



Lockdown lessons

Violence and policing in a pandemic

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Patterns of violence significantly changed with the introduction of South Africa's 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. By monitoring murder trends, carrying out interviews and conducting a survey of over 5 000 residents in Cape Town, the Western Cape Government and ISS researchers sought to identify lessons that could inform post-pandemic safety governance in South Africa's most violent police areas.

Key findings

- Murder fell by 47% in the first four weeks of lockdown compared to the same period in 2019 and by 38% in the second four weeks. With the relaxing of regulations most notably the unbanning of alcohol and opening of the economy murder increased to just 10% below 2019's figure. When alcohol was again banned, murder increased by 6% compared to 2019 and by 59% by mid-October.
- Sharp-object murders halved when alcohol was initially banned but doubled when it was reintroduced.
- Lockdown did not significantly affect firearmrelated murders.
- Our data show a much larger reduction in fatal violence against women than men during early lockdown, especially when alcohol was banned.

- There was little difference in reported police visibility before and during lockdown, with 50% of survey respondents reporting daily visibility and 25% reporting weekly visibility.
- Most survey respondents (70%) approved of the way the lockdown was enforced in their community and said they would like to see early lockdown-type policing continue beyond the lockdown (81%).
- Data indicate that 61% of survey respondents interacted with police or law enforcement during the early lockdown, with 64% of them reporting being treated 'well' or 'okay'.
- There was little difference in respondents' feelings of safety in their community before or during lockdown, with roughly 50% feeling 'very safe' and 12% 'very unsafe'.

Recommendations

- Both alcohol and firearms require better regulation.
- If the alcohol ban helped decrease sharp-object, opportunistic and possibly domestic violence, then better regulation of alcohol may do the same in the future.
- Alcohol enforcement must, however, be accompanied by the full regulation of firearms focusing particularly on the removal of illegal firearms and on identifying and removing corrupt officials who feed them back to communities.
- Police and law enforcers must rein in the postlockdown rise in violence. Evidence suggests they can do this if they adopt carefully planned problem-oriented and intelligence-driven strategies that are understood and embraced by all involved, limited in scope and carefully implemented.
- Police and law enforcers can't be everywhere or do everything, but they should be able to regulate the sale and consumption of alcohol, the possession of illegal firearms and the sale of ammunition. If they do this effectively, they could drastically reduce murder in the Western Cape.

Introduction

On 27 March 2020, the South African government instituted one of the world's most restrictive lockdowns to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. Routine activities changed overnight with unprecedented restrictions on movement and economic activity, a tobacco and alcohol ban, increased policing and the deployment of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Life fundamentally changed, including patterns of crime and violence.

Murder, the most reliable indicator of violence in general, declined by 72% in the first three weeks of lockdown, and after three months, 2 000 fewer people had been killed compared to the same period in 2019.¹ Despite these shifts, six months into the lockdown, the country's murder rate remained four times the pre-pandemic global average, showing that ending South Africa's violence will take more than a society-wide lockdown.²

To learn from this moment, the Western Cape Government (WCG) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) tracked and explored violence, safety and policing during the first lockdown.³ This report summarises our findings. It begins with an overview of the methodology and the country's lockdown levels, then presents survey and interview findings, followed by six months of murder data and ends with a discussion.

Methodology

This was a mixed-methods study. From April to October 2020, we tracked murders recorded by the Western Cape Forensic Pathology Services (FPS) as a proxy for violence in general. We focused on 11 police areas in Cape Town which in 2019/20 accounted for almost half of the province's 3 974 murders. These areas were Bishop Lavis, Delft, Gugulethu, Harare, Khayelitsha, Kraaifontein, Mfuleni, Mitchells Plain, Nyanga, Philippi and Philippi East.⁴

After three months, 2 000 fewer people were killed compared to 2019, but ending South Africa's violence will take more than a society-wide lockdown

We also carried out interviews and a survey in three of the eleven policing areas – Khayelitsha, Philippi and Delft. In May, we interviewed: 31 City of Cape Town learner law enforcement officers (LLEO), three South African Police Services (SAPS) station commanders, 39 residents, and eight non-governmental organisation (NGO) employees.⁵ In July, a cell phone survey of over 5 000 people in the three areas was conducted.

Both the interviews and survey were designed to probe experiences and perceptions of safety, policing and enforcement during lockdown.

MURDER FELL BY

72%

IN THE FIRST 3 WEEKS OF LOCKDOWN

South Africa's lockdown levels

Our data should be considered in the context of South Africa's five 2020 lockdown levels (Table 1). Level 5 was the first and strictest period. Residents had to stay home unless buying essential goods or performing essential services, most economic activity and public transport ceased, and schools closed. After three weeks a curfew was introduced.

Police and other law enforcement authorities were particularly strict during this period, carrying out roadblocks, foot patrols and visiting businesses to encourage compliance. On the first day of lockdown, 55 people were arrested for contravention of regulations countrywide. By mid-August, this number stood at 300 000.6

Survey and interview findings

Experiences of policing and safety

We begin with a summary of our survey and interview data. Interviews were conducted telephonically at the end of Level 5 and the start of Level 4 (30 April–12 May). The survey ran during Level 3a (15–30 June) and was

Table 1: Lockdown Levels 1-5

Level	Dates	Weeks	Key regulations and enforcement activities
5	29 March-2 May	14–18	Purchase of alcohol and tobacco banned; Stay home order; No public gatherings; Limited transport and economic activity; Schools closed; Curfew introduced after three weeks (8pm–5am). Increased policing and law enforcement, SANDF deployed.
4	3 May-30 May	19–22	Purchase of alcohol and tobacco banned; Stay home order but limited exercise allowed ; No public gatherings; Limited transport and economic activity; Schools closed; Curfew (8pm–5am). Significant but less intense law enforcement with the support of SANDF.
3a	31 May-11 July	23–28	Purchase of alcohol unbanned; Tobacco banned; Stay home order but exercise allowed; No public gatherings; Limited transport and increased economic activity; Schools closed; Curfew (8pm–5am); Compulsory mask wearing. Policing and law enforcement further relaxed, SANDF remains.
3b	12 July–15 August	29–33	Purchase of alcohol and tobacco banned; Stay home order but exercise allowed; No public gatherings; Limited transport and increased economic activity; Schools partially open; Curfew (8pm–5am); Compulsory mask wearing. Policing and law enforcement relaxed, SANDF remains.
2	16 August– 20 September	34–38	Purchase of alcohol allowed Monday to Thursdays and in restaurants; Purchase of tobacco unbanned; Stay home order but exercise allowed; No public gatherings; Limited transport and increased economic activity; Schools open; Curfew (8pm–5am); Compulsory mask wearing. Policing and law enforcement relaxed, SANDF remains.
1	21 September– 17 October	39–40	Purchase of tobacco unbanned; Purchase of alcohol allowed Mondays to Fridays and in restaurants; No limit on personal movement ; No public gatherings; Limited transport and increased economic activity ; Schools open; Curfew relaxed (12am–4am) ; Compulsory mask wearing. Policing and law enforcement relaxed, SANDF withdraws (30 September) .

Table 2: Number of murders in the three focus areas

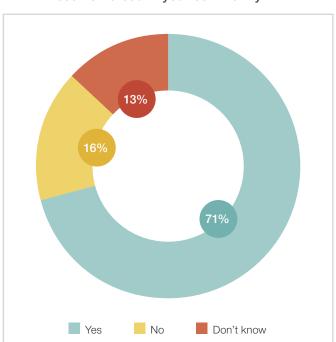
Area	Murder, Weeks 14–20 Interview phase (Levels 5–4)				der, Wee Survey p (Level		Murder, Weeks 14–27 Two phases combined (Levels 5, 4, 3a)			
	2019	2020	Change	2019	2020	Change	2019	2020	Change	
Delft	26	8	-69%	46	34	-26%	72	42	-42%	
Khayelitsha	36	20	-44%	42	37	-12%	78	57	-27%	
Philippi	11	3	-73%	21	10	-52%	32	13	-59%	

Source: Western Cape Forensic Pathology Services, 2020

broadcast via SMS to all Vodacom and MTN mobile network subscribers in the three focus areas – the Khayelitsha, Philippi and Delft police precincts. Over 5 000 people responded to some or all of the survey, 49% of them were female and 90% were younger than 34.

Murder declined significantly in the three areas in the weeks preceding and inclusive of the interviews (Weeks 14–20). It increased in the week when the survey was launched, but remained lower than in 2019 (Table 2). Both interviews and the survey asked respondents about the 'lockdown' rather than lockdown levels.

Chart 1: Do you approve of the way lockdown has been enforced in your community?

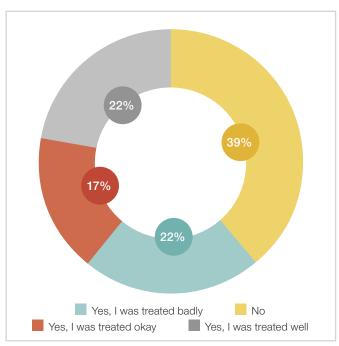


Perceptions and experiences of enforcement

Asked if they approved of the way lockdown was enforced in their community, 71% of the survey respondents said they did (Chart 1) and 81% said they would like lockdown-type enforcement to continue beyond the lockdown. Of those who had interacted with police or law enforcement officers, 64% said they had been treated 'well' or 'okay', while 36% reported being treated 'badly' (Chart 2).

In interviews, most residents and NGO workers thought that people in their areas had been treated fairly by authorities, though some complained of police abuses: 'I understand that sometimes people do not abide by

Chart 2: Have you interacted with police or law enforcers during lockdown?



rules but excessive force does not have to be used,' (Resident). Similarly, law enforcement and SAPS officers interviewed said that residents generally abided by their instructions: 'Most listen to us. Most give us respect,' (LLEO).

Asked about police visibility, first before and then during lockdown, few survey respondents noted a difference. Close to 50% reported seeing police daily and 25% seeing them weekly in both periods. Interview respondents were more likely than survey respondents to report increased police visibility, though some expressed surprise at how few police were around: '[There's] almost been zero law enforcement and policing in the areas ... Very little visibility,' (NGO).

Whether residents perceived it or not, police and law enforcers believed they were more visible, at least during the early lockdown: 'The police, law enforcement and SANDF patrol the streets, and are very visible,' (LLEO); 'It is much easier to enforce the regulations with SANDF, law enforcement and metro,' (SAPS).

Like visibility, survey respondents reported stable levels of trust in police and law enforcement, with roughly 35% reporting 'a lot' of trust both *before* (Chart 3) and then *during* lockdown (Chart 4), and 24% reporting none 'at all'.

Despite general satisfaction with lockdown enforcement (Chart 1) and a clear decline in murder in the three areas (Table 2), 31% of survey respondents believed violent crime had increased in their community during lockdown while 42% thought it had decreased (Chart 5).

Chart 3: How much did you trust police and other law enforcers BEFORE the lockdown?

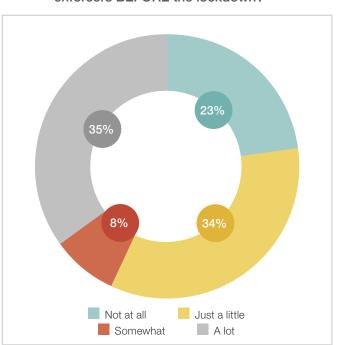
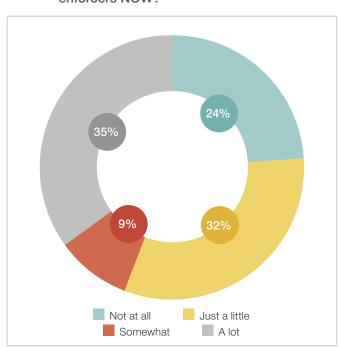


Chart 4: How much do you trust police and other law enforcers NOW?



In contrast, most interviewees believed crime had declined, especially law enforcers and police: 'There is a huge change. Each and every day at Delft you would hear there is a scene where someone has been shot. That's not happening now, I've not heard about shootings,' (LLEO).7

Both survey and interview respondents were asked why they thought violent crime had changed. Thirty-one per cent of survey respondents felt it was due to the ban on alcohol, while 26% attributed it to restrictions on movement (Chart 6). Only 16% credited 'more policing'.

Many interviewees also perceived a link between the alcohol ban and crime: 'Before lockdown people would drink and commit crime or fight ... During lockdown, there was nothing of that sorts,' (LLEO); 'Because there's less alcohol, there are less people gallivanting in the streets late at night,' (NGO employee). Another common view among residents was that police visibility had aided the decline in violence: 'It makes sense that murder has decreased because there is so much police visibility,' (Resident).

Other interviewees believed the perceived reduction was due to limitations in movement: 'It went down because no one is outside. [Crime] used to happen in the mornings, on the way to work,' (Resident). In Delft and Philippi, some residents attributed the change to a pause in gang violence.8 'There is usually a lot of shooting that we hear on a daily basis and all that gang activity. Since the lockdown this has really decreased,' (Resident).9

The survey also asked respondents whether they and/or someone they knew had been a victim of crime during lockdown. A surprising proportion (29%) said they had. This is much greater than the national rate of 0.25%-6%, or

Chart 5: Do you think violent crime in your community has increased or decreased during the lockdown?

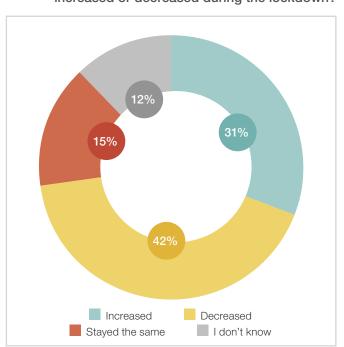
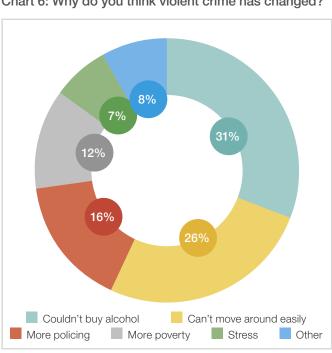


Chart 6: Why do you think violent crime has changed?



the provincial average of 5%–9%.¹⁰ It is possible that crime victims were more inclined than non-victims to complete the survey. Twenty-six percent said they knew others in their community who had experienced crime during lockdown.

Chart 7: Over the past year, how safe have you felt in your community?

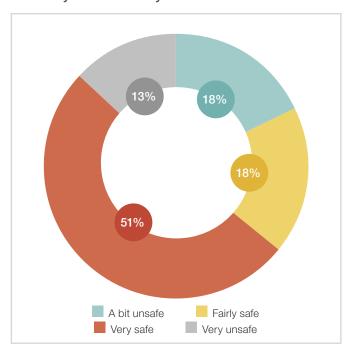
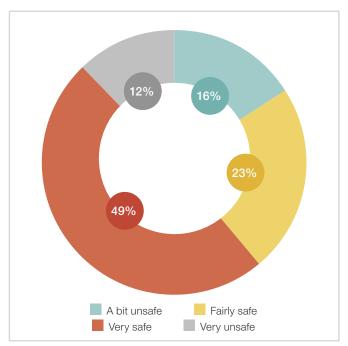


Chart 8: During lockdown, how safe have you felt in your community?



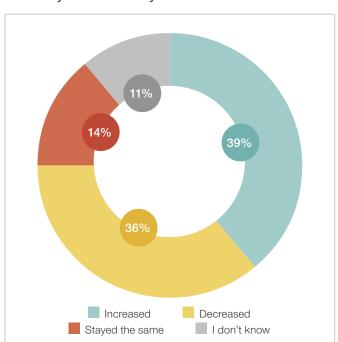
Despite this, half of the survey respondents felt 'very safe' in their community during lockdown (Chart 7), as well as in the preceding year (Chart 8).

Finally, both our survey and interviews probed the subject of domestic violence, with respondents offering mixed views on its possible increase/decline (Chart 9). Some interviewees were concerned that being stuck at home may aggravate violence, while others thought the alcohol ban may prevent conflict.

Domestic violence complaints to police remained consistent in the first four to six weeks of lockdown

Importantly, the three SAPS station commanders reported consistency in domestic violence complaints in the first four to six weeks of lockdown (Weeks 14–20), despite noting significant declines in other violence. This may suggest that domestic violence remained constant but did not increase, possibly due to the alcohol ban. As we discuss in the next section, across all 11 areas there was a 50% reduction in the murder of women in the early lockdown period compared to 2019.

Chart 9: Do you think violence within families has increased or decreased during lockdown in your community?



Murder data

Murder - the numbers

The interview and survey data provide insights into experiences of policing and safety in three of our eleven study areas during the first three months of the lockdown. We also tracked murder incidents in all 11 areas, the methods used and the gender of victims from 1 January to 17 October, using data from the Western Cape FPS.

Figure 1 shows that fewer murders occurred in the 11 areas in the first three months of 2020 (n=328) than in the same period in 2019 (n=368), suggesting that violence was already slightly subdued before lockdown.

Murder fell by 47% in the first four weeks of lockdown (Level 5) compared to the same period in 2019 (Table 3) and was 38% lower in the second four weeks (Level 4). With the relaxing of regulations under Level 3a – most notably the unbanning of alcohol and opening of the economy – murder increased to just 10% below 2019's figure.

After four weeks, alcohol was again banned while other regulations remained constant (Level 3b).

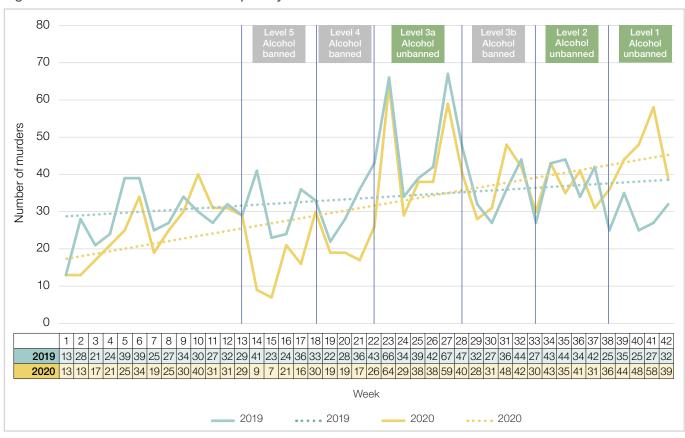
During this period murder *increased* by 6% in the 11 areas compared to 2019. Under Level 2, only one less murder was committed compared to 2019, and under Level 1 murder had increased by 59% by 17 October 2020.

Table 3: Number of murders in 11 areas in Weeks 14-42

	2019	2020	Change	
Full lockdown	1 054	982	-7%	
Level 5	157	83	-47%	
Level 4	129	80	-38%	
Level 3a	295	267	-10%	
Level 3b	166	176	+6%	
Level 2	188	187	-0.5%	
Level 1 (to 17 Oct)	119	189	+59%	

While the year began with fewer murders than 2019, and despite the number of murders plummeting during early lockdown, by September and October it had increased compared to the same period in 2019.

Figure 1: Number of murders in the 11 priority areas in Weeks 1-42



Murder - method

Figure 2 and Table 4 show that the pre-lockdown decline in murder was attributed to less sharp-object violence. More people were killed with firearms in the first three months of 2020 (n=201) than in 2019 (n=187), while far fewer were killed with sharp objects in early 2020 (n=73) than in 2019 (n=128). This suggests that patterns of violence had already changed before the pandemic.

While the number of people killed with firearms dipped under Levels 5 and 4, the decline was marginal compared to sharp-object murders. From April to October 2019, 49%–59% of murders resulted from

gunshots, and 28%–36% from sharp objects (Table 4). In contrast, under Levels 5 and 4, 72% and 73% of murders were firearm related. This dropped to 63% under Level 3a (when alcohol was unbanned) and increased to 78% when alcohol was again banned (Level 3b).

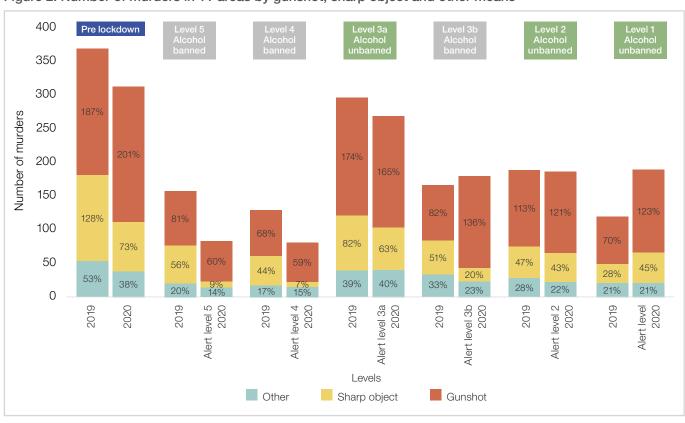
Under Level 2 and 1, 65% of murders were firearm related (up to Week 42/17 October), marginally up from 2019, and the same as the pre-lockdown proportion.

This data suggests a correlation between the alcohol ban and reductions in sharp-object murders, but not firearm murders.

Table 4: Percentage of murders in 11 areas by gunshot, sharp object and other means

	Pre- lockdown		Level 5 (No alcohol)		Level 4 (No alcohol)		Level 3a		Level 3b (No alcohol)		Level 2		Level 1 (17 October)	
Method	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020
Gunshot	51%	65%	52%	72%	53%	73%	59%	63%	49%	76%	60%	65%	59%	65%
Sharp object	35%	23%	36%	11%	34%	9%	28%	24%	31%	11%	25%	23%	24%	24%
Other	14%	12%	13%	17%	13%	19%	13%	15%	20%	13%	15%	12%	18%	11%

Figure 2: Number of murders in 11 areas by gunshot, sharp object and other means



Murder - gender

There was a significant variance in the gender of victims during lockdown compared to the same period in 2019. Although overall murder declined by 18% in Weeks 14–33, the number of female victims declined by 36%.

Before lockdown, roughly 9% of murder victims were female. Under Level 5, this dropped to 5% and under

Level 4 to 4% (Figure 3). With the reintroduction of alcohol under Level 3a, the proportion of female victims doubled to 9%. When alcohol was banned (but other factors remained constant) under Level 3b, 6% of victims were female. With its reintroduction (and the broader relaxing of regulations) under Level 2, females accounted for 8% of victims, and 7% under Level 1.

Figure 3: Percentage of murder victims by gender

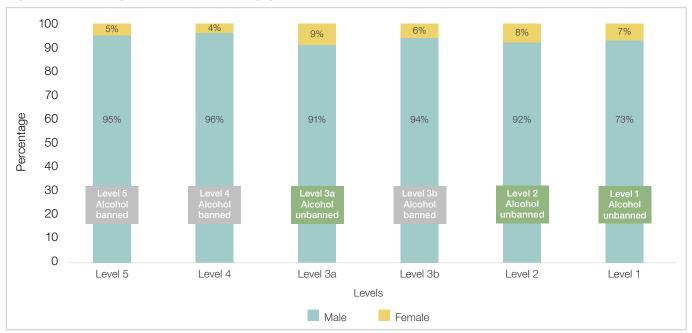
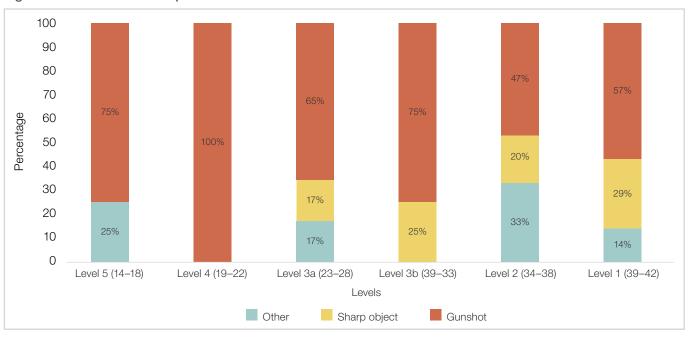


Figure 4: Method of murder per level - females



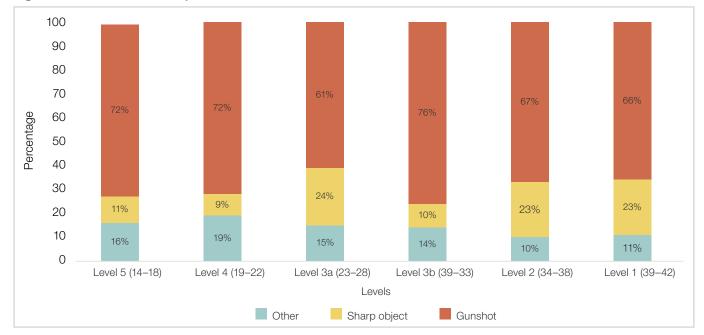


Figure 5: Method of murder per level - males

The number of female victims declined during the same periods in which sharp-object murders declined, i.e. when alcohol was banned (Figure 3). However, most female victims were killed with firearms rather than sharp objects (Figure 4 and 5). This suggests a correlation between alcohol, firearms and female murders.

Discussion

Patterns of violence significantly changed with the introduction of South Africa's 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. Although a third of survey respondents credited the early decline to the alcohol ban, it is likely that strict limitations on movement and the near-closure of the economy explain the bulk of the change. With less movement and social interaction, and with heightened surveillance as people stayed put, there were fewer opportunities for violence beyond the home.

There was a larger reduction in fatal violence against women than men during lockdown, and it was most pronounced when alcohol was banned

Survey and interview respondents generally approved of the way the initial hard lockdown was enforced, with most indicating they'd like such enforcement to continue. However, it was not obvious that they had noticed a significant difference in policing, or that feelings of safety or trust in police had changed during the lockdown. The unprecedented decline in murder seems to have done little to improve



WAS BANNED

these perceptions, with numerous respondents reporting experiences or knowledge of crime during lockdown.

Fewer murders occurred in the 11 areas in the first three months of 2020 than in the same period in 2019, suggesting that violence was already slightly subdued. However, more people had been killed with firearms in early 2020 than in 2019, suggesting a pre-lockdown change in the nature of violence.

Sharp-object murders more than halved under Levels 5, 4 and 3b when alcohol was banned, but doubled under Levels 3a, 2 and 1 when it was reintroduced. This trend matches that found in six years of Western Cape murder data (2010–2016) where 50% of sharp-object murder victims tested positive for alcohol compared to only 27% of firearm victims. As such, alcohol restrictions may have reduced impulsive, interpersonal violence and possibly prevented a spike in domestic violence during lockdown.

While domestic violence accounts for only about 6% of provincial murders,¹³ our data show a much larger reduction in fatal violence against women than men during lockdown. This was most pronounced when alcohol was banned.

Neither the alcohol ban, nor any other intervention, appears to have had a significant impact on firearm-related murder in the province

Neither the ban, nor any other intervention appears to have had a significant impact on firearm-related murder in the province. While the number of people killed with firearms dipped under Levels 5 and 4, the declines were marginal compared to those caused by sharp objects. The same trend is not evident in national data.

In 2018, SAPS reported that 42% of Western Cape murders were firearm related and 34% were caused by knives and sharp objects.¹⁴ In 2019, these figures were 46% and 31% respectively.¹⁵ FPS data suggests similar increases in firearm-related violence in the province, with firearms accounting for 65% of murders in the first three months of 2020.

In a SAPS sample of 2 410 murders countrywide between April and June 2020, firearms were used in 45% (n=1 089) of offences, and knives and other sharp instruments in 24% (n=584). By contrast, FPS data show that in the Western Cape, over the same period, 71% of murders were firearm related and 19% sharp-object related.

This may indicate the impact of gang-related murders in the province and in our 11 focus areas, but this should not be assumed. In 2019, the SAPS reported that just 24% of murders in the province were gang related, up from 19% in 2018.¹⁷



Most of these (95%) were committed with firearms.¹⁸ If this assessment is accurate, gang violence could not account for the bulk of firearm-related murders in 2020.

Whether firearm-related murder is driven by gangs or not, both SAPS and FPS data suggest a gradual increase in the number of such murders since 2018.

Two key lessons from this study are that both alcohol and firearms require better regulation. If the alcohol ban helped decrease sharp-object, opportunistic and possibly domestic violence, then better regulation of alcohol may do the same in the future.

However, the data also suggest that patterns of firearm-related violence may persist irrespective of the availability of alcohol or restrictions on movement. As such, alcohol enforcement must be accompanied by the full regulation of firearms, focusing particularly on the removal of illegal firearms, and on identifying and removing corrupt officials who feed them back to communities.

While 2020 began with fewer murders than 2019, and despite murders plummeting during the early lockdown, by September and October more people were being murdered than during the same months in 2019, 65% of them with firearms. By December 2020, SAPS data showed that murder had increased in the Western Cape and the country as a whole.

It will be important for police and law enforcers to rein this trend in. Evidence suggests they can do this if they adopt carefully planned problem-oriented and intelligence-driven strategies that are understood and embraced by all involved, are limited in scope, and are carefully implemented. Police and law enforcers can't be everywhere or do everything, but they should be able to regulate the sale and consumption of alcohol, the possession of illegal firearms and the sale of ammunition. If they do this effectively, they could drastically reduce murder in the Western Cape.

Notes

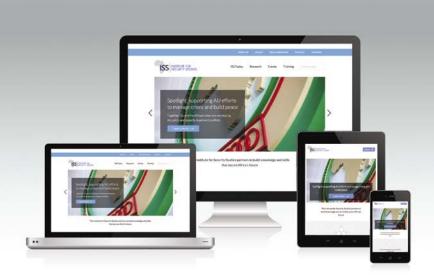
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- 8 This is supported by other research: J Stanyard, Gangs in lockdown: Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on gangs in East and Southern Africa, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2020, https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Gangs-in-lockdown-Impact-of-COVID-19-restrictions-on-gangs-in-east-and-southern-Africa-GITOC.pdf.
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