditions of perpetual underdevelopment (South Africa, 2000a). However, in solace, there are currently renewed efforts by the government to focus on improving the living conditions in rural areas (South Africa, 2000a). These goals gave birth to an integrated approach, which is characterised by bringing about sustainable development through the provision of, *inter alia* water, electricity, clinics, roads, housing, land restitution and land expropriation without compensation (which the government is currently grappling with). In the same vein, these initiatives call for greater clarity regarding the role of the institution of traditional leadership in rural areas in relation to government at all levels; particularly given the fact that, today, the democratic state, through the three spheres of government, has assumed authority and responsibility for the provision of infrastructure and basic services (South Africa, 2000a; Sihlobo & Kapuya, 2018).

Shembe (2014) postulates that traditional leaders have entered into a realm of crime prevention, as they continue to enjoy the power and authority to adjudicate over certain matters within their jurisdiction. This paradigm shift, as purported by Crawford and Evans (2017), paves the way for taking crime prevention from its police-led silo and declaring it to be a task of the whole community. Zenzile and Mofokeng (2022) refer to Margaret Thatcher's declarations that causes of crime lie outside the realm of police, thus crime prevention cannot be left to them alone for attention (Buthelezi & Mofokeng, 2015; Crawford & Evans, 2017). This is in concordance with the view of Grant (2015:3) that "police can't do it alone". Lately, this latter assertion is perceived as advocating for changes in policing, which has to be seen primarily as enacted by state and non-state actors and organisations, both internal and external, to the public police service. In other words, policing is conducted by a range of actors other than sworn police, such as environmental health officers, immigration officers and private security firms. (Bullock, 2014).

Bunei, et al. (2013) note that active citizenship in crime prevention efforts serves as a guardianship measure to prevent or restrict access to the target, wherein, an alliance between neighbours will be created for keeping an eye on one another's property. This prevailing view of crime prevention in South Africa is realised through legislative changes, which include National Crime Prevention Strategies (NCPS) and Provincial Safety Strategies (Department of Safety and Liaison, 2016). Together, these aforementioned strategies are advocating for social response to crime, which is largely deemed necessary. In order to realise such crime prevention goals, partnership is a way to go, wherein diverse actors are brought together for sharing information. There are also suggestions for including development approaches, which entail early intervention in personal pathways that might result in criminal behaviour and other social problems (Crawford & Evans, 2017). These new legislative efforts cement the changes in crime prevention and government shows commitment to a new era of policing (Omar, 2010).

Research methodology

The data analysis in this article was qualitative in nature and was carried out between July to September 2020. This study aimed to build on certain original thoughts in the earlier findings. Semi-structured interviews, focus group meetings and observations were used as the analysis methods. The research followed a paradigm of interpretive research. In contrast with statistical methods used in the positivist study, the interpretative paradigm focuses on the meanings from a participant's viewpoint (Noon, 2018).

Population of sample study

The research employed a purposive sampling method to ensure the participants identified were ideally suited to the research of traditional leaders' role in crime prevention, as well as their views regarding the role of community members. Without proper screening of individuals, data processing could be challenging and time-consuming. The

key attributes evaluated were whether participants had some skills (e.g. considerable expertise in the field of work) that rendered them eligible to research or had in-depth background or expertise of crime prevention and community policing. The research also incorporated the techniques of snowball sampling. The strategy of snowball sampling is compatible with purposive sampling, where a group of individuals propose possible research participants (Buttle, Davies & Meliala, 2016; Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017). Data collection from multiple sources requires triangulation, using different techniques. Academic books and papers, newspaper articles, government records and primary information were obtained, where two focus group discussions (FGDs) comprised of 14 traditional leaders per group, whereas, the other two FGDs comprised of 15 traditional leaders per group.

The author accepted, after interviews with 58 participants, that this study achieved concentration. In research, 10 to 25 interviews to reach saturation are commonly advised (Creswell, 2013). For the purpose of illustrating the study's objectives and what was expected of participants through interviews and focus meetings, participants were presented with a clear statement for their approval. The written consent of all participants to engage was confirmed. All interviews were written and recorded descriptively. The records, subsequently, were coded to secure participants' information. The identities of the individuals concerned were not indicated in terms of privacy and confidentiality, including the towns, villages or districts in which they are situated. In addition, the positions of the participants were not stated in the study, to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The data will be maintained for five years on computer records that are password-protected. After the interviews were finished, transcripts were created in order to ensure continuity. At the point of data processing, the data collected were thematically classified. The established categories were contrasted and the associations were analysed. Personal statements, suggestions or memoranda were made during this process. These notes helped to focus on the study results and address them.

Results

Data analysis produced four themes: (1) Incidences of crime in communities of traditional leaders; 2) The community's feelings about criminal justice system; 3) Common offenders in the community; and 4) Identification of situational crime prevention measures.

Theme 1: Incidences of crime in communities of traditional leaders

Concept	Quote	Reference
Crime incidences	*There are predominant incidences of stock theft. Livestock are solely stolen in daylight, people are just being deprived.*	Participant 3
	"There are incidences of mugging, and rape of women and children."	Participant 12
	"They are robbing foreigners' shops."	Participant 13
	"Family feuds, fighting over small issues."	Participant 14
	"In my area, there was an incident of a corpse of a person found with a head put next to it. This tragedy is allegedly committed by unknown people. In another case, a body of an unknown person was found floating in the river with stab wounds."	Participant 29
	"Some people, more especially the youngsters, are using drugs."	Participant 30
	"Crime is scattered in my community. It is predominantly alleged that youth from other communities are the perpetrators of different types of crime in my community."	Participant 57

Source: Researcher

Theme 1 shows that there are different incidences of crime in the areas of traditional leaders, for example, murder, rape, family feuds and robbery of foreigner's shops are reported.

Theme 2: The community's feelings

Concept	Quote	Reference
Description	*"It's worrisome in the sense that communities are totally losing faith and interest in the entire justice system in South Africa."*	Participant 1
	"People are aggrieved by the criminal justice system. A person goes to jail today and comes back the next day and if they are found guilty, they hardly spend much time in prison."	Participant 2
	"They are very happy when ex-convict come to the community with skills to give back."	Participant 10
	"In my area, people feel happy because police positive response when a matter is brought to their attention."	Participant 19
	"The Department of Justice sends some delegates to the Great Place for explaining the criminal justice process. However, there are some segments of people that remain unsatisfied by services rendered in general."	Participant 37
	"The Department of Justice seems to be disregarding the rights of victims of crime and offer culprits more protection."	Participant 39
	"My community members are not happy with the manner that criminals are handled by the justice system."	Participant 44
	"The general feeling is that the system is too lenient with regard to the granting of bail and sentencing offenders."	Participant 48
	"People are absolutely not satisfied with the services rendered by the criminal justice system."	Participant 58

Source: Zenzile (2021)

Theme 2 describes the feelings of community members with regard to the functions of the components of the criminal justice system, as indicated by the traditional leaders. Traditional leaders are of the view that members in their communities are dissatisfied by the services rendered by the components of the criminal justice system. One of the traditional leaders attested that victims' rights are not deemed to be a priority. As attested by traditional leaders, community members predominantly count on the criminal justice system for law enforcement in society. However, such an upheld belief by members of society puts too much faith in the criminal justice system to ensure certainty and swiftness' in society. This happens despite the fact that they do not obtain protection for their livelihoods as citizens. It can also be inferred that agencies of the criminal justice system do not achieve the goals that they were established to realise. Subsequently, it is presumed that society does not derive any pleasure from the practices of the criminal justice system. The police have extremely limited capacity for crime control (Prenzler, 2017).

Theme 3: Common offenders in the community

Concept	Quote		Reference
Crimes with common offenders	*"This is born by poor justice and policing system that at most times fails to apprehend and jail perpetrators."*		Participant 1
	"Crime is highly committed by same people, which goes back to the issue of broken homes."		Participant 2
	"There are people who are thieves and rapists."		Participant 8
	"The most common offenders are youngsters between age of 18 and 35 years, due to high rate of unemployment."		Participant 13
	"In my area of jurisdiction, there is a person who constantly circumcises young boys before they reach the age of maturity as stipulated by government."		Participant 29
	"The Department of Justice is too lenient on dealing with criminals. Culprits get arrested and become released within no time and commit the same crimes in the community."		Participant 36
	"A person in my community will commit murder and become released from prison within no time and commit another crime."		Participant 39

Source: Zenzile (2021)

Theme 3 shows that in areas that are under the jurisdiction of traditional leaders, certain crimes are committed by common offenders in the community. However, instead that offenders or perpetrators of crimes getting punished for their actions, as perceived by traditional leaders, such offenders are protected by the law.

Theme 4: Identification of situational crime prevention measures

Concept	Quote	Reference
Governance of behaviour	*"We have a duty as the Great Place to allocate a residential area, as well as arable land/site, to every male child upon reaching emancipation stage. Everything that comes, we deal with it as a collective."*	Participant 1
	"We have programmes where parents motivate children at the beginning of the year for school and life outside school."	Participant 2
	"We encourage children about the importance of school, so that they can be independent and live a better life."	Participant 3
	"Customs, norms, traditions, and church programmes are used."	Participant 11
	"Parents are encouraged to have good communications with their children. To a large extent, parents are encouraged to become friends with their children, so that they can make them to open up. Subsequently, good relationships will pave a way for teaching them about the differences between what is right and wrong."	Participant 13
	"As a leader, I call meetings every month in my area and I take an opportunity to show them how to raise teenagers."	Participant 14
	"We organise Imbizo for discussing better methods that can be used by families for disciplining their children and upbringing."	Participant 31
	"As a traditional leader, I take it as my responsibility to make sure that I intervene when there are families which have some crisis. I also ensure that each child that is of a school-going age attend school for his/her livelihood in future."	Participant 32
	"We invite the Department of Social Development to present different disciplinary techniques to community members, so that they can ultimately use the acquired skills at home for better disciplining their children."	Participant 34
	"Resolve disputes amongst families."	Participant 44
	"Interventions by social workers on a man-to-man basis, through workshops and counselling."	Participant 48

Source: Zenzile (2021)

Theme 4 shows that the traditional leaders are involved in the identification of risky factors that might make the community to have breeding grounds of criminal behaviour. They assist the community by strengthening family ties, encouraging parents to make sure that they apply legitimate means to encourage their children to adhere to and commit themselves into conventional activities. In this theme, it is explicitly stated that traditional leaders cause parents to consider it important to form part of the lives of their children, which encourages their children to refrain from unconventional activities and strengthens the bond.

Discussion

This research has found that cohesiveness is a reality in the rural villages of ORTDM. In such situations, according to Zenzile (2021), traditional leaders are able to mobilise community members and patrol streets in an effort to curtail crime in their areas. This is done because community members do not feel that calling the police is helpful. Singh (2005) purports that community member's further encounter another predicament when it comes to approaching the police in order to report crime. This problem persists and can be largely attributed to the fact that many people South Africa, predominantly in rural areas, are economically disadvantaged and live in areas that are under-resourced and where transport is infrequent, unreliable and expensive. Dixon and Rauch (2004), further postulate that even if they successfully report crime to the police, they come across police who do not have enough resources to deal with the incident of crime. Furthermore, in most instances, the police are under-staffed, over-worked and inadequately trained; they thus become overwhelmed by the problem of crime. Traditional leaders also attest to the fact that police take a lengthy periods of time to arrive at the place of the incident of crime (crime scene) and that impedes investigation, as upon their arrival there will not be enough forensic evidence to identify and collect (Donnermeyer & Barclay, 2005).

Subsequently, in certain ORTDM villages, there are common offenders that are often known to community members. This makes it possible to judge that there is a lack of safety, which is deemed to be a core human right (South African Vision 2030; Zenzile, 2021). The research findings of Donnermeyer and Barclay (2005) reveal that police officers in rural communities are capable of exercising their wide discretions in their response to calls for services from farmers. Some police first consider the management practices of the farmer before concluding whether or not a report was credible, which is likely to be the case in the ORTDM.

Furthermore, the element of cohesiveness, in many instances, is challenged by the fact that communities are characterised by *gesellschaft* and *gemeinschaft* (Hudson, 2003). In terms of *gesellschaft,* societies are depicted as anonymous and impersonal. In such situations, community members enter into associations, temporarily and conditionally, for reasons of personal gain. While on the other hand, *gemeinschaft* societies are sentimentally depicted as face-to-face, warm and nurturing. They are also composed of individuals who have stable roles while sharing history, values, day-to-day experiences and future prospects (Hudson, 2003; Zenzile, 2021).

These research findings advocate for a different approach, where traditional leaders will play a central role in advancing the ethos of crime prevention in their areas of jurisdiction. Community members that are under traditional leaders may best resemble the networks and social systems, which according to Bullock (2014), "tie" people together and comprise families, friends and wider structures such as voluntary groups and the institutions of civil society (Bullock, 2014). In previous approaches, the focus was largely on criminal justice resources, specifically the police (NPC, 2012). This led to a SAPS that is stretched beyond its capacity. They are given a mandate that is impossible to fulfil and disenchanted police officers with fragile authority and legitimacy were envisaged as an all-purpose agency, rather than a highly specialised resource to be deployed strategically (NPC, 2012). Mears, Scott and Bhati (2007) postulate that in the rural context, situational crime prevention programmes are based on reducing the opportunities for crime to occur.

Conclusion

This research article should be considered as amongst the first steps of engaging traditional leader's on matters of gender-based violence and crime prevention in their areas of jurisdictions. This study largely focussed on the ORTDM situation, but perhaps circumstances are different in other traditional leaders' jurisdictions.

Throughout the course of the study, it was revealed that the ORTDM is infested with crime and there are common offenders in many areas. Many of the crimes are perpetrated by youngsters, which may be largely attributed to unemployment and other unfavourable societal conditions, for example, school drop-out and lack of labour skills. These youngster commit violent crimes (murder, rape, theft, robbery, burglary, assault, etc.). Traditional leaders, in a quest to implement primary crime prevention measures, provide opportunities to the likes of the Department of Social Development so that they can present, to community members, various disciplinary skills in order to improve discipline in the family settings, which will result in better livelihood and a thriving community. Subsequently, parents will be in a better position to strengthen the bonds with their children and attachments will be the result of the process.

This study largely recommends crime prevention forums that will be led by traditional leaders. However, the process may be thwarted by the lack of resources. Thus, partnership is advocated as the first step for realising the future goals of situational crime prevention. The basis of this call is premised on the belief that citizens' roles in crime control can be viewed as an outcome of wide commitments, relationships, norms and values. All these attributes of crime prevention are situated within communities and serve to generate informal social control, which is often viewed as a powerful insulator against crime.

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