



## SHORT COMMUNICATION

### Book Review

**Title:** Crime, Violence and Injury in South Africa: 21st Century Solutions for Child Safety

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Injury remains a leading cause of the global burden of disease amongst children. When considering the current figures on child injury mortality in South Africa, it is clear that child safety is under threat. Child injuries are predictable, preventable and often occur in or within close proximity to the home or school – places that should be safe for children. Crime, Violence and Injury in South Africa: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Solutions for Child Safety provides a concise yet comprehensive discussion of intentional and unintentional child injury in South Africa. The Review's sixteen chapters flow in a logical order from unintentional injury to intentional injury in the home and school, alcohol-related injury and, finally the psycho-social impact of trauma and violence. The chapters are authored by noted experts in the fields of, amongst others, psychology, sociology, education and public health.

The first four chapters explore unintentional injury, specifically pedestrian safety, burns, lead poisoning and falls. The epidemiology, as well as individual and contextual risk factors associated with each type of injury is discussed in the light of current research. The authors critically discuss current social, psychological, environmental and technological interventions as well as policy and other regulatory interventions that pertain to each type of injury. The authors provide insightful suggestions for how these policies and interventions can be strengthened and made more effective. Regrettably, key additional sources of child injury, namely drowning, suffocation and other forms of poisoning are not discussed. These forms of injury are highly relevant in South Africa and should have been included in the Review.

The discussion on intentional injury is subdivided into child maltreatment, sexual violence, bullying, violence in schools, gang involvement, children deprived of their liberty by the state as well as suicidal behaviour. The chapter on child maltreatment examines the limitations of current child maltreatment interventions as well as legislative and institutional frameworks that are aimed at children. The authors present a highly insightful discussion of the ethic of care as the ideal framework for child maltreatment prevention programmes. By strengthening caring relationships amongst adults and amongst caregivers and children, the well-being of children and families can be enhanced leading to healthier communities.

Sexual violence is discussed over two chapters. The authors describe the social context and psychological consequences of child sexual abuse and present a critical discussion of the programmes and policies that address child sexual abuse. In particular, the lack of integrated services at health facilities, stigmatisation and insensitive caregiver responses are highlighted as key obstacles to effective treatment. Moreover, despite the numerous interventions, policies and legislation

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that serve to protect children against sexual violence, there is still a great need to improve the implementation thereof. The link between sexual violence and HIV infection is also discussed.

The discussion on intentional injury continues with two chapters on intentional injury in schools. Bullying is discussed, with a particular emphasis on the nature and effectiveness of anti-bullying programmes. The authors highlight the need for theory-driven, data-driven and thoroughly evaluated anti-bullying programmes. The extent and nature of school violence in South Africa in general are discussed, with the emphasis being laid on the need to develop safe schools. A critical discussion is presented of violence prevention initiatives in schools as well as legislation and policies that address school violence. The authors conclude with a number of practical recommendations for further research and interventions.

Child gang involvement is also discussed. The authors juxtapose gang involvement prevention, disengagement and suppression. The reader is reminded that prevention remains the ideal way to address child gang involvement. An extensive range of anti-gang initiatives are discussed. Ultimately, the authors recommend inter-agency cooperation, the rigorous evaluation of interventions as well as more initiatives that are aimed at girls.

The chapter on children deprived of their liberty by the state provides an insightful look at the extent and nature of rights violations against children in places of detention. This is a unique chapter, as it deals with a topical issue that receives limited research attention. The author uses legislation and case studies to explore the issue. Figures on child deaths in custody is presented and critically discussed, serving as an eye opener of the true extent of the issue in South Africa.

The chapter on suicide provides a comprehensive look at suicidal behaviour amongst children and adolescents. Comparative epidemiological trends in suicidal behaviour are discussed with the aim to elucidate how to develop effective prevention initiatives and policy priorities. An in-depth discussion is also presented of suicide risk factors, emphasising the multidimensional and multifactorial nature thereof. Ultimately, a nationwide prevention programme is argued to be the ideal way to facilitate preventative action at all levels of society.

The discussion on alcohol-related injury focuses on alcohol and drug use amongst children and adolescents as well as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). The extent and nature of substance use is discussed, with particular emphasis on the role of substance use as a major contributor to intentional and unintentional injury, violence and crime. An in-depth discussion is presented of the numerous risk factors associated with substance use, as well as universal, selected and indicated prevention strategies. The chapter on FASD presents an interesting discussion on the topic. The extent, nature and social context of FASD is explored. A critical discussion is presented of current FASD interventions and policy as well as the influential role government can play in addressing FASD.

The Review aptly concludes with a discussion on the psycho-social effects of trauma and violence. Child traumatisations are explored, with the focus mainly on documented psycho-social impacts. The risk and protective factors associated with adverse psycho-social reactions to trauma and violence is also explored. An extensive discussion is presented of intervention approaches, highlighting the lack of local data regarding the developmental aspects of trauma, risk and protective factors, as well as effective intervention approaches.

Ultimately, *Crime, Violence and Injury in South Africa: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Solutions for Child Safety*, emphasises the importance of the prevention of child injury. The book succeeds in achieving its objectives, namely: describing the extent and consequences of priority child injury problems; identifying significant downstream and upstream risk and protective factors; highlighting injury prevention contributions that may result from environmental, social and technological strategies and interventions; as well as proposing prevention priorities and consequent research and policy imperatives.

Crime, Violence and Injury in South Africa: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Solutions for Child Safety is the only publication that is currently available that presents an in-depth discussion of the existing literature on child injury and safety. The Review successfully captures, not only the causes and risk factors of child injury, but also provides practical recommendations regarding prevention and treatment. Consequently, it provides an excellent foundation for future action in the form of intervention, policy and research. The intended audience for this book is anyone that is involved in the public health sector or who works with children, including students, educators and policy makers. The content of the Review is very recent and topical and it is therefore expected to remain relevant for some time.