

## THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY: OVERVIEW AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

The article provides an overview of the main interventions proposed in the South African National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) as well as a discussion of the aims and principles of the strategy in the context of sociological/criminological theories of crime, philosophical theories of punishment, and patterns and strategies for controlling crime in Western societies. The main themes addressed are: crime and human rights, crime control vs. crime prevention, crime as security issue vs. crime as social issue, retributive justice vs. restorative justice, and community-based crime prevention and criminal justice.

### INTRODUCTION

The National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) was launched in 1996, in the words of Acting President Thabo Mbeki (1996), "as part of government's endeavour to eradicate the unacceptable levels of crime in our country". As such it is a historically important document, being the first attempt to "establish a comprehensive policy framework which addresses all policy areas which impact on crime and to develop a common vision around crime prevention" and at the same time proposing a fundamental paradigm shift in the handling of crime.

Although the strategy has received wide journalistic coverage, the same does not hold true for academically oriented publications (e.g. Shaw 1997). This article aims to: (i) give a brief overview of the main interventions proposed in the strategy (ii) discuss the aims and principles which underly the strategy and (iii) to contextualise and evaluate the strategy against the background of relevant theoretical insights as well as international patterns and strategies of crime control. Although this broader context is not specifically addressed in the NCPS, the aim is to indicate that such linkages (intentionally or unintentionally) do exist. In the following discussion the second and third aims will largely be integrated.

### OVERVIEW

The interventions against crime proposed by the NCPS centres on four pillars and a list of high-priority crimes. Central to the strategy are the following four areas of concern or **pillars**, each incorporating specific **national programmes** (16 in total):

**Pillar 1: The criminal justice process:** The broad aim of this area is the transformation of the departments involved in the criminal justice process to advance the **legitimacy and effectiveness** of the process. More specifically this entails national programmes aimed at: re-engineering the criminal justice process (e.g. streamlining, new systems, training personnel); criminal justice information management; crime information and management; prosecutorial policy; appropriate community sentencing; diversion programmes for minor offenders; secure care for juveniles; rationalisation of legislation; and a victim empowerment programme.

**Pillar 2: Reducing crime through environmental design:** In this case the aim is to **reduce the opportunities for crime** through national programmes which focus on: design and maintenance

of the physical environment; the development of a new national identification system; motor vehicle regulation; the reduction of opportunities and increasing detection and apprehension of persons involved in corruption and commercial crime.

**Pillar 3: Public values and education:** It is envisaged that crime levels can be reduced by creating a moral climate and attitudes opposed to crime and violence among the public as well as promoting a greater willingness of citizens to take responsibility for crime. This pillar encompasses two national programmes: a public education programme and a school-based education programme.

**Pillar 4: Trans-national crime:** It is realised that in an era of globalisation efforts should also be made to limit the influence of international and regional criminal syndicates. Two national programmes, transnational organised crime and border control and ports of entry, target this area of growing international concern.

Against a background of limited resources it was also decided to prioritise specific crime categories which have the most damaging effects on communities. These are: crime involving firearms; organised crime; white-collar crime and corruption; gender violence and crimes against children; violence associated with inter-group or political differences; vehicle theft and hijacking; and paramilitary activity. It is envisaged however, that this list will be supplemented in the light of specific regional and local needs.

## AIMS, PRINCIPLES AND CONTEXT

In what follows an attempt is made to analyse the NCPS in terms of the aims and underlying principles as indicated in the policy document itself. This will be supplemented by insights drawn from the broader context of sociological/criminological theories of crime, philosophical theories of punishment, and patterns and strategies for controlling crime in Western societies.

The analysis will concentrate on the following themes: crime and human rights, crime control vs. crime prevention, crime as security issue vs. crime as social issue, retributive justice vs. restorative justice, and community-based crime prevention and criminal justice. These themes form part of the paradigm shift in crime prevention proposed by the NCPS. Another area of major concern addressed by the NCPS, i.e. the efficiency and effectiveness of the criminal justice system, will not be treated separately, but will be included in the discussion where deemed relevant.

- **Crime and human rights**

Part of the paradigm shift envisaged in the NCPS is viewing safety as a basic need. This involves "a shift from seeing safety and security as an enabling condition for economic growth and development, towards the realisation that it is an essential precondition to the protection of rights, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (Department of Justice: 7).

It should be remembered, however, that the Bill of Rights enshrined in the South African Constitution forms the background against which the NCPS must be implemented. In practise this implies that certain crime prevention measures may be rejected or at least be debated due to conflicts with the Bill of Rights. The current public debates on the death penalty, bail for apprehended offenders, the right of prisoners to vote in the parliamentary election and police violence against suspects are four cases in point which emphasise the fact that the ground rules of the 'crime control game' have changed. The fact that these issues are debated indicates, however, that the ground rules are not always accepted by the public or at least they are

interpreted differently. From this perspective the "common vision" envisaged by the NCPS and referred to in the introduction is clearly more a vision than a reality.

- **From crime control to crime prevention**

It is accepted in the NCPS that the criminal justice system largely deals with crimes that have already been committed and in practise it thus reacts to crime. This aspect of handling crime is defined as **crime control** (pp. 4-7) and is viewed as a short-term process.

In terms of current theories of punishment<sup>1</sup> this can be approached from the angle of **deterrence** or by posing the question as to what extent people will refrain from criminal behaviour due to punishment or the threat of punishment. Of relevance here is one of the main findings of deterrence research, i.e. that the most crucial dimension of punishment which has an effect on levels of offending is the **certainty** that offenders will be apprehended and punished, which places the spotlight on the effectiveness of the criminal justice process (see Liska, 1981 for a review of relevant research).

As stated above one major focus of Pillar 1 of the NCPS is improving the effectiveness of the criminal justice process, through, among other things, the successful investigation, prosecution and punishment of offenders. Presently this is an area of major concern as there has been a decline in the conviction rates for various crime categories since 1992/93 (Oppler & Louw 1997:E7-E12). The current problem is partially due to incompetent investigation by the police and inexperience on the part of prosecutors.

A major thrust of the NCPS, however, is the long-term strategy of **preventing crime** before it actually happens. Although deterrence, especially general deterrence, also holds implications for prevention, various other aspects of the strategy are relevant: (i) One of the aims of the national programme for victim empowerment and support proposed as part of Pillar 1 is crime prevention. It is argued that empowerment of victims will reduce repeat victimisation and that support for victims will address dissatisfaction which often leads to vengeance and cycles of violence and crime. The lead agency to develop a national programme for victim empowerment is the Department of Welfare and some steps have already been taken in this direction, including a national conference in 1998 (see various articles in *Social Work Practice* 1:98).

(ii) Pillar 2: Reducing crime through environmental design is wholly aimed at crime prevention. Viewed from an international perspective the attention given to this approach places South Africa on par with other Western societies regarding approaches to crime prevention (Garland, 1996). On a theoretical level this links with the influential **theory of situational crime prevention** which forms part of the broader control perspective (Clarke 1995).<sup>2</sup> Assuming that criminals rationally calculate the costs and benefits before actually committing crimes, it is argued that by **limiting the opportunities for crime** (victims, targets and facilitators, e.g. guns), thereby increasing the effort and risk and reducing the rewards of crime, many crimes can be prevented. (iii) Pillar 3: Public values and education rests on the assumptions that crime can be prevented through **self-control and public participation in crime prevention**, e.g. community policing, which can also be linked to the control perspective referred to above. Theoretically the importance of **lack of self-control** is currently associated with the work of Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990). Starting from a rational choice perspective, they argue that crime results from unrestrained human tendencies to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and that unless people are properly socialised, mainly in the family, they will tend to criminality. (The aspect of public participation will be discussed separately - see 'The shift to a community based criminal justice system' below). (iii) Pillar 4: Trans-national crime, which also devotes attention to the international dimension of crime prevention.

- **Crime as security issue vs. crime as social issue**

Traditionally the main approach to crime in South Africa has been to view it as a security issue which mainly involves the security services. The NCPS proposes a shift in emphasis toward the view that **crime is fundamentally a social issue**. Two aspects of this view will be discussed, i.e. the social causes of crime and the multi-agency approach in handling crime.

Chapter 4 of the NCPS gives an overview of various factors which are seen to cause crime in South Africa. For present purposes a full discussion of that analysis is not necessary. What is relevant is that the factors mentioned all fall within the social domain (including economic and political factors). A further relevant distinction is that between "root causes" and "enabling factors". The NCPS mainly deals with the enabling factors such as deficiencies in the criminal justice system and limiting the opportunities for crime referred to above.

The question thus remains: **what about the root causes of crime which all are mainly of a social nature?** In this regard it is important to remember that the NCPS, and safety and security more generally, is but one aspect of the more comprehensive governmental policy to promote growth and development. The NCPS was drawn up with full knowledge that it will have to go hand in hand with economic development, as underdevelopment is related to the crimes committed by large sections of the population.

Perhaps the most thorny issue here is the **role of welfare provision in limiting the crime rate**. Although the welfare state did not succeed in bringing crime levels down as expected, this does not necessarily imply that welfare provision is irrelevant to crime reduction. Downes (1994), in a recent analysis of youth crime in Europe, reaches the conclusion that criminal justice policies introduced by governments make little difference to crime levels. This is not only due to the fact that crime levels are mainly influenced by social, economic and political factors, but importantly also by **the quality of the supporting services which surrounds the justice system**. It thus appears as if crime is contained more effectively by a **social approach**, implying "policies which attempt to achieve high levels of well paid, high productivity jobs, ensure a minimum wage, redistribute wealth through progressive taxation and provide adequate educational, health and social services to their citizens. This, it appears, promotes social cohesion, reduces social marginalization and limits status frustration". Unfortunately in the present economic climate and demographic composition of South Africa such policies are highly problematical.<sup>3</sup>

Also implied in the emphasis on crime as a social issue is the **handling of crime within a multi-agency approach**. This refers to the view that in the light of the multi-faceted nature of the crime problem all relevant 'role-players' should be involved in an integrated effort to reduce crime levels. This implies a shift away from an exclusive criminal justice approach towards the inclusion of, not only other relevant departments in central government (e.g. Welfare, Health, Home Affairs), but also provincial and local government as well as civil society.

While this theoretical perspective is currently in vogue among Left Realists,<sup>4</sup> in government circles it was applied as part of the welfare approach to crime which dominated in Europe during the 1950s and 1960s (O'Malley & Palmer 1996). According to Gilling (1994), it was also reaffirmed during the 1980s as part of government strategy to prevent crime in Britain. On the basis of his own research in Britain he has expressed certain reservations regarding the multi-agency approach. One issue relates to differences in interpretation of what 'crime prevention' means – these differences usually amount to a confrontation between proponents of 'situational' approaches which focus on limiting the opportunities for crime and 'social approaches' which focus on economic development and welfare provision. These debates are often exacerbated by

political differences, inter-agency stereotypes and ignorance regarding the motives of other agencies. 'Social approaches' are also often marginalised due to short-term methodological considerations of monitoring and evaluation - the issue being that 'social approaches' are mostly long-term and their effectiveness more difficult to evaluate.

- **A state-centred justice system vs. a victim-centred restorative justice system**

Reference has already been made above to the focus on victim empowerment in the NCPS. This focus should further be placed in the context of two of the national programmes proposed as part of Pillar 1 of the NCPS, i.e. appropriate community sentencing and diversion programmes for minor offenders which entail, among other things, a shift away from retribution as punishment (see note 1) towards a system of restorative justice.

According to Zehr (1996), **retributive justice** in its "pure" form is characterised by an adversarial and authoritarian process between the state and the offender. The aim is to establish the offender's guilt, followed by the administration of pain (punishment). The theory forms part of the **liberal** tradition, emphasising the rational, autonomous individual who is held responsible for her/his behaviour and must receive his or her 'just deserts' on transgressing the law. **Restorative justice**, on the other hand, is characterised by a reconciliatory process involving the victim and offender along with the community and state with the aim of establishing needs and obligations. As such it importantly provides for **restitution/repair** to be made to the victim by the offender. Restorative justice forms part of the **communitarian** tradition, which opposes the individualistic slant of liberalism and emphasises interdependency characterised by mutual obligation and trust, which are interpreted as a matter of group loyalty rather than individual convenience (Braithwaite 1989:86).

In criminological theory Braithwaite recently gave a theoretical rationale for the practice of reparation in his theory of **reintegrative shaming** (Braithwaite 1989; Dignan 1994). Extending labelling theory, Braithwaite argues that offenders should be reintegrated into society and not stigmatised and rejected (disintegrative shaming) as often is the case in a retributive approach. Reintegrative shaming entails the process of showing disapproval for the offender's deed(s) by law-abiding citizens, while maintaining a relationship of respect and ultimately forgiveness. It is important to note that reintegration only takes place after repentance by the offender and is accompanied by reparation.

In effect the above implies a bifurcation of the criminal justice process into a 'hard' and 'soft' end. Serious offences will be dealt with in the 'traditional' manner by the state and in terms of 'traditional' theories of punishment, e.g. retribution, deterrence, incapacitation and possibly rehabilitation. Less serious offenders, on the other hand, will be dealt with in terms of restitution and rehabilitation. In the latter context the Department of Welfare and NGOs concerned with child welfare and rehabilitation will play a major role in as far as juveniles are concerned.

- **The shift towards community-based crime prevention and criminal justice**

An important theme common to the three trends discussed above is the acceptance in the NCPS of the principle that there should be **greater community involvement in crime prevention and the criminal justice process**. This can be explained by distinguishing between the three sectors of the criminal justice system, i.e. policing, the judiciary and correctional services.

As far as **policing** is concerned it is envisaged as part of the public education programmes in Pillar 3 of the NCPS that members of the public should involve themselves in community policing structures and ultimately practise self-policing (self-control). Linked to this is also the emphasis placed on greater awareness by the private sector and members of the general public of

measures to be taken to protect themselves from victimisation (situational crime prevention) - Pillars 2 and 3.

The shift towards community involvement in the **judicial process** presently entails the extension of the use of assessors to include lay members of communities and also the institution of community courts. Community courts are intimately linked to the idea of restorative justice discussed above. Other options would be the institution of a jury system and lay magistrates (Omar 1996).

Regarding the **correctional process** there is a shift towards deinstitutionalisation and diversion of less serious offenders (especially juveniles). Deinstitutionalisation refers to the use of community-based alternatives to prison sentences, while diversion refers to dealing with offenders outside the (state) justice system altogether. In practice both options largely entail the same programmes, e.g. community service, empowerment schemes. Another option here is to receive inputs from the community, especially victims, when decisions regarding parole must be made in the case of prisoners.

The above is in line with what Cohen (1985) referred to as the movement to destructure the control of deviance, which became influential in Western industrialised nations from the 1960s. From that perspective it may be described as a transformation of three dimensions of the control system which developed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These dimensions are: a movement towards state involvement in and professionalisation of control, as well as the segregation (incarceration) of deviants from society. In its most radical form the destructuring movement proposes a reversal of these trends and aims to establish a totally informal control system in the hands of the community - no state and professional involvement and no incarceration. As is the case in other Western societies, what is proposed in the NCPS does not entail such a total destructuring as radicals envisage.

Also of relevance here are the discourses of privatisation of services and responsibilisation of citizens (Garland 1996; O'Malley & Palmer 1996). These recent discourses and associated policies aim to curtail the role of the state and emphasise the point that citizens ought to take greater responsibility for their own lives.

The movement towards community-based crime prevention and criminal justice raises at least four questions. Firstly the question can be asked to what extent the state can relinquish its power to the community in an era where crime has become an issue high on the political agendas of many countries. It would appear that in the last analysis 'the community' expects the state to handle the thorny issue of crime prevention. In a perceptive analysis of current trends in Britain, Garland (1996) shows that the British government is constantly pressurised by the public to adopt a strong law and order approach despite the rhetoric of community-based alternatives.

A second related issue is the capacity or otherwise of communities to become involved in crime prevention. This is especially true for areas which experience the highest rates of crime and violence. Not only do they lack the financial means to afford security devices and services, but in many instances the social integration for concerted action is also absent. In addition to this, involvement in organised community crime prevention endeavours also involves the real threat of danger. The issue of social integration or lack thereof raises the third question: what does 'community' mean? Many of the community-based interventions presume consensus within the community, while the reality often is the opposite. It is highly questionable whether consensus is always an obtainable goal in contemporary societies and this places a question mark behind the attainability of the NCPS's aim to provide a "common vision around crime prevention". A related issue is the tendency to romanticise the community. Community values and traditions are

not intrinsically good. Communal action can also take in the form of vigilantism and local values may clash with central values of the democratic state, e.g. the South African constitution and specifically the section on human rights.

A fourth issue which has received extensive academic analysis is the problems associated with community-based alternatives to imprisonment. Some of the main issues are the discretionary powers of those in control of the diversion process, the implications for the principle of due process of the law and the retention of negative effects, e.g. labelling which these programmes are supposedly to avoid. (See Muntingh, 1995 for an overview of the major issues involved.)

## CONCLUSION

The NCPS can be seen as an effort to move away from the more state-centred and authoritarian 'law and order' approach of the previous regime in South Africa. As such it is an effort to forge a link with trends in western thinking regarding the handling of crime and criminal justice in general. It is doubtful, however, whether the NCPS will provide a common vision around crime prevention as is the intention of the government. As is the case in other Western societies, it can be expected that there will be continuous pressure to revert to control measures associated with the 'law and order' approach. This can currently be seen in the debates on safety and security between political parties in South Africa and also public opinion on the issues involved.

Although it is commonly assumed that a major function of the criminal justice system is the reduction of crime levels, it can also be viewed from other perspectives, e.g. punishment can be seen as culturally expressive (Garland 1991). Seen in this light the NCPS is not only an instrument for safety and security, but certainly reflects the type of culture the government would wish to develop in South Africa, e.g. the values associated with human rights and community involvement. The dilemma, however, is that criminality and public reactions to criminality often tend to subvert these values.

## NOTES

The article is based on a paper presented at the 1998 Congress of the South African Sociological Association, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg.

<sup>1</sup> In the context of criminal law the theories of punishment are philosophical views on the justifications for punishment and ultimately the purpose of criminal justice. In discussions of these theories a distinction between absolute and relative theories is often made. Absolute theories see punishment as an end in itself - the dominant approach currently being the idea of retribution. Although the word has various senses, 'retribution' has recently been associated with the liberal tradition, emphasising the rational, autonomous individual who is held responsible for her/his behaviour and who must receive 'just deserts' on transgressing the law. The administration of punishment redresses the imbalance created by the injustice which accompanies the offending behaviour. In terms of the relative theories punishment must have utilitarian function. The functions most commonly referred to are: rehabilitation, deterrence (specific deterrence is based on the assumption that punishment will deter the punished offender from further criminal behaviour, while general deterrence is based on the assumption that the threat of punishment will deter the general public from committing possible offences) and incapacitation, e.g. the death penalty or long-term incarceration which limits the capacity of the offender to reoffend (Rabie & Strauss 1981; Snyman 1995; Clarkson & Keating 1994).

<sup>2</sup> The control perspective in criminology and the sociology of deviance is based on the assumption that there is always a possibility that people will deviate from norms, e.g. due to

unsuccessful socialisation or, in terms of the rational choice perspective, due to the greater profitability of deviance relative to conformity. People will thus only conform if they are controlled or, stated differently, lack of control becomes the crucial factor in explaining crime and deviance (Curran & Renzetti 1994).

- <sup>3</sup> Economic development and welfare provision, of course, do not address the issues of white-collar crime and corruption. These offences are intimately linked to the opportunities created by the occupational structure of contemporary economies, more specifically the large proportion of the public working in modern organisations which are the main sites in which these types of offences are committed.
- <sup>4</sup> Left Realism is one approach within the larger Critical/Marxist perspective in criminology. Left Realists are critical, however, of the neo-Marxist position that the basic motive for crime is political and that the solution to the crime problem in capitalist societies lies in the radical transformation of capitalism into communism/socialism. They see this position as idealistic and propose their own realistic solution to the crime problem. This entails, among other things, the reform of capitalist societies and dealing with crime by giving attention to all relevant factors associated with crime (the square of crime: the state and its agencies, informal control/the public, the offender and the victim) in a multi-agency approach (Young 1996).

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## WHAT DO CHILDREN'S HOMES STAFF LET PARENTS DO?: AN INTERNATIONAL COMPARISON

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### ABSTRACT

This article reports the results of an exploratory cross-national study of how the staff of Children's Homes help to maintain parent/child connectedness and what they allow parents to do for their children while they are in out-of-home care. The data were gathered from three Children's Homes in the US and one in South Africa. This cross-national comparison is a rare, if not unique, example of this type of study.

Discussion of the findings from this study includes consideration of possible language and cultural factors influencing the results and highlights some of the challenges in doing cross-national studies that include countries with very different educational and literacy levels. Finally the paper indicates what efforts have been made by the South African Home to respond to the findings and in so doing illustrates the value of comparative research for improved intervention.

### INTRODUCTION

The recently developed family-centred practice paradigm in mental health and disability services emphasises empowerment of parents rather than the psychological treatment of their dysfunction (Johnson, Renauld, Schmidt & Stanek 1998; Stroul 1990). This development is influencing social work and other child- and family-focused occupations including the staff of Children's Homes (Ainsworth 1997; VanderVen & Stuck 1996). From a child welfare values perspective it reflects what Fox Harding (1991) has described as the "modern defence of parents" which calls for professionals to respect the contribution that parents, even abusive and neglectful parents, can make to the care and treatment of their children. This challenges those explanatory models - psychodynamic, behavioural, family systems - that locate the cause of abuse and neglect in parental or family dysfunction and in so doing requires a 'no-blame' approach to working with these families (Ainsworth 1991; Reder, Duncan & Gray 1993; Scott & O'Neil 1996).

This international shift in the approach to families is supported in the South African White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:39-42), which states that "the well being of children depends on the ability of families to function effectively" and that the strategies employed by the welfare system should promote family autonomy, involvement and meaningful participation by families. The *Interim Policy Recommendations* of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Young People at Risk (1996) places equal emphasis on the need for real partnership with and support for families.

Implementation of a more family-centred practice in the residential care system for children is complex and it is important to develop a methodology that will assist and can be used both to assess and generate the changes needed. Ainsworth (1998) and others (Ainsworth & Small 1995) conceptualised, developed and validated a family-centred group care model (FCGC) for practitioners and policy makers involved in the assessment of family-centred practice in group care. The validation process, based on 239 cases, involved Australian and North American

facilities and was theoretically validated using LISREL (Joreskog & Sorbom 1993). The model is based on a four-scale, 59-item, FCGC instrument that measures 3 constructs, namely service availability, parental involvement and staff attitudes (Ainsworth 1997). Only two of the scales (the arrangements for maintaining contact scale of 24 items and the parental decision making scale of 16 items) are used in this study.

Studies of what parents of children in care are allowed to do for their children by Children's Home staff are absent from the literature on out-of-home care as are studies of staff practices in Children's Homes. This and the fact that this is a cross-national study makes this research rare, and possibly even unique. Empowering parents and family members so that they can safely reassume responsibility is clearly central to family reunification. Practices that are designed to facilitate family reunification are increasingly part of the philosophy of most progressive children's services (Ainsworth & Maluccio 1998) and include programmes such as Family Empowerment Training (FEP) (Struhsaker, Schaltz & Bane 1991), which point out that parents of children in out-of-home care must:

- .... (1) sustain involvement with and responsibility for their children if at all possible; (2) feel empowered in their role of care takers in order to preserve and possibly reunify their family; (3) become advocates for their children's needs; and (4) believe that they can be good parents for their child while they are in care (Struhsaker, Schaltz & Bane 1991:671-672).

Clearly, what parents are encouraged and allowed to do by Children's Home staff for their children while they are in care is at the centre of empowerment and family reunification strategies (Ainsworth 1996) alongside the role of child care staff in using everyday life events as opportunities to teach parenting skills (Ainsworth 1996).

In this paper the data are drawn from four residential care facilities – three in New England and one in South Africa. Because the focus of this paper is on the South African facility, it is sufficient to say that the New England facilities serve both rural and urban communities and have children and youths referred to them by the state welfare and educational facilities. They have between 50 (1) and 100 (2) places, with the third facility catering only for pre-pubescent boys, while the others serve all school-aged children (7 - 18 years).

The South African agency is based in a small town in the Eastern Cape. It serves all neglected and abused children under the age of 18. It has 160 places on three sites. Children and families are referred to the agency by the state child welfare authorities as well by private welfare organisations through the Children's Court system. In addition to this residential care facility, the Home operates a non-residential community-based life skills and vocational skills programme for youth at risk.

For the three New England and one South African facility (n=56) the 59-item FCGC instrument was completed by the total workforce. The New England group care programmes were of comparable size to the South African facility (A = 63, B = 54, C = 52, total = 169). To facilitate the administration of the instrument in South Africa it was translated into Xhosa and respondents completed either the English or Xhosa version according to their preference. Accordingly, of the 56 instruments completed 32 were in English and 24 in Xhosa.

The Cronbach's alpha for the two scales reported on in this paper are .78 for the arrangements for maintaining contact scale (24 items) and .76 for the parental decision making scale (16 items). The 24 items in the first scale ask staff questions about arrangements for maintaining

parent/child connections. The second 16-item scale asks questions about what parents of the children in care are allowed to do for their child. Responses are on a three-, four- or five-point Likert scale with a high score being associated with activities involving parents or being encouraged by staff.

As illustrated in Table 1 the New England sample is similar to the South African sample in terms of number of respondents per agency and their occupational distribution.

**TABLE 1**  
**COMPARISON OF OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS BY AGENCY**

Occupational group	Agency A (n = 76)		Agency B (n = 63)		Agency C (n = 60)		Agency D <sup>1</sup> (n = 56)	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Child care workers	34	44.7	32	50.8	35	58.3	23	41.1
Clinical staff	14	18.4	4	6.3	7	11.7	5	8.9
Educational staff	9	11.8	12	19.0	4	6.7	9	16.1
Administrative staff	11	14.5	10	15.9	10	16.7	8	14.3
Support staff	8	10.5	5	7.9	4	6.7	11	19.6
	76	100.0	63	100.0	60	100.0	56	100.0

<sup>1</sup> = South African

The data analysis consisted of a Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance ANOVA for each scale (Norusis 1993; Pilcher 1990). List-wise deletion of cases occurred and this accounts for the variation of the agency sample size against each scale. The results are presented in Table 2.

**TABLE 2**  
**KRUSKAL-WALLIS ONE-WAY ANOVA OF MAINTAINING CONTACT AND PARENTAL DECISION MAKING SCALE SCORES BY AGENCY**

Agency mean rank percentage score					
	Agency A	Agency B	Agency C	Agency D <sup>1</sup>	H (df = 3)
Contact	109.17 (68 <sup>2</sup> )	88.72 (57)	127.30 (58)	63.35 (23)	23.80 (23.88 <sup>3</sup> )*
Decision	132.84 (68)	85.66 (57)	115.85 (56)	55.12 (29)	41.73 (41.85)*

<sup>1</sup> = South African; <sup>2</sup> = number of cases; <sup>3</sup> = adj. for ties; \*  $p < .001$

The conclusion to be drawn from these results appears to be that there are significant differences in what staff of Children's Homes do to ensure that parent/child connectedness is maintained ( $H = 23.80$ ;  $p < .001$ ) or adjusted for ties ( $H = 23.88$ ;  $p < .001$ ). There are also significant differences between agencies in terms of what staff allow or encourage parents to do for their children while they are in out-of-home care ( $H = 41.73$ ;  $p < .001$ ) or adjusted for ties ( $H = 41.85$ ;  $p < .001$ ). The South African agency scored significantly lower than all the others in terms of the extent to which parental involvement in decision making and parental contact was perceived by the staff who completed the questionnaire. For instance, a quarter of South African respondents did not know how decisions were made within their agency as to what level of

contact was allowed between parent and child, with almost 36% (20) indicating that a points-type system was in use, although the management confirms that this is not the case. A quarter of the staff indicated that the visits were supervised (even if this was not a legal constraint). A quarter of South African respondents also indicated that the parents do not have the right to make decisions about the religious services attended by children in care. A focus group session held with the staff of the South African facilities indicated that this lack of involvement of parents stems from a belief that the parents expect the Home to make decisions for them and do not expect to be consulted. In addition the staff indicated that at times the parents may not "fully understand" the decisions being made.

This is a very limited study and there is need for great caution when considering the results. Methodological concerns also reduce the value of the study. There is a serious problem of missing data, which results in the item ANOVA tests for the different agencies having a sample size that varies from 68 to 23 cases. Especially for the South African respondents the missing data a bearing on important issues. Discussions with the staff team after completion of the questionnaire indicated that some items represented a cultural position on the issues that was foreign to the South Africans – even in translation the items were not readily understood. An example is that the term "reunification" is used extensively in international literature, while South African practice still refers to "reconstruction" work.

The issue of language is also important. The scale was translated independently into Xhosa and the translation checked. The accuracy of the language was confirmed as was the belief that the idiom used was appropriate for the target group. Nevertheless, it later became apparent that the staff of the Home, especially the child care workers, were unfamiliar with the concepts as expressed in the scale. The scale was group administered and there were no requests for clarification at the time of completion, but it did emerge in the focus group and individual interviews that some items had not been clearly understood but respondents had felt it inappropriate to question a questionnaire they described as "official". This highlights the need to ensure that consent to participate is completely informed with appropriate and non-threatening procedures in place for ensuring that the respondents fully understand what they are being asked to do.

Over and above the direct issue of making the scale available in Xhosa, the researchers failed to provide adequately for the lack of familiarity with the questionnaire format. Rating scales of this kind would not be familiar to the staff group in the Home, most of whom do not have educational levels higher than Matric. It was noted that the US respondents who completed the FCGC instrument were more familiar with this type of request and may have been more comfortable with the completion of this kind of scale. It is not possible to determine how this might have influenced the respondents and the shape of the data collected, but there is no doubt that the South African respondents found the format difficult.

The low mean rank percentage scale scores of 55.12 and 63.35 respectively the South African agency achieved on the two scales was a surprise to both the researchers and the organisation which views itself (staff and management) as very family centred. Ainsworth (1997:68) suggests that agencies with a mean FCGC score of between 50.00 and 59.00 are within the normal range and are viewed as somewhat family centred. While it is clear that use of all four scales may have yielded a different result, the New England agency with the highest FCGC score also had high scores on the two scales used in this study. These results suggest that the staff in the South African agency involve parents of abused and neglected children less in routine care activities than the staff of the New England agencies do. Surprisingly 83.3% of the South African sample

felt that teaching parenting skills to parents was most important in their roles (in contrast to just over 53% of the New England sample). This was explored in follow-up interviews with senior child care workers and the management of the Home. These staff confirmed that parents are very rarely directly involved in the routine care activities of the children, because many of the children come from a widely dispersed geographical area making the maintenance of parental involvement more difficult. It was conceded that even parents living in close proximity to the Home were rarely involved in routine care. However, programmes in which the staff went to the homes of parents to teach these skills during periods in which the youths were at home were considered priorities, although in reality this amounted to less than three hours per family per vacation period. In the six-month period following the presentation of these results to the Centre and the writing of this article, the Home instituted a number of new programmes and strategies to increase the extent of parental involvement and parental contact, including increased provision of food parcels to children going home on weekends and involvement of parents in meetings with schools. Staff have been able to give up the originally identified explanation that parents are apathetic and are engaging in a process in which they explore the extent to which their own expertise and the perceived competence and power of the whole Home would negatively influence the behaviour of parents.

Poverty is one of the primary reasons associated with the placement in care of more than 75% of the children in the South African Home (Coughlan 1998) – consistent historically with many black African children who are in care. Poverty limits the extent to which parents are able to maintain involvement unless an agency is able to provide services, including financial support, which ensure that parents are able to be part of the care process (Pelton 1991). This type of assistance is rarely available in either the US or South Africa. In the case of the South African agency it would have the immediate effect of limiting the ability of the family to be flexible in terms of travel and other associated issues related to maintaining direct contact with child care activities.

The study found that 23% of the South African sample indicated that abuse was the kind of situation they encountered least frequently, while neglect was encountered frequently or most frequently by 67% of respondents. In contrast, only about 4% of the US sample indicated that abuse was what they encountered least frequently. The link between poverty and perceptions of neglect through lack of provision of shelter, food, clothing and education has been part of the welfare system in South Africa for decades. Thus, at least in practice wisdom, poverty and neglect are associated. It follows that this finding is thus consistent with the perception that parental poverty is an additional contributing factor to which lack of parental involvement in child care tasks in the Home has been attributed by staff.

Given the research evidence that points to the importance of parental involvement as a factor that determines the outcome of family reunification efforts, this must be a concern (for a review of this literature see Ainsworth & Maluccio 1998). Parental involvement, especially parent/child contact, has been shown to be a key to reunification. This study supports the principle that when out-of-home placements are necessary, they should be based in the local community, because out-of-home care placements with agencies distant from the community in which parents reside make the maintenance of parental involvement extremely difficult. It can only lead to children remaining in care longer than is necessary and consequently their potential isolation from family, community and even culture.

Finally, although a body of evidence (Struhsaker, Schaltz & Bane 1991; Ainsworth & Maluccio 1998) has shown that maintaining parental involvement in the care of their children is an

important determinant of family reunification, this study shows that staff in some Children's Homes appear to do relatively little to promote this involvement and that staff in at least this South African facility do relatively little to encourage parental involvement relative to what is happening in facilities in New England. It was this comparison that initiated a process of reflection in the South African facility.

While this study is exploratory in nature, it has value in that it shows that cross-national studies are feasible. Hopefully, it will encourage further cross-national research efforts. Cross-national studies of this type are challenging, but they have the potential to add further to our knowledge about how Children's Home can adopt promote pro-family attitudes. Abusive and neglectful parents have a role to play in providing continuity of concern and interest in their children. This is important from the child's point of view and this is why Children's Homes need to be both child centred and pro-family involvement. However, unless the findings of this kind of research are presented in a way that is accessible to the respondents, they are not empowered by their participation in the research to become reflective practitioners and are thus not empowered to change. Without the process of feedback, survey research of this kind adds to, rather than simply describes, the difficulties.

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