Journal of Sociology and Social Work
June 2016, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 68–82
ISSN: 2333-5807 (Print), 2333-5815 (Online)

Published by American Research Institute for Policy Development
DOI: 10.15640/jssw.v4n1a9
URL: https://doi.org/10.15640/jssw.v4n1a9

Examining the Process of Violentization of 78 Youth from Gugulethu and Khayelitsha in the Western Cape – Violent Offenders or Dangerous Violent Criminals

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the social process of violentization of South African youth living in two high-violence communities in Cape Town; Gugulethu and Khayelitsha making use of Athens' Process of Violentization Theory (Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003). Athens developed the Process of Violentization Theory describing four stages in the development of violent perpetrators, namely; brutalization, belligerency, violent performances and virulency. In testing the Process of Violentization Theory for the South African context, a quantitative study was conducted which entailed the interviewing of a research sample of 78 youth from Gugulethu and Khayelitsha making use of a 59 Item Violent Socialization Scale (VSS, Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003). The outcomes of this investigation indicated that Athens' model of violentization can be measured quantitatively with a South African sample in a reliable manner. The subscales measuring the underlying theory of violentization manifested excellent internal consistency in the South African sample with a Cronbach alpha of more than 0.9 in some cases. In addition, standardized processes of validation yielded concurrent support of the underlying theory in the South African sample.

Keywords: Violent Juvenile Offenders, Process of Violentization Theory, Violent Socialization Scale

Introduction

Currently, South Africa has some of the highest rates of homicide, gender-based violence, and gang-related violence in the world (Altbeker, 2007; Seedat, van Niekerk, Jewkes, Suffla, & Ratele, 2009; Weierstal, Hinsberger, Kaminer, Holtzhausen, Madikane & Elbert, 2013). It is estimated that approximately half of the annual 59 935 violence- and transport-related deaths in South Africa are the result of interpersonal violence (Gould, 2010).Almost a third of adult South Africans have been a victim of violence, and over half have experienced multiple exposures to potentially traumatic events (Kaminer, Grimsrud, Stein, & Williams, 2008; Weierstal et al., 2013).

Troublingly it would seem that, South African youth are at particularly high risk for exposure to violence (Weierstal et al., 2013). This observation is supported by the work of Burton, who found that youth between 12 and 22 years of age are twice as likely as adults to be victimized by crime and violence (Burton, 2006; Weierstal et al, 2013). Youth between the ages of 10 and 29 years account for 48% of all violent deaths in the country (Foster, 2012), with rates of youth homicide being especially high in Cape Town's impoverished communities (Seedat et al., 2009 in Weierstal, 2013). In addition to the developmental challenges posed by high levels of poverty and inequality, many South African youth therefore also grow up amidst high levels of threat and danger to which they must adapt (Weierstal et al, 2013).

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Considerable research effort has been applied to try to explain why South Africa, in particular, is so violent. By way of example, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR)in a 2009 Summarised Report titled; "Why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?" cite a plethora of reasons for the exceptionally high levels of violence in South Africa. These range from the legacy of apartheid and colonialism, brutalization and a culture of violence, racism, structural inequality, firearms and a host of other factors (CSVR, 2009).The CSVR 2009 Report, essentially revisit an occasional paper published by Schönteich & Louw in 2001. In their paper, Schönteich & Louw, also showed the link between South Africa's political transition post 1994 and the growth in the crime rate, a destructive violent culture which manifests itself in 'murderous intolerance', the proliferation of firearms, organized crime, rapid urbanization, and a weak criminal justice system (2001).

Reading the above mentioned "recipes for violence" one is left feeling less than satisfied with explanations for South Africa's high levels of violent crime. They do however draw attention to important conceptual and methodological problems in some of the research on violence. Most home-grown research on violence asks "why does South Africa have such high rates of violent crime?" Asking the question "what causes crime?" or "why do people commit violent crime?" and expecting to find an absolute or conclusive answer is like searching for the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow(Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013: 431). There simply is no definite and agreed explanation why people, some more than others, commit criminal offences and only some become dangerous violent criminals (Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013:431).

For me, a more nuanced question to ask is; "why only some who experience high levels of victimization and abuse go on to commit crime and become dangerous violent criminals and others do not?"Here I am influenced by the work of Lonnie Athens (Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003; Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013). Athens, a contemporary violence theorist, originated the term "violentization" by combining two concepts; "violence" and "socialization (Athens, 1989, 2005). Although conceptualised more than a decade ago, Athens Theory of Violentization remained relatively unknown until author Richard Rhodes popularised it in *Why They Kill: The Discoveries of a Maverick Criminologist* (Rhodes, 1999, 2002).

Athens Theory of Violentization is based on four key assumptions. The first assumption is that dominance and subordination are the common denominators of all human conflict, including violence (Athens, 1998: 686). Secondly, that people always strive to make their lives more predictable by "institutionalizing" critical social experiences across life span. Thirdly, violent and ultra-violent people undergo a special form of socialisation which Athens calls the "violentization process". Athens feels that people are what they are as a result of the social experiences that they have undergone in their lives (2008: 7). Most social experiences, however, are trivial; they pass in an almost endless stream, quickly over and quickly forgotten. Conversely, some social experiences are significant consequential and unforgettable, and those have a lasting impact upon people's lives and are remembered weeks, months and years afterward, leaving a permanent mark upon people regardless of their wishes (Athens, 2008:7). Among significant social experiences, he proposes to show, are those that make people dangerous violent criminals (Rhodes, 2000: 111).

The Process of Violentization Theory

Athens (2008:8) sees violence as a developmental process during which most violent offenders move through four stages of developing into violent actors, namely; "brutalization, defiance, violent performances and virulency." *Brutalization*- This stage involves the teaching and demonstration of violent behavior, which includes threatening to use physical force, observing the use of physical force, and learning how to use physical force. Brutalization is made up of three distinct experiences: (1) Violent subjugation; one or both of the guardians or parents of a child use physical force to discipline, intimidate, control or hurt the child, whether from ignorance, personal frustration or their own experiences, the result is a battered, suffocated, scared, tortured and/or humiliated child (James, 2004). (2) Personal horrification; during this experience, the child witness someone close to them such as a mother, brother, close friend or schoolmate undergo violent subjugation (Athens, 2008).

Although not as physically traumatic as violent subjugation, it can be even more psychologically damaging. (3) Violent coaching; entails the parent or significant other person instructing or "coaching" the child trough a variety of techniques to take violent action against others (Athens, 2008). The second step in the violentization process is defiance.

It is the beginning of a decision to make the brutalization stop. As the child grows up a response pattern develops; if provoked, attack especially if there is a chance you can win the fight. But critical questions remain, "Will I be able to do it, to be violent enough to prevail? Can I hurt someone else and get away with it?" (James, 2004 in Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013).The third stage, violent performance, answers these questions. Deciding to hurt someone is not a casual act for a child. Athens points out that "it takes courage to cross that portentous barrier" because you are putting yourself at risk (Athens, 1992). Most boys or girls wait for a major provocation. It can be a direct physical attack by a family member or a shoving match after a ball game. Victory may move the process of becoming violent forward, defeat may push it back. According to James, hazing and bullying other children is a testing out phase of what adults will allow (2004; in Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013).

Success may push a young person to the fourth stage, virulency. The fourth and final stage of Violentization is "virulency". If the experimentation with violence has been rewarding a child may draw the conclusion that he or she cannot be stopped. The child is now recognised in his or her community as being a violent person. The child experiences violent notoriety in that he or she is seen as not just being capable of violence towards others, but proficient in it. Others treat the child with social trepidation and take special pains not to challenge or provoke the child in any way because they know that the slightest provocation then triggers more violent reactions. He or she has become the adult that brutalized them as a child (James, 2004; Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013). A false sense of omnipotence is felt and the child resolves to harm or even kill someone for any provocation, however slight. Athens (in James, 2004) offers a summary of this process, "Any person who completes the virulency stage will become a dangerous, violent, criminal" (James, 2004; Holtzhausen & Heath, 2013). This remains the case regardless of the social class, race, sex or age and intelligence level of people." When the cycle has been concluded the individual has become the brutalizer he so hated at the outset (Athens, 2008).

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to examine the social process of violentization of South African youth from two Western Cape communities; Gugulethu and Khayelitsha making use of Athens' Process of Violentization Theory (Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003). Athens developed the Process of Violentization Theory describing four stages in the development of violent perpetrators, namely; brutalization, belligerency, violent performances and virulency. In testing the Process of Violentization Theory for the South African context, a quantitative study was conducted which entailed the interviewing of 78 youth from Gugulethu and Khayelitsha making use of a 59 Item Violent Socialization Scale (VSS, Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003). It was hypothesized that young people from high risk communities in the Western Cape move through four stages of violentization, namely; "brutalization, defiance, violent performances, and virulency."

Method

Sample

Convenience sampling was used to select a sample for the VSS study.A sample of 78 male participants, residing in two low-income communities in Cape Town, South Africa, participated in the study. They were aged between 13 and 27 years (M = 20, SD = 3). The first language of all the participants was isiXhosa, an indigenous South African language, while levels of English fluency varied within the sample. The demographic data of the sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Socio Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N=78).

Age, mean (SD), [range]	20.3 (2.9) [13-27]
Marital status, No. (%)	
single	23 (27.1%)
partner	55 (72.9%)
Number of children, No. (%)	
0	60 (80,0%)
1	17 (18.6%)
2	1 (1.4%)
Years spend in school, mean (SD), [range]	9.8 (1.9) [5-14]
Education, No. (%)	
No school	1 (1.4%)
Primary school	74 (92.9%)
Secondary school	4 (5.7%)
Imprisonment (yes/no), No. (%)	36 (51.4%) / 34 (48.6%)

From the above table it can be noted that participant's ages ranged between 13 – 27 years with a mean age of 20.3. Theoretically, all participants in the sample had the opportunity to move through four stages of violentization, namely; "brutalization, defiance, violent performances, and virulency. Most participants (93%) reported that their highest level of Education was primary school and 51% had been imprisoned at some point during their childhood.

The study formed part of a pilot project to investigate mental health in former young offenders in two urban townships of Cape Town, South Africa. The South African townships emerged during *apartheid*, the system of institutionalized racial segregation that characterized South Africa during the rule of the National Party from 1948-1994. These townships are a legacy of *apartheid's* geographic separation of South Africans along racial lines, and remain characterized by high unemployment, informal housing, and a lack of basic infrastructure (Christopher, 2005; Turok, 2001 in Weierstall et al, 2012), as well as high rates of criminal violence (Demombynes & Ozler, 2005) and domestic violence (Dinan, McCall & Gibbson, 2004).

Participants in this study were members of a community-based intervention program that aims to prevent re-offences amongst ex-inmates as well as non-incarcerated former young offenders who have been diverted from the justice system by the state. Over a six-month period, members of the organization take part in nine programmes that offer social and psychological support as well as skills development. The programme director together with the researchers explained the study aims to all youth attending the organisation's programme, and all were invited to participate. It was further explained that participation in the study was voluntary and declining to participate would not impact upon participation in the organisation's programme, and that participants would receive no financial compensation. None of the potential participants declined to participate.Participants were also given the names and contact information for the investigators of the study as well as for a crisis responder should they want to discuss any concerns that might have arisen as a result of completing the survey. The procedures for conducting this study were approved by the proper boards of ethics at each of the Institutions of Higher Education that participated in the overall research process.

Measure

Use was made of the Violent Socialization Scale (VSS, Rhodes; 2003), to assess Athens's (1992) conceptual model of violent socialization in a South African context. The VSS is a self-report questionnaire that asks people to indicate their developmental experiences with violence and their current everyday way of thinking about the use of violent action (Rhodes, 2003).The 59-item checklist is made up of six components, namely; Violent Socialization (VS: 19 items), Personal Horrification (PH: 11 items), Violent Coaching (VC: 9 items), Belligerency (Be: 6 items), Violent Performances (VP: 5 items) and Virulency (Vi: 9 items). Each component was examined for internal reliability using the Cronbach alpha (Refer, Table 2: Reliability of Individual Components).

Table 2: Reliability of Individual Components

Component	Cronbach Alpha
VS	.914
PH	.935
VC	.815
Be	.809
VP	.577
Vi	.834

Values higher than 0.7 indicate good reliability and values above 0.8 suggest very good internal consistency (Pallant, 2007: 98).It can be noted that most of the VSS components have excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha of more than 0.9 in some cases. The VP component had an alpha value of 0.577, which indicated that the items that made up this component were not measuring the underlying construct of the VSS as a whole. After checking for incorrectly scored items, it was decided to remove items 46 and 50 from the VP component as it would improve the overall reliability of the VSS for the South African sample. Table 3, reflects the scale mean, variance and Cronbach alpha if VS_46 ("it is my responsibility to protect myself and the people I care about") and VS_50 ("I am proud of my ability to protect myself") is removed.

Removal of the above mentioned items from the VSS however meant that I could not compare the results from the South African study with other studies using the Violent Socialization Scale.

Table 3: Cronbach Alpha with Deleted Items

Item-Total Statistics

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
VSS_46	20.81	17.664	.128	.604
VSS_47	21.60	8.996	.610	.309
VSS_48	21.63	9.743	.545	.369
VSS_49	21.14	14.201	.268	.559
VSS_50	20.67	17.835	.130	.602

Violent Subjugation

The Violent Subjugation component included items regarding direct victimization or threat to physical integrity of the child (e.g. "when I was growing up a significant person in my life would: threaten to harm me physically, beat me or whip me, punish me for being disrespectful"). The VS also test the child's cognitions and behaviours during the direct victimization event/s (e.g. "when I was getting a beating or whipping, I had to show respect before the beating would stop, I had to scream and cry for the beating to stop, even when I said I was sorry the beating did not stop"). The VS component also measured what happened directly after the traumatic event (e.g. "after the beating stopped; I was angry, ashamed, confused, afraid, wanted to get back at the person who beat me").

Personal Horrification

The Personal Horrification (PH) component appraised victimization or threat or physical harm to someone important to the child, like the mother, younger sibling or older sibling (e.g. "when I was growing up, I saw someone important to me getting beaten up or threatened"). Attention is also paid to how the child experienced seeing a significant other being beaten or harmed (e.g. when the person was getting a beating or whipping, I was angry, ashamed of myself for not doing something to stop it from happening, felt like I was getting the beating too, felt it was my fault that the person was being beaten").

Violent Coaching

The Violent Coaching (VC) section focused on items that gauge if a parent or significant other person instructed or "coached" the child trough a variety of techniques to take violent action against others (e.g. when I was growing up, a significant other person in my life; told me the best thing to do is to physically attack someone who threatened me, told me that people would get you if you did not get them first, told stories about hurting, beating or killing others, said that I had to do whatever it takes to win a fight, made me feel proud that I was not afraid to take violent action against others").

Belligerency

Belligerency (Be) included 6 items that measured current cognitions and feelings when others use violence against the child (e.g. now when I think about other people pushing me around; I feel ashamed, I feel confused, I feel afraid"). The purpose of this component is to determine if the person will resort to violence if necessary to stop the abusive treatment. It tests the person resolves to use "serious violence" if provoked and if it has a chance of success.

Violent Performances

Violent Performances (VP), measures the transition from a resolution to use violence to its actual use in everyday life (e.g. "When people try and push me around I stop them", and "I will protect myself even if I get hurt"). VP measures experimenting with violence and the decision to use violent acts as a future measure of resolving violent encounters.

Virulency

The final component of the Violent Socialization Scale is called Virulency (Vi). This component assessed the person's readiness to use extreme violence to attack another with minimal or no provocation (e.g. "people who know me as I am now would; give me what I want because they are afraid of me, say I am dangerous, show that they are afraid of me". The final 5 items of the Virulency component evaluated self-statements around the use of extreme violence (e.g. I am dangerous, I like to pick fights, I fight when people don't do what I tell them, I attack someone just because I want to, and I am full of hatred".

Procedure

The VSS was administered verbally in the form of a structured interview. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("never") to 6 ("almost always"). This self-report scale can either be administered verbally or in paper and pen format. To improve external validity, the researcher administered the items in a structured interview. Each item was scored by adding the numbers endorsed for each component and divide by the total number of items. High exposure is indicated by an average component score of 5 – 6. Medium exposure is indicated by an average component score of 3 – 4. Minimum exposure is indicated by an average component score of 1 – 2 (Rhodes, 2003). VSS has demonstrated strong convergent validity (Rhodes et al, 2003) as well as a high internal consistency indicated by alpha coefficients (0.90; Rhodes et al, 2003).

Prior to administration of the study, all participants were given a written informed consent letter, which was translated into isiXhosa with the assistance of an interpreter. The interpreter also read the consent letter aloud to participants, due to varying levels of education and literacy in the sample. For participants under the age of 18 years, parents or legal caretakers also gave written informed consent prior to administration.All questionnaires were translated from English into Xhosa by a bilingual speaker and back-translated from Xhosa into English by a second bilingual speaker.

The back-translations were compared with the original English versions by a panel of bilingual translators to ensure equivalence with the original standardized instruments, and any discrepancies were resolved through consensus. The questionnaires were administered to participants by the researcher together with a bilingual interpreter, trained to translate the structured interviews. Six interpreters assisted with administration and all received prior training in general mental health issues as well as in the concepts of trauma and aggression. Participants were interviewed at the organisation's premises. Interviews took 45 minutes to complete.

Data analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test theProcess of Violentization Theory.Factor analysis attempts to identify underlying latent variables or factors that explain the pattern of correlations within a set of observed variables (Pallant, 2007: 179).

It may thus be used to reduce the dimension of a problem, in that a small number of factors may be found that adequately explain the variability observed in a much larger number of observed variables. In the case of the Violent Socialization Scale (VSS), factor analysis was used in the original development of the scale (refer, Rhodes, Allen, Nowinski & Cillessen, 2003), and generated the various components of the VSS (for example; violent socialization, personal horrification, violent coaching, belligerency, violent performances and virulency). Therefore, using Factor analyses assisted in the meaningful interpretation of the data, because it allowed me to see which items group together, and I could thus assign an overall meaning to that grouping. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS for MAC, version 20.0.Methodology was purely descriptive (frequency tables and bar charts), with specific summary statistics: N, mean and standard deviation, median and inter quartile range, and mode (most frequently observed response).

Results

Table 4 shows the two-way correlations between all dependent variables that were assessed in the sample.

Table 4: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations (R_p)For All Variables

		VS	PH	VC	Be	VP	Vi
N	Valid	78	78	78	78	78	78
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean		2.8947	3.1177	2.8832	3.0641	5.2923	1.9758
Median		2.6842	3.4091	2.8333	3.0000	5.7000	1.6111
Mode		1.00a	1.00	1.00	1.00	6.00	1.00
Std. Deviation		1.31591	1.78230	1.37243	1.53018	.87961	1.07914
Minimum25		1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	1.00
Maximum		5.89	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Percentiles		1.7368	1.0000	1.7500	1.6667	4.7500	1.0000
	75	4.0658	4.7273	4.0278	4.3333	6.0000	2.5000

a. Multiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown

Exposure was calculated for each component and overall (using the average of the various components), and the resulting frequency tables and bar charts are presented next.

Violent Subjugation

Table 5: Exposure to Violent Subjugation

Exposure_VS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	23	29.5	29.5	29.5
	Medium Exposure	55	70.5	70.5	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Athens argued that the first key stage of violentization is the brutalization of the individual through violent subjugation (Athens, 2003). The first 19 items of the VSS measured exposure, during middle and late childhood, to violence and harsh treatment (for example, threat or harm, physical beatings and the use of violent force) by an authority figure in the subject's primary group.

Table 5: Exposure to Violent Subjugation, reports participant's response to incidences where one or both of the guardians or parents of a child used physical force and or threat or harm to discipline, intimidate, control or hurt the child. There are n = 78 valid responses to this set of questions. The majority of respondents reported medium exposure (70%) and the rest indicated minimum exposure (30%) to violent subjugation. Although none of the respondents reported high levels of VS the findings indicate that all of the respondents experienced the use or threat of physical force by authentic or would-be subjugators, such as fathers, older siblings, neighbours, or school bullies at some stage during their middle to late childhood.

Personal Horrification

Table 6: Exposure to Personal Horrification

Exposure_PH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	29	37.2	37.2	37.2
	Medium Exposure	17	21.8	21.8	59.0
	High Exposure	32	41.0	41.0	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

The Personal Horrification (PH) component appraised victimization or threat or physical harm to someone important to the child, like the mother, younger sibling or older sibling. There are n = 78 valid responses to this set of questions. The majority of respondents reported high exposure (41%) and medium exposure (22%) to personal horrification indicating that most respondents experienced high or just below levels of personal horrification during middle and late childhood.

Violent Coaching

Table 7: Exposure to Violent Coaching

Exposure_VC

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	25	32.1	32.1	32.1
	Medium Exposure	34	43.6	43.6	75.6
	High Exposure	19	24.4	24.4	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

The Violent Coaching (VC) section focused on items that gauge if a parent or significant other person instructed or "coached" the child trough a variety of techniques to take violent action against others. The majority of the sample (44%) indicated medium exposure, whilst 25% indicated high exposure and 32% reported minimum exposure to violent coaching.

Belligerency

Table 8: Exposure to Belligerency

Exposure_Be

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	25	32.1	32.1	32.1
	Medium Exposure	32	41.0	41.0	73.1
	High Exposure	21	26.9	26.9	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

The Belligerency (Be) component included six items that considered current feelings and cognitions on the use of necessary force and violent action when seriously confronted, or what Athens calls "mitigated violent resolution" (Athens, 1992:62). Most respondents (41%) indicated medium exposure to Be, whilst twenty seven percent rated this item as high exposure and the rest (32%) minimum exposure. The cumulative frequency is 100% indicating that most respondents experienced high or just below levels of belligerency.

Violent Performances

Table 9: Exposure to Violent Performances

Exposure_VP

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Medium Exposure	12	15.4	15.4	15.4
	High Exposure	66	84.6	84.6	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

Virulency

Table 10: Exposure to Virulency

Exposure_Vi

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	51	65.4	65.4	65.4
	Medium Exposure	24	30.8	30.8	96.2
	High Exposure	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

The Vi component included 9 items that measured the final stage of Athens Violentization Theory; namely Virulency. Here, successful violent encounters and the community's fear reaction of the young person results in a growing reputation and personal identity of "unmitigated violence". The majority of the sample (65%) indicated minimum exposure to virulency, whilst thirty one present reported medium levels of exposure and only 4% said that they have experience high levels of virulency in their own lives.

Overall exposure to Violentization

Table 11: Overall Exposure to Violentization

Exposure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Minimum Exposure	4	5.1	5.1	5.1
	Medium Exposure	64	82.1	82.1	87.2
	High Exposure	10	12.8	12.8	100.0
	Total	78	100.0	100.0	

The Violent Performances (VP) component was re-constituted into 3 items measuring levels of experimentation with violence and violent acts as a defensive measure. The majority of the sample (87%) indicated high levels of experimentation with violent performances and the rest (15%) reported medium exposure. Table 11 reflects the overall exposure to violentization based on the average of the various components that constitute the Violent Socialization Scale. Out of the n = 78 valid responses captured, eighty two percent reported medium exposure to violent socialization during middle to late childhood. Note thatthirteen present of the overall sample indicated high levels of exposure to violentization and the rest (5%) reported minimum exposure.

Discussion

Much research work has been done on the deleterious effects of child abuse, with established links to later delinquency in youth (Smith & Thornberry, 1995), aggression and violence (Maas, Herrenkohl, & Sousa, 2008; Stouthamer-Loeber, Loeber,Homish, & Wei, 2001 in Sousa et al, 2011). According to Sousa et al, children's exposure to violence can lead to short- and longer term outcomes of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems during adolescence, including delinquency, status offenses, and perpetration of violence (Curie, 2006; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Herrenkohl et al., 2008 in Sousa et al, 2011).Furthermore, studies indicate that the risk to become a violent offender is significantly higher in persons with a background of childhood victimization (e.g. Scarpa& Haden, 2006; Widom, 1989 in Sommers, et al forthcoming). Much less is known of the mechanism of socialization that lead to problem behaviour, delinquency andviolence in middle to late childhood. For me, the question that remains unsolved is why some individuals, who grow up in an adverse violent environment, develop robust propensities for aggressive behaviour, while others do not?

Overall Exposure to Violentization

The study found that most respondents (82%) reported medium exposure to the four stages of the violent socialization process during middle to late childhood, which supports the underlying Process of Violentization Theory in the South African sample. These findings suggest thatAfrican youth living in high-violence communities in Cape Town, are exposed to a four stage violentization process, which generates a higher risk for violent offending behavior as they transition into late child and- early adulthood. This study mirrors the tendency of 15 - 25 year olds committing more crime than any other comparable age group (Holtzhausen & Heath, 2014). This curve, which for individuals typically peaks in the late teen years, highlights the tendency for crime to be committed during the offender's younger years and to decline as age advances" (Blumstein, 1995: 3 in Holtzhausen & Heath, 2014). This is supported by the fact that more than half (51%) of the sample had been imprisoned at some point during their lifetime for violent crime.In the literature this phenomena is known as 'criminal trajectories'. Criminal trajectory research makes a distinction between Life Course Persistent (LCP) offenders and Adolescence Limited (AL) offenders (Moffit & Caspi, 2001).

AL offenders will engage in criminal behaviour for the duration of adolescence and will then cease such activities. The criminal behaviour of LCP offenders is, according to Moffitt (cited in Blokland *et al,* 2005), rooted in early childhood factors: neurological difficulties and failing parent-child relationships that set a small number of individuals on a life path of anti-social behaviour. The utility of the findings of this study in particular is that they offer us a way to distinguish between types of violent offenders (AL vs. LCP) and its potential usefulness for risk classification and intervention work. According to Jarjour& Triplett, Athens' theory of violentization offers a way to make distinctions among violent young offenders by examining the social experiences of offenders (2003).One could argue that not all violent offenders are equally violent, given the fact that only 5 – 8 % of juveniles engaging in violent crime actually commit serious forms of violence (Elliot &Tolan, 1999 in Athens et al, 2003).

The difficulty with predictors of youth offending is that they are not effective at distinguishing between youth who commit violent offences (AL) and the more dangerous violent perpetrator (LCP). What is significant for me in the South African study is the thirteen percent (N = 10) of the respondent sample who measured high levels of overall exposure to the violentization process. Could these young offenders in the study potentially become what Athens calls "dangerous violent criminals" and Moffit views as "Life Course Persistent" distinct from the other violent offenders in the study? The answer to this salient question takes us beyond traditional predictors of violent offending to the social experiences of youth. The four stages of violentization measured in the South African sample will now be discussed in more detail.

Violent Subjugation

Violent subjugation is the experience of being forced to acquiesce to the control of an authority figure from one's primary group. In the South African sample it became clear that all of the respondents (n = 78) were forced to obey commands and show respect through the use of coercive and retaliatory violence or the threat of violence.

For me, Athens' model of violentization delineates a more detailed understanding of the presumed socialization process that could lead to delinquency and perpetration of violence during adolescence by providing us with an initial marker called violent subjugation. Violent subjugation could be seen as an individual-level risk factor that predicts violent juvenile offending. In other words, children who are exposed to violent subjugation from an authority figure in the primary care group during middle to late childhood are more likely to become violent offenders than those who are not. If we want to prevent children from becoming violent offenders we have to minimize what Athens's calls "cruel treatment at the hands of others that produce lasting and dramatic impact on the subsequent course of their lives" (Athens, 2010:27).

Because behavior problems often worsen without treatment (Loeber, 1982) early intervention may be necessary to prevent their continuity. Early intervention is optimal because evidence suggests that interventions provided at the preschool age may be more effective than when children are older (Ruma, Burke, & Thompson, 1996).

Personal Horrification

Personal horrification, occurs when the child hears or sees the violent subjugation of another within the child's primary group like a mother or a sibling. The Personal Horrification subscale indicated that forty one present (41%) of respondents reported high exposure to PH. For me this is significant because this type of exposure is associated with significantly greater behavioral, emotional, and cognitive functioning problems among children, as well as adjustment difficulties that continue into young adulthood (refer; Appel & Holden,1998; Edleson, 1999a; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Lehmann, 2000; Margolin, 1998; O'Leary, Slep, &O'Leary, 2000; Rossman, 2001). Where previously children were thought of as being tangential and disconnected to the violence between their parents, and commonly labelled "silent witnesses" (McIntosh, 2003 in Holt, Buckley & Whelan, 2008), more recent qualitative research has disputed this opinion, finding children dynamic in their efforts to make sense of their experiences, while navigating their way around the complexity and terror intrinsic to domestic violence (McIntosh, 2002 and Mullender et al., 2002 in Holt, et al, 2008).

According to Sousa et al, children's exposure to domestic violence in close interpersonal relationships can lead to short- and longer term outcomes of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems during adolescence, including delinquency, status offenses, and perpetration of violence (Curie, 2006; Ehrensaft et al., 2003; Herrenkohl et al., 2008 in Sousa et al, 2011). In many households in which interpersonal violence occurs, children are present and often witness the physical injuries and emotional pain inflicted on adult victims. Others may not witness the violence directly but are well aware of violence in the home (Fantuzzo, Boruch, Beriama, Atkins, &Marcus, 1997, in Sousa et al, 2011).

There is an evidence-based connection between the exposure to violence, as a victim or a witness, and self-committed aggressive behavior or aggressive tendencies (Halliday-Boykins & Graham, 2001; Köbach, Schaal, & Elbert, 2015). Studies indicate that the risk to become a violent offender is significantly higher in persons with a background of childhood victimization (e.g. Scarpa & Haden, 2006; Widom, 1989, in Sommers et al, forthcoming). Given the high response rate (41%) in the South African sample to PH one could argue that personal horrification is a central socialization component in the lives of South African youth living in two high violence communities in Cape Town; Gugulethu and Khayelitsha. Although Athens's model makes it clear that children forced to endure personal horrification do not necessarily turn to violent behavior, it does appear to prepare the conditions for the development of aggressive behavior as children transition to adolescence.

Violent Coaching

In the South African sample, 25% of respondents indicated high exposure to being coached by a significant other from the primary group on how to behave in situations of conflict. This finding support conventional theorist, like Eron (1997) and Kalmus (1984), who rightly view the genesis of family aggression as the parents. Accordingly, young individuals who see violence in their family being rewarded learn to resolve frustrations and conflicts with family members through violence (Kalmus, 1984). The challenge with the above models is that most children who experience abuse in their families of origin will not perpetrate intimate partner violence in the future, and some people who seemingly never experience abuse in their families of origin will abuse their partner (Widom, 1989).

The inconsistent outcomes of childhood maltreatment have puzzled researchers for some time (i.e. Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Loeber & Henry, 1998; Lewis, Shanock, Pincus & Glaser, 1079; Weeks & Widom, 1998; Widom, 1998). Though research has established a number of factors useful for predicting violent offending behaviour, their ability to identify the 5 – 8% who commits the more serious forms of violence are limited. Could Violent Coaching be the missing component that would explain why some children become violent and others do not?

Based on the findings of this study in particular, one could postulate that children exposed to violence in their families may learn the capacity to become violent, but that capacity does not necessarily turn into violence unless the child is coached by a significant other to use violence to win a conflict situation. Athens' model of violentization and the findings of this study make it clear that children forced to endure Violent Subjugation and Personal Horrification do not necessarily turn to violent behaviour, but with the addition of Violent Coaching the stage is set for later ultra-violent behavior.

Violent Performances

According to Athens (1989, 2003) the third stage of the violentization process, that of Violent Performances is marked when the subject acts in a violent way when provoked. Violent Coaching have trained the individual to behave cruelly and this behavior fosters benefits and survival strategies found through Violent Performances. It is significant to note that the majority of the South African sample (87%) indicated high levels of experimentation with violent performances. This finding provides an evidence-based connection between the violent socialization process propounded by Athens' and, aggressive behaviour or tendencies in middle to late adolescence. Violent Performances and the intrinsic motivation and reward to act violently explain whythe risk to become a violent offender is significantly higher in persons with a background of childhood victimization (e.g. Scarpa & Haden, 2006; Widom, 1989 in Sommers et al, forthcoming). This is also consistent with research that recognizes the important role that abuse has in increasing the risk of future violent offending (Widom & Ames, 1994; Weeks & Widom 1998; Kaufman & Widom, 1999).

Virulency

A successful violent performance is normally followed by a social reaction, which cues the final phase of the violentization process – Virulency (Athens, 2003). Here the persons close to the subject will react to the violent performance of the subject and thus shape the subjects' perception that others now view him or her differently. Athens notes "the subject is ready to attack people physically with serious intention of gravely harming or killing them with minimal or less minimal provocation on their part" (p79). Thesubject has become a dangerous violent offender. In the South African study only 4% (n = 3) of respondents indicated that they have experienced high levels of virulency in their own lives.The majority of the sample (65%) indicated minimum exposure to virulency, whilst thirty one present reported medium levels of exposure.

Previously, I asked "if some of the young offenders in this study could potentially become what Athens calls "dangerous violent criminals" and Moffit views as "Life Course Persistent" distinct from the other violent offenders in the study?"Because standardized processes of validation yielded concurrent support of the underlying theory of violentization in the South African sample, we can readily distinguish between violent youth offenders and dangerous violent youth offenders.Only a very small portion (4%) of the subjects in this study met the theoretical criteria for dangerous violent offenders. For me this suggests a meaningful way to identify those offenders at risk of committing serious predatory violence in their respective communities and those who will not. This also supports the notion that not all violent offenders are equally violent and that there exists a class of "dangerous violent offenders" distinct from other violent offenders.

Limitations of Current Study and Future Directions

This study has two important limitations. Firstly, the sample size (n = 78) was relatively small and geographically limited to only two high violence communities in the Western Cape. It would be of interest to assess larger samples of violent young offenders from more geographic areas in the Western Cape in order to test Athens' theory of violentization more robustly in multiple settings.

A second but related limitation is the fact that only violent young offenders were interviewed and assessed for this study. To reveal and test the underlying structure of the VSS, a comparison group of young non-offending participants could have been constructed. Group differences could theoretically have shown young violent offenders scoring higher than the young non-offending participants. In future research, group differences should be tested to enhance the reliability of the VSS in South Africa. This study raised an additional question not adequately addressed by this theory or due to the uniqueness of this point of view, anywhere else. What should the response of the South African Criminal Justice System be for those offenders that experience all four stages of violentization? Should they be incarcerated indefinitely with no possible parole until death? Should their names be published on a national register for ultra-violent offenders in order to protect society against them? This is a fascinating and highly socially relevant set of questions that can only be answered with systematic empirical research.

We need more ethnographic, statistical, historical and cross-national data and analysis to test and refine our understanding in which cultures, communities and context interrelate to produce or mitigate violentization.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the social process of violentization of South African youth living in two high-violence communities in Cape Town; Gugulethu and Khayelitsha making use of Athens' Process of Violentization Theory (Athens, 1992, 1997, 2003). The outcomes of this investigation indicated that Athens' model of violentization can be measured quantitatively with a South African sample in a reliable manner. The subscales measuring the underlying theory of violentization manifested excellent internal consistency in the South African sample with a Cronbach alpha of more than 0.9 in most cases. In addition, standardized processes of validation yielded concurrent support of the underlying theory in the South African sample. Though research has established a number of factors that are useful in predicting those at risk for violent offending, their ability to identify the 5 – 8% who commit more serious forms of dangerous violence is notoriously limited. Does Athens' theory of violentization help us identify the most serious violent offenders in our communities? The analyses presented here, while admittedly based on a smallish research sample (n = 78), suggests that Athens' conceptualization of the process of violentization may indeed allow for useful distinctions between different types of violent young offenders.

Athens' theory of violentization offers a way to make distinctions among violent juvenile offenders by examining the social experiences of offenders. As such it provides a very useful classification tool for identifying "dangerous violent offenders" distinct from other violent offenders. It goes beyond the old-style risk assessment tools of the day where "at risk" is based on traditional community, school, family and individual factors identified in literature and common practice. Furthermore, research findings from this study suggest that treatment interventions may focus most usefully on either preventing coercive child rearing practices or providing prosocial alternatives to violent coaching. This is based on fact that violent coaching appears to set the stage for the potential to develop later physical aggression Although it may be premature to create a typology of violence for South African low income communities, cross-generational cycles of violence may be reduced by developing and implementing programs to break the cycle violence.

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