

Special Hearing: Children and Youth

• INTRODUCTION

- 1 In light of the direct impact of the policies of the former state on young people and the active role they played in opposing apartheid, the Commission decided to hold hearings on the experiences of children and youth. Many of those who testified before the Commission were eighteen years old or younger when the gross violations of human rights occurred.¹ However, it was considered important that those who were under eighteen years of age during the life of the Commission be given the opportunity to testify. Indeed, before these special hearings, few children under the age of eighteen had approached the Commission to tell their stories.
- 2 The idea of special hearings on the role and experiences of children and youth was widely supported by a range of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which were invited to participate in the preparatory process.

Children subjected to gross human rights violations

- 3 The hearings provided an opportunity to focus on the impact of apartheid on children and youth. Over the years, children and young people were victims of and witnesses to of many of the most appalling gross human rights violations in South Africa's history. The effects of exposure to ongoing political violence may have had serious effects on the development of many of these children.² It was, therefore, considered imperative that the trauma inflicted on children and young people be heard and shared within the framework of the healing ethos of the Commission. Recognition of the inhumanity of apartheid was seen as a crucial step towards establishing a human rights framework for children and young people in order to ensure that they be given the opportunity to participate fully in South Africa's new democratic institutions.
- 4 The report does not, however, claim to be representative of all children and youth. Given the Commission's focus on gross human rights violations, those who gave evidence at the hearings on children and youth spoke mainly of the suffering of young people. Few chose to speak of, or to report on, the heroic role of young people in the struggle against apartheid. Many saw themselves not as victims, but as soldiers or freedom fighters and, for this reason, chose not to appear before the Commission at all. Others, fearing reprisals from family or community, remained silent. Sometimes close family members were unaware of or strongly opposed to the political activities of young people. This accounts for any apparent contradictions between the perceptions of mothers and other family members who gave testimony and those of the many young people who excluded themselves from the hearings.

- 5 These stories are not, consequently, captured in what follows. No concerted attempt was made by the Commission to encourage those young people who *did* attend the hearings to speak of themselves as heroes who had sacrificed their education, their safety and often their long term opportunities through their active resistance to apartheid.

A culture of human rights and children's rights

- 6 In 1995, South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), an important step towards securing South Africa's rightful place in the world community of nations. The CRC imposes important obligations and responsibilities on its signatories, including that of "honouring the voice" of children and youth, by giving them an opportunity to express their feelings and relate their experiences as part of the national process of healing.

Participation of children under eighteen years of age

- 7 In terms of the CRC, a child is a person under the age of eighteen years of age and is entitled to special protection by government and society. A critical debate arose before the hearings as to whether or not children under the age of eighteen should appear and testify at the hearings. It was felt that the formal structure of the hearings might intimidate children and subject them to additional trauma. In order to discuss this issue, the Commission held a series of meetings and workshops and sought the opinions of international organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and over thirty South African NGOs working with children and youth. The final decision of the Commission was that children under the age of eighteen would not testify. Instead, NGOs and other professional people working with children were asked to testify on their behalf. The Commission did, however, make extensive efforts to involve children directly in the hearings and in the collection of data before the hearings.

Regional hearings

- 8 The special hearings on children and youth were held regionally. Each regional office hosted a hearing for the area covered by that office.
- 9 Throughout the country, school children participated in the hearings and listened to the evidence presented. At the KwaZulu-Natal/Free State hearing, school children from a number of schools presented a play and other schools performed songs. A dramatic presentation by school children of the Soweto uprising was a highlight of the hearing hosted by the Johannesburg office, moving members of the audience to tears. This hearing was opened by Ms Graça Machel, chairperson of the UNICEF Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, who brought an important international perspective on this issue. In the Eastern Cape, musical presentations by school choirs assisted in the process of reconciliation while, in Cape Town, three high school students read a submission by Professors Pamela Reynolds and Andrew Dawes on the impact of apartheid on children.

Creativity and flexibility

- 10 The special hearings on children and youth were more flexible than other hearings of the Commission, in that they allowed participants to reflect on or critically analyse the root causes of apartheid and its effects on children. Most parties providing testimony supplied written submissions ahead of the hearing and were asked to summarise their submissions orally and answer questions posed by the panel. The hearings also allowed for the participation of children in ways other than by testifying; this included finding creative ways to access and share the children's experience. Before the KwaZulu-Natal/Free State hearing, for example, children spent a day telling their stories and making drawings that reflected their experiences. These were shared at the hearings the following day.³

• Overview of the Experience of Children and Youth

- 11 The South African social fabric was shaped by apartheid laws and structures that exposed the majority of South Africa's children to oppression, exploitation, deprivation and humiliation. Apartheid was accompanied by both subtle and overt acts of physical and structural violence. Structural violations included gross inequalities in educational resources along with massive poverty, unemployment, homelessness, widespread crime and family breakdown. The combination of these problems produced a recipe for unprecedented social dislocation, resulting in both repression and resistance.⁴ This contributed to a situation that made possible the gross human rights violations of the past.
- 12 Many white children, on the other hand, were raised in an environment which condoned racial prejudice and fear of the 'other', while demanding unquestioning submission to the authority of family and state. The structural and legislated segregation of apartheid ensured that young white people were isolated and separated from their peers in other race groups – in their homes, schools, communities and every other aspect of their lives.
- 13 Most of South Africa's children were born and grew up in a context of conflict. The Reverend Frank Chikane described the situation in 1986 as:

A world made up of teargas, bullets, whippings, detention and death on the streets. It is an experience of military operations and night raids, of roadblocks and body searches. It is a world where parents and friends get carried away in the night to be interrogated. It is a world where people simply disappear, where parents are assassinated and homes are petrol bombed.⁵

- 14 Resistance was fuelled by socio-economic deprivation, coupled with state oppression. Many youth were inspired to seek channels through which to fight for better living conditions. At the Eastern Cape hearing, Mr V Mbinda, a member of the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) spoke of the poverty of his home and the way he felt about it:

It caused a lot of anger when you asked your mum why she could not afford a pair of shoes when others can. You always want to commit yourself to something that would neutralise that anger ... we joined because of that anger that we inherited from our homes.

- 15 These conditions led to the recognition by many of South Africa's children that they were being denied opportunities to take up their rightful place as South African citizens. According to testimony at the Athlone hearing, children had to make choices about whether to avoid, participate in or lead the resistance. Many of South Africa's children did not

stand passively by, but actively disputed the legitimacy of the state. In doing so, they contributed to the dismantling of apartheid.

- 16 Very early on, the former state became aware of the pivotal role of children and youth, identifying them as a serious threat and treating them accordingly. Dr Max Coleman spoke of the waging of an undeclared war against children and youth, in which they became the primary targets of detention, torture, bannings, assassination and harassment of every description.
- 17 The rise of young people to leadership positions was also seen as a challenge to the patriarchal authority of some of the older men, leading to intergenerational conflict between the young comrades and conservative elders. In the process, violence was unleashed against, witnessed, and perpetrated by the young. Many young people felt that the only means of dealing with systemic violence was to fight back, which led to many situations of counter-violence. Ms Sandra Adonis, who became an activist at the age of fifteen, commented at the hearing in Athlone:

Although we have done things that we are not very proud of, but the reasons why we have done it we are proud of them, because today we can stand with our heads up high and say that, together with the nation, we have done it.

- 18 The role of children and youth was crucial in opposing the apartheid system. However, in the process, they were drawn into an arena that exposed them to three particular kinds of violence: state oppression, counter-violence and inter- and intra-community violence.

State oppression and counter mobilisation

- 19 The role of youth in resisting apartheid dates back to the formation of the militant African National Congress (ANC) Youth League in 1943. The militancy of the youth provided the impetus for the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and the drafting of the Freedom Charter in 1955. In the 1960s, students were amongst those who rose up in their thousands to protest against the pass laws. The state's response to these peaceful protests was mass repression. Many youth saw no option but to leave the country in order to take up arms and fight for liberation. Umkhonto weSizwe (MK), formed in 1961, drew many of its recruits from the ranks of the youth.
- 20 Children and youth faced the full force of state oppression as they took on their role as the 'foot soldiers of the struggle' - as what were called the 'young lions'. Youth challenged the state by organising and mobilising their schools and communities against illegitimate state structures. Mr Potlako Mokgwadi Saboshego, a student activist from the East Rand, described the role of students thus:

After some time, the parents stood back because, when we held meetings at school, the police would come and interfere with those meetings and they would shoot teargas and, together with our parents, we would become victims of the police interference.

- 21 The threat which the youth presented is evidenced by the backlash from the former state which used its oppressive armoury against the young.

- 22 In June 1976, the student revolt that began in Soweto transformed the political climate. One hundred and four children under the age of sixteen were killed in the uprising and resistance spread to other parts of the country. Dissent by the children and youth of South Africa cast children in the role of agents for social change, as well as making them targets of the regime. Classrooms became meeting grounds for organisations such as the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), which was formed in 1979 and ultimately boasted a membership of over a million students. The security police clampdown on COSAS resulted in the arrest of over 500 of its members by the time of the declaration of the state of emergency in July 1985.
- 23 The arrest of students and the occupation of schools stirred the determination of many children to resist. Mr Mashalaba (Eastern Cape hearing) said:
- We were not passive bystanders but rather acted with the naivete of youth and had no way of knowing how the government of the day would retaliate.*
- 24 Many other student and youth organisations emerged, based on differing political ideologies. They too became targets of state repression. Mr Mbinda said:
- I can also not forget to quote the PAC whereby it was put in a situation where it could not organise itself, especially in schools. Many of our comrades [were] in schools like Pandulwazi where eleven of our comrades were expelled in 1990.*
- 25 Differing political ideologies and affiliations generated tensions within the liberation movement erupting, at times, into overt conflict. Mr Mbinda, for example, spoke of the conflict between PAC and ANC youth in the Eastern Cape when the United Democratic Front (UDF) was formed. He said that the PAC had initially thought that the UDF would accommodate all the liberation forces of the country. He described what the PAC perceived as:
- an emerging monopolistic tendency ... There was a faction which was growing to the extent that it affected our lives; it affected our upbringing because it resulted in feuds, massacres and violence. This meant the PAC had to be more militant because, [according] to our analysis and interpretation of the situation, we were not fighting the enemy only, we were also fighting with our fellow brothers.*
- 26 The state used various means to suppress dissent. Arrests and detentions removed opponents from the political arena. Courts were used to criminalise political activity. In the 1980s, in particular, student and youth organisations were banned, as were the possession and distribution of their publications. From 1976 to 1990, outdoor political gatherings were outlawed. From 1986, there was a blanket ban on indoor gatherings aimed at promoting work stoppages, stay aways or educational boycotts.
- 27 The security establishment engaged in the informal repression of children by hunting down ‘troublesome’ youth and developing an informer network. This latter had dire consequences for youth organisations. Stories are told about the transfer of detained children to rehabilitation camps where it is thought that they became informers and participated in

counter-mobilisation structures and other state security projects. In the words of Mr Mzimasi Majojo at the Eastern Cape hearing:

Our friends were made to spy on us ... be it girlfriends or boyfriends, were forcibly turned to spy on us for the benefit of the monster.

Inter- and intra-community violence

- 28 Until 1985, casualties were mainly the result of security force action. From 1987, however, vigilantism began to make an appearance. Dr Max Coleman, who made a presentation at the hearing in Gauteng, argued that:

The destabilisation strategy was cold-blooded, calculated, deliberate ... it was about a collusion between various elements who had an interest in maintaining the status quo or at least retaining the power which they had from the apartheid system.

- 29 Vigilantes were recruited from the ranks of the homeland authorities, black local authorities, black police officers and those who wished to protect existing social hierarchies. The state colluded with vigilante organisations in order to destabilise resistance organisations. As migrant hostel dwellers were drawn into the conflict with youth, vigilante attacks came to reflect class, ethnic and geographic differences.
- 30 Many vigilante attacks were rooted in intergenerational conflicts. Some men saw the dramatic surge of women and youth to political prominence as a threat to the patriarchal hierarchies of age and gender. Young people were perceived to be undermining the supremacy of traditional leaders who saw it as their duty to restrain them. Vigilantes mobilised around slogans such as, 'discipline the children', and frequently described themselves as 'fathers'.
- 31 The *Witdoeke* of Crossroads were typical. They called themselves 'fathers' and saw children as having become disrespectful of their authority. In Welkom, another vigilante group, the *Pakathis*, organised in opposition to student boycotts and street resistance. Their rallying cry was, 'spare the rod and spoil the child'. In Zolani, a group of men began enforcing curfews and assaulting children after the commencement of a school boycott in 1985. The Peacemakers of Grahamstown acted against school children engaged in boycotts. There are many examples of such vigilante activities.
- 32 Vigilantism coincided with the state strategy of creating 'oil spots' – that is, establishing strategic bases in townships as a means of regaining control of the population. A second aspect of the strategy involved the co-option of leaders, the counter-organisation of communities and the formation of counter-guerrilla groups. The state supported many vigilante groups by providing funding and training.
- 33 Large numbers of youth, whether politically active or not, were affected by the violence, especially those who lived near the hostels. In many cases, the responsibility for protecting their homes and streets fell on children. Some young people turned their attention to the defence of their communities⁶, redirecting their energies into the formation of self-defence units that were, in their view, justified by vigilante attacks.

34 Vigilantism was characterised by sudden attacks by an enemy who was frequently a member of the same community. In some cases, families were targeted because their sons had joined self-defence units. Self-defence units were forced to adopt weaponry that was more sophisticated; their knives and *pangas*⁷ were unable to keep the well-armed vigilante forces at bay. In the 1990s, the conflict between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) intensified and vigilante attacks increased. In KwaZulu-Natal, in particular, young people were forced to flee to the cities in fear of their lives.

35 Mr Potwalo Saboshego, a seventeen year old activist from the East Rand, spoke of the acquisition of weapons and explosives which were believed to be necessary for purposes of self defence:

The issue of explosives ... they were given to us by some reliable sources because we have to protect ourselves. So that if we see an enemy we should be able to fight - because people were shot at. Some of my friends were just shot.

36 The weapon sources were not always reliable, however. As reported elsewhere, young people often faced the risk that the weapons they received had been booby-trapped by the security forces.

37 The submission of the Inter-Church Youth, based in the Eastern Cape, defended the involvement of young people in violence. Effectively, they saw themselves as 'soldiers' and 'heroes', fighting against an enemy. The submission conceded that youth were both directly and indirectly involved in killings and the demolition of property.

We were part of this as the church youth. One needs to emphasise that this was justifiable for the cause of our liberation.

38 Some young people were recruited into vigilante activities by, for example, being offered money to attack the homes of activists. Two youths from Thokoza admitted to having been recruited by the police for this purpose. Young people were also manipulated by state projects such as the Eagles, which was founded in the early 1980s and came into conflict with organisations like the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO). Groups like the Eagles were involved in activities such as assisting the police to identify activists, launching arson attacks and disrupting political meetings. In 1991, the Eagles were exposed as an official state project.

39 Many of South Africa's young people grew up in an atmosphere of imminent danger. They lived with the painful reality of losing loved ones and family members and were often conscious of the burden of responsibility they carried for the lives of others. Their lives were characterised by fear and insecurity. Because the state made no distinction between public and private space, their homes did not provide them with a safe haven. Many children were on the run because they feared for their lives and suffered grave disruptions to their education and development.

White youth

40 White youth lived in an altogether different reality. According to Mr Pierre Reynolds of the Democratic Party (DP) Youth:

Classified white under the apartheid regime, I and my peers, enjoyed privileges because of the colour of our skin. We were born with and we were brought up with racist prejudices ... we enjoyed the benefits of apartheid.

- 41 Mr Reynolds attributed the lack of white youth resistance to the system of patriarchy, whereby the young were kept under control by their elders, their cultures, institutions and state systems.
- 42 Young white males were also conscripted into the defence forces.⁸ Through government control of the national media and strategies such as police visits to white schools, young white people were subjected to propaganda. Fear of the 'other' was implanted in children under the guise of an imminent 'Communist' plot, articulated through slogans such as 'total onslaught'. All this contributed to a situation in which most white males concluded that it was their obligation to serve in the armed services.
- 43 White children were offered few alternatives to being part of the white elite. Group Areas and other legislation effectively segregated them from their less privileged peers. They had virtually no contact with black children and lived largely in the racially protected environments of school, family and church. Conflict and political volatility were seen as a threat to the deliberately narrow world order with which they were familiar. White conscripts were used to uphold the *status quo*, with violence if necessary.
- 44 The militarisation of young white boys began at an early age with systems like the cadets, through which they were taught basic military discipline and skills. Indoctrination, coupled with widespread racist state propaganda, was largely effective in preventing widespread resistance to enforced conscription. Again, according to Mr Reynolds:

In the 1980s, I and my contemporaries - my peers - were at the mercy of a system designed to socialise and condition us into the ranks of perpetrators of apartheid. We were told the army would turn us into men. It was the white man's circumcision school.

- 45 Some white youth who fought in defence of a white South Africa were convinced by their military and political masters that both their own suffering and the acts of violence committed in the process were undertaken for a just cause. Others faced the dilemma of being conscripted to fight a war in which they did not necessarily believe. A minority became conscientious objectors, condemned as traitors to the nation and faced with the choice of leaving the country or being sentenced to six years' imprisonment.
- 46 Some white youth joined the struggle against apartheid through membership of and participation in resistance organisations such as the End Conscription Campaign (ECC)⁹, student movements, such as the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) or by joining political organisations. Like other activists, they became targets of state violence.

• Evidence and Emerging Themes

- 47 Statements and testimony provided surprisingly little evidence of violations against children under the age of twelve. It is unlikely that this was a result of under-reporting, as violations perpetrated against the very young have tended to

invoke the strongest condemnation. By far the largest category of victims to report to the Commission fell into the thirteen to twenty-four age bracket (see figures 1-4). For this reason, some adaptations to the accepted definition of children and youth were made for the purposes of this report. Children between the ages of thirteen and eighteen experienced violations equivalent to their nineteen to twenty-four year old counterparts, and it was considered that a more appropriate unit of analysis could be achieved by combining these age categories to include young people between thirteen and twenty-four years of age. This reflects, first, the fact that this age group was a clear target for gross human rights violations in South Africa and, second, the fact that those who were more likely to be victims of random violence were those who found themselves in exposed situations. Younger children were victims of random violence but were less likely to attend marches or demonstrations, which is where the largest number of random violations occurred.

- 48 Figures 1-4 reflect evidence gathered by the Commission with respect to the types of violations investigated. They do not reflect a universal experience of violations; only those that were reported to the Commission. Many South Africans who experienced human rights violations did not come to the Commission and are therefore not represented. Many parents testified on behalf of their children. Significant, too, was the fact that many women and girls chose not to testify about violations they themselves had experienced. They spoke instead of the violations committed against others, notably their fathers, sons and brothers. The figures must, therefore, be read within the framework of the Commission's experience rather than analysed as definitive figures of all violations experienced in South Africa from 1960 - 1994.

Killings of children and youth reported to the Commission

- 49 Figure 1 represents the number of killings reported to the Commission. The left side reflects female victims and the right side male victims. Based on the graph, few children under the age of twelve were killed. The majority of victims of killings reported to the Commission were young men between the ages of 13-24. This can be seen as a reflection of the perceived threat posed by young males to the state, but is linked with other 'gendered' issues about women and their willingness to testify about their own abuses.¹⁰

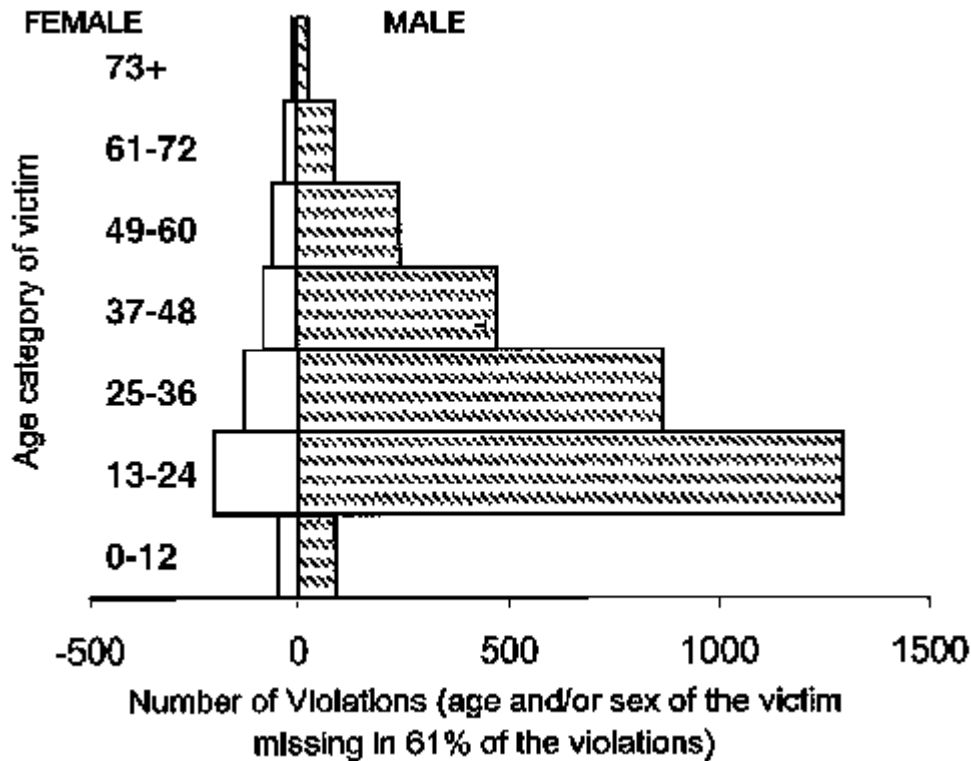


FIGURE 1: Number of killings, by age and sex of victim

- 50 At the Mmabatho hearing, Ms Mary Dikeledi Moreti told the Commission about the day her child was killed. Early in the morning of 28 November 1985, her house was attacked and destroyed by the police, who suspected the family of harbouring 'terrorists'. "Only the toilet was still standing. There was literally nothing in that yard, only the toilet." Her small child was caught in the crossfire: "there were small children in the house, innocent children, like Ronnie who died at the age of five."
- 51 Ms Joyce Mthimkulu told the story of her son, Sipiwe Mthimkulu, at the Commission's hearings in Port Elizabeth in June 1996. The case of Sipiwe Mthimkulu details the tragic layers of abuse that were endured by many activists. Sipiwe was a determined political activist in the Eastern Cape from the age of seventeen. His activities centred on his objection to Bantu Education. His participation in COSAS brought upon him the wrath of the regime. He was detained numerous times and subjected to severe forms of torture. He was shot in the arm and faced constant police harassment. To protect his family from harassment, he was continually on the run and, when he did return home, he lived in a dog kennel.
- 52 In 1981, after his release from yet another arrest, his health deteriorated rapidly and he was diagnosed as having been poisoned with thallium. His body swelled, his hair fell out, he could not urinate and he was confined to a wheel chair. Despite the poisoning, he fought to recover and began slowly regaining his health. Throughout his convalescence, Sipiwe continued with his political activities and filed a claim for damages against the police in connection with his poisoning. In 1982, he left his home for a check up at the Livingstone Hospital. He never arrived and it was later revealed that the security forces had killed him.

53 Mr Lulu Johnson, testifying at the hearing on the death of Siphwe Mthimkulu, described the reality of death many young political activists faced. He referred to the case of Mr Xolani Wonci who was shot by the police. He mentioned the killing of Mr Lungile Tabalaza who 'fell' to his death from the fourth floor of the SANLAM building. He spoke of Mr Xolile Maneli who was reported by the police to have committed suicide whilst in custody. Many other killings of children and youth were reported. Some were killed by the security forces; others were killed in random shootings and in intra-community conflicts in the latter part of the mandate period.

Detention and imprisonment of children and youth

54 In large-scale and often arbitrary police action, thousands of children, some as young as seven years old, were arrested and detained in terms of South Africa's sweeping security and criminal legislation. Sometimes, entire schools were arrested *en masse*.¹¹

55 It is clear from the body of evidence presented that large numbers of children were detained during the period covered by the Act. Detention was a major weapon in the former state's armoury of terror and repression. At times, during the years of greatest conflict, children under the age of eighteen years of age represented between 26 per cent and 45 per cent of all those in detention. All the available figures indicate that the largest number of children and youth was detained between 1985 and 1989, during the two states of emergency. Of 80 000 detentions, 48 000 were detainees under the age of twenty-five.¹²

56 Mr Mxolisi Faku of the Eastern Cape described his experiences in detention when he was in standard eight. At this stage, he was a member of COSAS and was engaged in mobilising students and parents about the importance of establishing a democratically elected students' representative council, while also encouraging students to participate in a bus boycott. In 1983, the leadership of COSAS was arrested, followed shortly afterwards by the arrest of other members. He said:

I think the youngest amongst us was ten or eleven years of age and his surname was Majeke. He was in hospital with a bullet in his body. However, after being discharged from the hospital, [he] was taken back into prison.

57 Mr Faku described the torture they experienced at the hands of the police:

They would take our genitals and squeeze them against drawers, hoping to get information, because they were convinced that we worked together with people who were in exile.

58 Fear of detention meant that many young activists were 'on the run' and 'in hiding'. Sandra Adonis, a member of the Bonteheuvel Military Wing, lived 'on the run' until she was eventually captured by the security police:

By the time they got hold of me, I knew their tricks and I was preparing myself all the time for this day. You know, it is like you prepare yourself for death, because you do not know what is going to happen and even if you prepare yourself how much, you will never be able to prepare yourself really.

59 She used various strategies to deal with the police:

I was, like, trying to hit back at him all the time, but also in a very gentle way not to have him think that this is a stubborn woman, because once you show stubbornness, they would show no mercy.

60 Upon release from prison, many young people were subjected to bannings and other restriction orders, turning the young person's home into another kind of prison. They were forced to report to police stations once a day and were prevented from participating in political and social activities.

Torture of children and youth

61 Torture usually occurred at the hands of the security forces whilst children and youth were in detention. Types of abuse reported by children included food and sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, beating, kicking, enforced physical exercise, being kept naked during interrogation, suspension from poles and electric shocks. Other forms of torture included verbal insults, banging a detainee's head against a wall or floor, use of teargas in a confined space, enforced standing in an unnatural position, beating on the ears, near suffocation and cigarette burns. These forms of torture were compounded by a lack of intellectual stimulation, false accusations, threatened violence to the detainee and his or her family, misleading information, untrue statements about betrayal by friends, pressure to sign false documents, interrogation at gun point and other violations.¹³

62 Figure 2 reveals the evidence gathered from statements made to the Commission about the extent to which young people were victims of torture. The predominant category of those who reported being tortured was, again, young men. Few children under thirteen years of age were victims of torture.

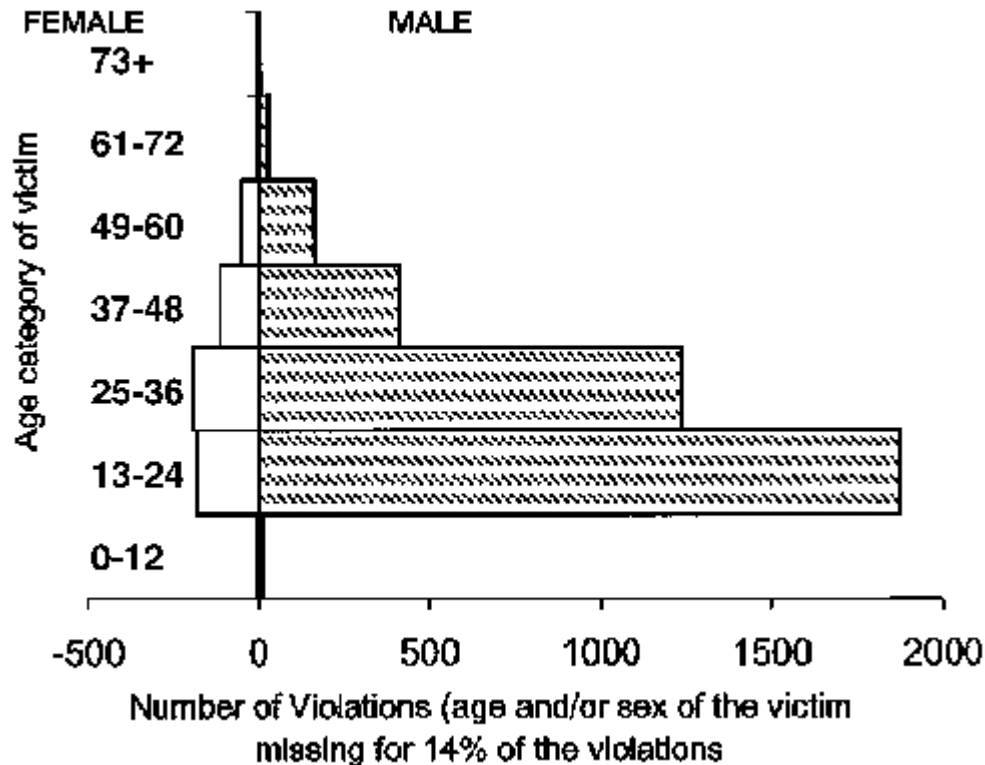


FIGURE 2: Number of acts of torture, by age and sex of victim

- 63 Mr Potwala Saboshego described his experience of torture. He was seventeen years old at the time and politically active on the East Rand. He described the circumstances of his arrest and subsequent torture by the security forces:

It was in 1986, in August. I was [returning] from school. When I arrived at home, Security Branch came and arrested me. They told me the details of my arrest. I was detained at Daveyton police station. On my arrival, they kicked me and assaulted me and they kicked me on my private parts. For the whole day, I was being kicked. Late at six o'clock, they injured my right eye.

- 64 Ms Evelyn Masego Thunyiswa was twenty-two years old when she and a group of her comrades decided to attend the funeral of Steve Biko in 1977. The police stopped them at a train station and detained them. She described the severe torture and sexual assault to which she was subjected:

They assaulted me. The other one came to me and said, "Stand up", and then I stood up. And he said, "Stand up! I want to see your vagina", and they started hitting me with fists. After that, they electrocuted us. This cord was like an electric cord and then you put it on a battery and they used equipment to shock me. I can't remember where did they apply this to my body because, when they switched it on, I felt as if my private parts were falling. I cried for quite a long time. While crying, they were sitting in front of me laughing.

Police provocation, violence and complicity

- 65 At the Soweto hearing, Mr Murphy Morobe, an activist in the UDF, told the Commission:

One episode I should mention is when we went to bury a person by the name of Mashabane. ... As we were marching into the cemetery, even before the coffin was put down, they [the police] opened fire on the mourners. There was no violence there. There was nothing that suggested that police should act that way. But the mourners and family had to flee and leave the coffin there. People had to fall and jump into graves to hide themselves from the barrage that came and more people were killed.¹⁴

- 66 This description of unprovoked violence on the part of the state is only one of many that were submitted to the Commission. In KwaZulu-Natal, evidence was presented which testified to the fact that the police stood by and watched as violence occurred, making no attempt at intervention, nor trying to reduce the intensity of the violence. People ascribed the high levels of death and injury in the province to this failure to react.
- 67 In the Western Cape, evidence was heard about the notorious 'Trojan Horse' incident during which the police shot a child of eleven years of age. Clear evidence was presented of a police plan in the 'Trojan Horse' incident, and the commanding officer of the police apologised for the actions of the police and their consequences.

Police intimidation at schools

- 68 As schools became centres of resistance, they were targeted by the security forces. Police intimidation included the occupation of schools, the arrest of students and the creation of a general climate of intimidation.
- 69 Ms Elizabeth Sizane Mdluli was a student in Nelspruit during the 1986 school boycotts. She told the Commission about the disruption caused at the school by the presence of the police:

During the year 1986 – it was the year where it was not possible to attend school. At school, we normally experienced the visit of the police. Even if we were just seated and we were prepared to learn. You could find us scattered outside because of the teargas which was thrown [at] us ... The police would come, and just their presence would make the school kids feel very uneasy.

- 70 Mr Potwalo Saboshego described the situation on the East Rand:

By the time I was a student, we experienced many problems. We were detained at our school, we were sjambokked [whipped] by the police ... We arranged marches and presented memorandums so that some of our students should be released so that [they could] write exams. Because those who were arrested were not charged, they were just detained indefinitely. That is why there was a lot of conflict in the East Rand ... When we were studying at school, you would find soldiers in your classroom. That is one of the things which we wanted to stop.

Intimidation of families

- 71 The childhood of the children of activists was often filled with fear of police intimidation and violence. Ms Nolita Nkomo was born in February 1970. Most of her recollections of her early teenage years are of threats and

intimidation, especially when members of the security forces bombed her family home. By the time she was sixteen years old, her house had been bombed three times. Threatening telephone calls were a regular part of home life. The family experienced many sleepless nights – lying awake in a state of tension after being told, repeatedly, that none of them would see the next day dawn.

- 72 Ms Nomakhwezi Gcina, the daughter of Eastern Cape activist Ms Ivy Gcina, spoke of the difficulties and stresses of growing up as a child in an activist home:

I've led a very difficult life starting in 1977, when Samora, our eldest, left this world. We'd be sleeping at night and the police would come kicking the doors down, wanting to know where my brother was and beating us up. They would burn our house down, arrest my mother and we would be left without a mother. In 1980, Msimasi left and even [then] they would wake us up in the middle of the night beating us, wanting to know where our brothers were. I think the most difficult time in my life was in 1982 when we also lost my third brother who was in exile and only two of us were left.

In 1982, when my brother was eleven years old, both my mother and father were arrested and the two of us were left alone in the house. They were arrested under section 29 and we could not even visit them; even our pastor could not visit them. We were treated like animals, my brother who was eleven years old and myself. Nobody was visiting us and even members of our extended family isolated us.

As my parents were still in detention the police came [in the] early hours of the morning (but fortunately there was a lady who came to spend the night with us) and they kicked the doors down as usual. They never knocked; they just kicked the doors down. That was the norm. They asked Mzokolo where our relatives were and he said he did not know; he only knew where our parents and siblings were. He was wearing short pyjamas and they beat him up and took him with [them] in a very harsh manner. We were left behind and didn't know what to do.

He came back the next day at two o'clock. He was swollen and he couldn't even see. He also passed away.

In 1985 up to 1989, giving a summary, my mother was arrested and put in detention for four years but no charges were laid. I lived with my father.

Abduction

- 73 The extent to which violations were perpetrated against the young is again revealed in the data on abduction. The majority of those who were abducted were young males between the ages of 13 and 24. In the case of women, young rather than older women experienced this violation.

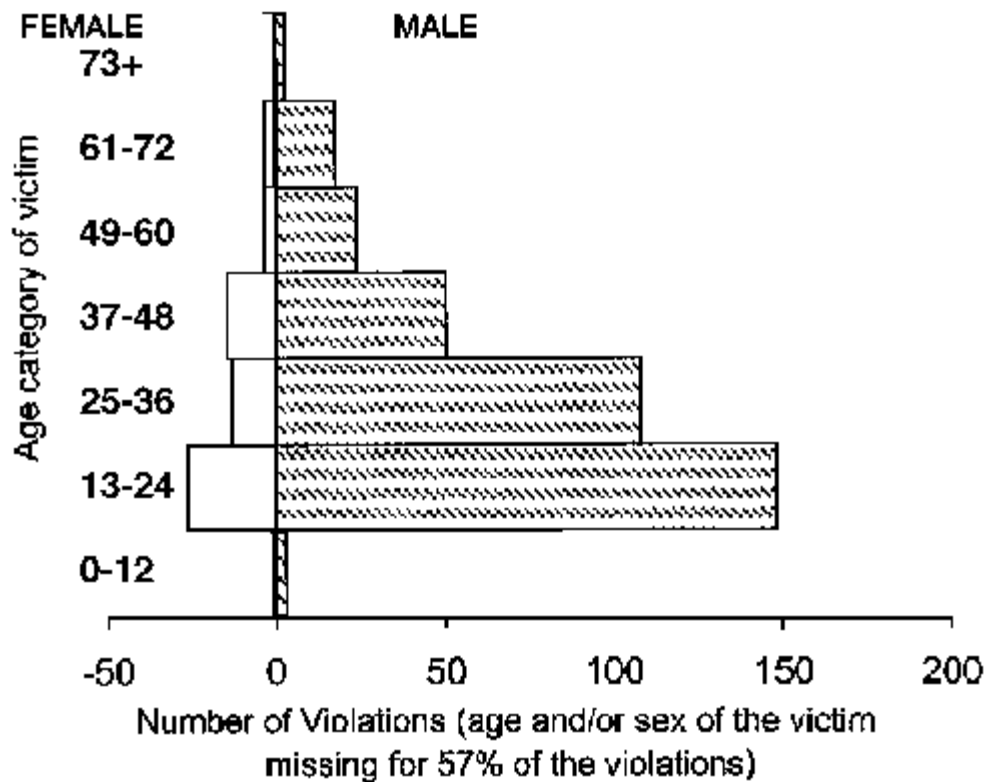


FIGURE 3: Number of acts of severe ill-treatment, by age and sex of victim

- 74 Ms Florence Madodi Nkosi, who testified at the Mmabatho hearings, was a victim both of abduction by vigilantes and of police abuse. On 24 November 1985, after attending a meeting of the ANC Youth League, a group called the *Inkathas* or A-team, which was working with the police, abducted her. She was taken to a shop in Huhudi.

They caught us and they put us into a shop and started assaulting us with sjamboks and knobkieries¹⁵. They hit me a lot on my head. Every time I would touch my head, it would be soft. They hit me until I could not feel the pain anymore.

Severe ill treatment

- 75 Young males between the ages of thirteen and twenty-four reported the highest incidence of severe ill treatment of all age categories. Among females, women between thirty-seven and forty-eight years of age were most commonly the victims of severe ill treatment.

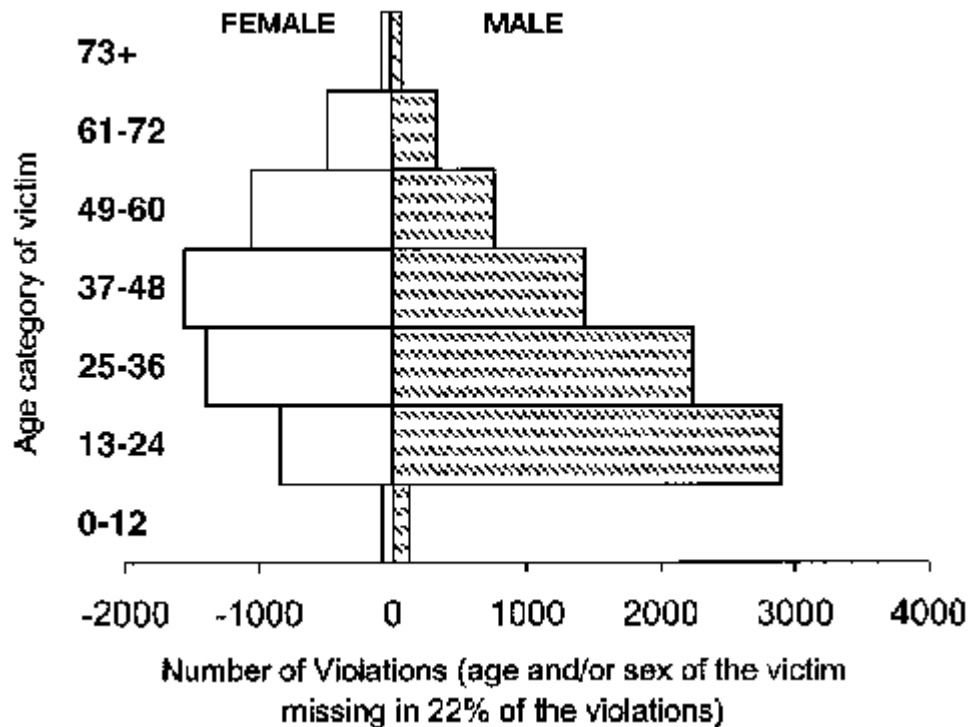


FIGURE 4: Number of acts of severe ill-treatment, by age and sex of victim

Children and youth in exile

- 76 In the face of mounting repression, many young people or their family members left the country to reside in other countries or to join liberation movements.
- 77 Exile is often experienced as a brutal rupture in an individual's personal history, resulting in a lack of continuity that frequently becomes a serious obstacle to the development of a meaningful and positive sense of identity. It has been argued that political repression and exile tend to distort normal socialisation in a child or young person. Some of the significant consequences of life in exile include a feeling of 'transitoriness', a profound sense of loss of security, feelings of guilt, and a range of more severe psychological problems and disorders.
- 78 At the Eastern Cape hearings, evidence was presented about the impact of exile on children and young people. Professor Mbulelo Mzamane, founder member of the South African Refugee Committee and himself exiled as a child, testified about the experiences of young people in exile. He identified three key periods during which South Africans were driven into exile: the Sharpville generation, the Soweto generation, and the post-1984 (UDF) generation.
- 79 Professor Mzamane described the trauma of escape. He recalled the experience of receiving 'Queenie', a girl of eight years of age, who had walked over the border under the cover of darkness. On arrival, she was detained by the Botswana authorities as part of the normal procedure for the reception of exiles.
- 80 Inadequate shelter, hunger and the ever-present threat of kidnapping by the South African state were the daily realities of children in exile in frontline states, including Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.¹⁶

- 81 One of the leaders of the Soweto uprising of June 16, Tsietsi Mashinini survived no less than three kidnap attempts whilst living in Gaborone in Botswana until it was felt necessary that he should leave Botswana to go where it would not be possible to have him kidnapped. He eventually fled to Liberia where he subsequently died.
- 82 The exodus resulted in the breakdown of family units and the severing of links with extended families, with traumatic effects on the lives of many young people. Exiled children often grew up without their parents or primary care givers. They were unable to contact family and friends in South Africa because of the risk of reprisals against their loved ones in South Africa. The conditions to which they were subjected included exposure to disease and hunger. Some were unable to hold onto clearly defined identities, partly because of the ruptures between them, their kin and their homeland.
- 83 It is not clear how many young people and members of their families died in exile, either as combatant members of the liberation movements, or because of natural or other causes. Some died as a result of cross-border raids into neighbouring countries.

• Consequences of Apartheid and Gross Human Rights Violations

The impact of apartheid on children and youth

- 84 South African children were exposed to countless horrors and suffered considerable trauma because of apartheid. Their role and involvement in the resistance struggle placed them on the firing line. The Commission's documentation shows that children and youth were the dominant victims in all categories of gross human rights violations described in the Act. For almost every adult that was violated, probably two or more children or young people suffered. Children and young people were killed, tortured, maimed, detained, interrogated, abducted, harassed, displaced as well as being witnesses to these abuses.
- 85 Children growing up in extremely violent situations are frequently deprived of the structural support that allows for their meaningful experience of social and cultural life; the fabric of their societies and institutions is affected. For many South African children, family and friendship support networks were shattered by the policies of apartheid. Family life was often damaged, making it difficult for parents to take care of their children and to be emotionally available to listen to them.¹⁷ Many children became alienated from their parents and the trust, faith and communication that should have existed between the generations was sorely tried.
- 86 When considering the experiences of children under apartheid, it is important to remember that the Act provided for victims of defined gross human rights violations to testify and make statements to the Commission. This chapter therefore concerns the statements and testimonies of deponents who were defined as victims in terms of the legislation. This focus on victims is not, however, intended to diminish the active role of children and youth. Children were agents of social change and harnessed vast amounts of energy, courage and resilience during the apartheid era. For many young people, active engagement in political activity resulted in the acquisition of skills such as analysis, mobilisation and strategising, as well as the ability to draw strength from friends and comrades in times of

hardship. Many of today's leaders come from a politically active history and have displayed a remarkable capacity for forgiveness and reconciliation.

- 87 The majority of people who came to the hearings spoke of experiences of extreme hardship, pain and suffering, whilst also providing testimony of the bravery and enthusiasm of young people. The Commission provided a process through which some of the hurt that many people had been carrying silently for years could be released. Thus, while recognising the largely positive role that children and youth played in the liberation of South Africa, many of the testimonies and statements refer only to the generally negative consequences of repression in the period under review.

Psychological effects of exposure to gross human rights violations

- 88 Political and community violence characteristically expose children and adolescents to suffering long after the event. Whilst many are able to recover with the support of friends, family and community; others may suffer lasting psychological damage. Young people may suffer from concomitant conditions similar to those of adults – including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour.¹⁸ Spraker and Dawes have reported significant depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychosomatic symptoms at levels that impaired everyday function in South African youth.¹⁹

- 89 Whilst the Commission did not embark on psychological evaluations of people who made statements or gave testimony, deponents themselves often referred to the damaging psychological effects of gross human rights violations. Ms Dee Dicks, who testified at the hearing in Athlone, was arrested and charged with public violence at the age of seventeen. She described her pain in her testimony to the Commission:

I am not in control of my crying and ... my self esteem and confidence is very low at present and it is very difficult for me. And sometimes I am still directionless and unfocused which is always like, you know, the experience that I lived through in the 1980s is like forever in my mind. And it has become quite difficult for me to cope and it is making me very angry, because at that time I could and now I cannot.

- 90 Children may feel hatred, bitterness and fear towards society and institutions that represent authority, such as the security forces. A fifteen year old girl from the South Coast in Natal saw a policeman force a child to hold a bomb which subsequently exploded in her hands, tearing her to pieces.

I still have distrust for the police ... I blame the police for the disruptions in our schools. I still harbour hatred and fear for those who have committed these acts.²⁰

- 91 Children who have been continuously exposed to violence may experience a significant change in their beliefs and attitudes. Loss of trust may occur where children have been attacked or abused by people they previously considered as neighbours or friends.²¹ Fear, hatred and bitterness may be the greater, therefore, in cases of inter- or intra-community violence where children not only know who the perpetrators are, but are forced to live in the same community as them, despite feelings of simmering rage. A thirteen year old girl from KwaZulu-Natal recounted what happened to her when she was only six years of age:

Me and my family lived in Bethany and that was a mostly IFP area, and we were all expected to be IFP members. My family and I were ANC members and, as a result of that, we had to leave Bethany to go to Emavuleni ...

One fateful afternoon in 1992 my father was forcibly taken from our home by people known to us. ... That night my younger brother, my mum and myself went into the forest looking for our father, and then what I saw that night I have been carrying around with me ever since. My father had bullet and stab wounds all over his body and, since that day, I vowed to revenge my father's death.²²

- 92 The loss of those aspects of childhood that many people assume that children should enjoy was illustrated in the testimony of Ms Sandra Adonis. She said:

It is only now that I realise that I have - I do not know what it is to go to a bioscope [cinema] on a Saturday afternoon or even to a disco like many young people do today or maybe that time as well. I mean, I never had friends really. My friends, my compadres were my comrades. Those were the only people that I could really trust at that point in time, and sometimes you were not even sure if you could trust them.

- 93 Children and youth who are constantly exposed to violence as a form of assertiveness and conflict resolution may perceive violence as the only option available for resolving disputes. Mr Maxlesi of the Eastern Cape Provincial Youth Commission described the negative effects of this on the psyche of the youth:

The methods of confrontation damaged the minds of the youth of our country from both sides of the racial and ethnic divide. The country as a whole has a responsibility of killing violence as an entrenched means of solving problems.

- 94 He elaborated on the effects of militarisation on the youth saying, "youth are products of the highly militarised confrontational past of South Africa and many of them are wearing serious psychological scars." This includes the militarisation of white youth through conscription to the army and of black youth recruited into MK and, especially, through the formation of SDUs and SPUs (self-defence and special protection units).
- 95 For many white youth who were conscripted into the Defence Force, the nature of the war had varied psychological effects. Guerrilla warfare was attended by many stresses, especially for people from urban areas who were suddenly confronted with the reality of fighting a bush war. These experiences were compounded by the physical brutality to which they were subjected during their basic military training – which itself resulted in numbers of deaths. Others were engaged in violence and repression as conscripts in the townships. Many of these former combatants have since displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.²³
- 96 Child soldiers and activists who were exposed to or involved in extensive acts of violence may have become desensitised to suffering. Many have been deprived of opportunities for physical, emotional and intellectual development. After the conflict was over, it was difficult to take up life as it was before, especially where there was a

lack of education, training, decent living conditions and jobs. Effective social reintegration depends on support from families and communities.

Disillusionment

- 97 Most activists anticipated the risks of incarceration, detention and torture and were thus better placed to deal with the emotional consequences of suffering than were those who had not been inducted into political resistance. Many who were activists in their youth have had to struggle with a sense that their active participation and sacrifice resulted in practical and material losses – especially through missed educational opportunities. For many, the new South Africa has not proved to be the land of opportunity that they expected and this has generated deep seated feelings of resentment. Ms Sandra Adonis expressed it thus:

My life is messed up as it is, directionless. I mean, I have lost my education and I have lost my childhood, although we have in return received our freedom and our democracy in this country. But to what extent did we, as the comrades, members of the Bonteheuvel Military Wing gain? I do not think we have gained anything because we are still in the same position as we used to be - unemployed, homeless, abandoned. And there is nobody that looks back and says, well, these are the people that have fought the struggle, that has been part and parcel of the struggle and has brought us to the point where we are now. Not any recognition.

- 98 For youth who were not politically active and who were randomly arrested or injured, the psychological damage may have been more severe. Children who are victims of random violence often experience a sense of bewilderment, loss and confusion. This is reflected in the case of Mr Vuyani Mbewu who, at the age of fourteen, was caught in the crossfire between police and boycotting students near Manenberg in Cape Town. Vuyani was permanently blinded as a result of the police attack. He said:

Since I realised that I had lost my eyesight, I have never been confident again ... My presence here today is, if nothing else, the uselessness for which I lost my eyesight.

Physical consequences of gross human rights violations

- 99 Psychological, social and economic stresses are compounded when children are faced with physical danger from and abuse by the authorities that are meant to protect them. Not only were child protection laws ignored, but the authorities systematically attacked children, resulting in grave emotional and physical harm. Mr Maxlesi described the persistent physical reminders of a violent history:

It was in these struggles where we saw the brutality of the regime. Hundreds of our students were detained and tortured and others severely beaten. You can see the scars of sjamboks on their faces. Even today, others are semi- and permanently disabled because of the bullet wounds they suffered. In other cases, some of our fellow students were brutally killed.

- 100 In 1986, Mr Potwalo Saboshego was arrested and assaulted by police (see above):

For the whole day, I was being kicked. Late, at six o'clock, they injured my right eye ... They tied me on a tree, continuing with the assault and they were drinking until late at night and took me back to the police station.

- 101 Despite repeated requests to see a doctor, he was allowed medical attention only four days later when he was released on bail. Potwalo's torture resulted in the loss of sight in his right eye. His life has been fundamentally altered; he has not been able to secure employment or continue with his studies.

My feelings about the past is I am worried because they've made me lose my dignity. I don't see myself as a complete person as like before and I feel humiliated again, because [of] those people who assaulted me. I did open a case against them, but nothing has happened thus far ... That wound is still there because those policemen were just left.

- 102 Mr Bhekithemba Mbanjwa was seventeen when he was attacked in Epatheni in KwaZulu-Natal. Although not politically affiliated to any particular organisation, he was caught in the crossfire while delivering some maize meal to his mother. In the shooting incident that arose out of ANC/IFP conflict, he lost his leg. Consequently, he lost his job and his dream of becoming a soccer star one day.
- 103 Children who are physically injured, especially if the injury results in permanent disability, suffer extreme stress as they attempt to reconstruct their identity and come to terms with the disfigurement or disability.

Disruptions to education

- 104 The quest by the oppressed majority for a proper education has been a theme that has dominated South African resistance. According to Professor Mzamane: "The deprivation of one's opportunity to develop one's mind must surely rank as one of the most evil conceptions of apartheid." Children and youth, although they valued education and acknowledged the difficulties of advancing their careers without certificates, were prepared to sacrifice their education by joining liberation movements and participating in mass mobilisation under the slogan of 'liberation before education'.
- 105 Mr Maxlesi described the effects of apartheid education on the youth:

The unjust education system resulted in many of our fellow students leaving school to join the work force and others leaving the country to join the liberation movement in exile. The culture of learning and teaching was reduced to non-existence by the regime ... The absence of educational and recreational facilities in our schools and communities affected our academic achievements and growth development as young people.

- 106 The education of many children was disrupted because they were forced into underground activities, had to sleep away from home to evade arrest or were detained. Children placed under house arrest or restriction orders were socially isolated and the required daily reports to the police station interfered with their studies or their ability to earn a living.

- 107 Children suffering from psychological problems because of violations may display symptoms of lack of concentration, sleeplessness, nightmares, headaches and depression that can impair their ability to study. Figures from the Commission's database provide some support for this assertion.²⁴ Fifty-seven per cent of those who reported a disruption to their education also reported that they were suffering from psychological problems of anxiety, depression and an inability to cope. Although it is not possible to draw a linear conclusion between the two, it does suggest that psychological problems may interfere with educational pursuits.
- 108 Disruption of education compromised the future potential of many children. Such disruptions were exacerbated by the negative economic effects that gross human rights violations have been reported to have on families. Of those statements in which parents reported a disruption to their children's education, 51 per cent also referred to losses of income as an outcome of violations.
- 109 Intra-community violence, which led to the displacement and homelessness of many children, had dire consequences on their education. Of the statements that reported disruptions in education, 34 per cent reported that the violation was a result of intra-community violence. A further 29 per cent were homeless.

Dislocation and displacement

- 110 Large numbers of children, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal, were displaced or ran away from their homes to avoid the violence. Many of them have still not returned and others have not been able to find their parents. Many children also suffered the trauma of watching their homes being burnt down and their parents being taken away. Others were left with the burden of having to take care of siblings when both parents were killed or detained.
- 111 Being forced into hiding and exile disrupted children's lives. As internal refugees, children led nomadic lives and had limited contact with their families. Mr Reginald Wonder Nkomo became an internal refugee. In 1991, at seventeen years of age, he was forced to leave his home in KwaNdengezi in KwaZulu-Natal. He described his experiences at the Commission's hearings in Durban:

We left the township in 1990 because we were experiencing conflict and some of our brothers had died. Therefore, we decided to leave and go outside. But these people were overpowering us because they were together with the police, therefore we had to spread ourselves around ... We used to mention among ourselves that if you wished to go back home to visit your parents you can do that at your own risk ... One day I took a risk to visit my parents, because it was after a long time and I was missing my grandmother, because she was the one who brought me up ... All I remember is that they shot at me.

- 112 Wonder was shot in the leg. He was taken to the police station and tortured. He has subsequently been in and out of hospital for the past seven years and requested that the Commission assist in arranging a consultation with a specialist. He lamented his lost opportunities:

I left school in standard six because of the violence. Like as I have said that we couldn't stay in our homes, we had to run to the mountains and hills ... I don't know what to do, and time has run out. But I would also like to

go back to school but [cannot] because of my condition and the problems I am facing as one person who is always in and out in hospital.

- 113 Wonder's case reflects the complex and multiple layers of abuse and human rights violations suffered by South Africa's youth. Wonder's education was disrupted prematurely. He was forced to leave his family, which he missed so much that he risked his life to see them again. This led to his being shot, detained and tortured – another trauma added to others he had experienced, such as the loss of his friends and relatives in the conflict. The constant pain of his wounded leg was a nagging reminder of the losses and suffering he had to endure. The cost of his sacrifice was exacerbated through comparison with his brother who completed his secondary education and was pursuing tertiary training.
- 114 The effects of displacement and homelessness are evident in figures from the Commission's database. In KwaZulu-Natal, 26 per cent of those who made statements to the Commission said that, because of the violations inflicted on them, they were left homeless and 14 per cent were forced to move away. These figures are almost three times greater than those reported from other provinces. Sixty per cent of those who were left homeless reported intra-community violence as the cause. The problem of displacement was overwhelmingly predominant in KwaZulu-Natal.

Exile

- 115 Children in exile face many challenges, including adaptation to a new environment and loss of contact with kin and social support networks. They often experience feelings of transitoriness, loss of security and disruption that can lead to a sense of limbo and insecurity. South African children who were in exile in neighbouring countries were also faced with the ever-present threat of being kidnapped or killed in cross-border raids.
- 116 Some white youth chose to leave the country rather than serve in the defence force. This resulted in numerous traumas associated with exile. Mr Roger Fields reported that, in London, in the four years from 1985-1989, one youth committed suicide and six others were hospitalised for nervous breakdowns because of their exile.²⁵ The breakdown of family units and broken connections with extended families caused by the exodus affected the lives of many young people.

Concluding remarks

- 117 Those who grew up under conditions of violence will carry traces of their experiences into adulthood. Many have suffered the loss of loved ones. Many carry physical and psychological scars. The life opportunities of many have been compromised through disruptions to their education. Some have transplanted the skills learnt during the times of political violence into criminal violence, as they strive to endure ongoing poverty. However, perhaps the most disturbing and dangerous aspect of this legacy for the future of the nation is the fact that those who sought to transform the country, and in the process gave up so much, see so little change in their immediate circumstances.
- 118 The period of struggle also, however, nurtured resilience, wisdom, leadership and tolerance. Many young people rose above the suffering they experienced. Some defiantly and bravely saw themselves as fighting for the freedom of their

people – sacrificing education and opportunities for self-improvement and joining liberation armies and resistance movements.

- 119 Many of these young people have become men and women of extraordinary calibre. Despite their suffering, they have shown extraordinary generosity and tolerance and have reached out to their former oppressors in a spirit of reconciliation.*

• APPENDIX

THE BONTEHEUWEL MILITARY WING

- 1 Bonteheuwel is a coloured township situated north of Cape Town. It was created in the 1960s as a repository for coloured people who had been forced to move out of Cape Town as a result of the Group Areas Act. By the mid-1980s, it had become a site both of student political activism and very high crime rates.
- 2 In 1984, the Bonteheuwel Inter-Schools Congress (BISCO) was formed to co-ordinate the activities of the various student representative councils (SRCs) which were rallying around issues of inequalities in apartheid schooling and the repression of legitimate political protest. BISCO became the target of security force repression and, in October 1985, along with 101 other organisations, was prohibited from organising or holding any gatherings. A number of BISCO leaders, including Ashley Kriel and Gary Holtzman, were detained and subsequently went into hiding.
- 3 It was in this context that the “formation of a militant body to co-ordinate and intensify revolutionary activities, especially at the Bonteheuwel High Schools”¹ was conceived by BISCO members. At a meeting in 1985, it was decided to form a structure that would protect the community of Bonteheuwel, render Bonteheuwel ungovernable and ‘hit out’ against any organ of the state. This structure became the Bonteheuwel Military Wing (BMW). The vast majority of its active members were students between the ages of fourteen and eighteen years of age.
- 4 While the formation of the BMW was not part of the strategic plan of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in the Western Cape, its emergence was welcomed and endorsed by the organisation. A former UDF spokesperson of the Bonteheuwel area committee, said:

We were very aware and conscious of the BMW. We obviously approved.... The BMW was very much part of the struggle family... there was an understanding that they fell under the political leadership of the UDF. However, it was not a situation of command control.²

- 5 In time, however, the BMW became increasingly independent, operating as a paramilitary organisation outside the formal discipline of the UDF. The relationship between the UDF and the BMW became strained as ideologies and *modus operandi* diverged.
- 6 In addition to links with the UDF, the BMW developed very close alliances with the African National Congress (ANC) and Umkhonto weSizwe (MK). A number of young BMW members were recruited into MK and underwent military

training either outside South Africa or within existing MK cells in the Western Cape. Most of this training took the form of short 'crash courses' in the use of arms and explosives. Those who attended the courses were afterwards expected to return to the BMW and pass on their training to others. The BMW was armed from a number of sources, including arms stolen from policemen, bought from local gangsters, supplied by MK operatives in South Africa or smuggled into the country by BMW members returning from training in exile. Weapons ranged from homemade 'zipguns' to hand grenades and rocket launchers.

- 7 The BMW launched a number of operations, including attacks on vehicles belonging mainly to the state and private companies, attacks on security force personnel and attacks on installations such as police stations, post offices and railway stations. In the course of these attacks, a number of individuals were seriously injured or killed.
- 8 Eventually, the BMW acquired a reputation that made it the focus of security force attention: "*Hierdie aktieviste leiers is die kern van die probleem en hul verwydering is noodsaaklik*".³ (These activist leaders are the core of the problem and their removal is essential.) In 1986, a number of special unrest investigation units were set up to address the 'unrest' problems in the Western Cape; the Athlone unit was responsible for infiltrating and halting the activities of the BMW.
- 9 Between June 1987 and January 1988, members of the special unit detained over forty BMW members. The police had instructions to obtain, as quickly as possible, confessions that would lead to more arrests and convictions.

*"Die nodige beëdigde verklarings moet, soos vereis, so spoedig moontlik maar in elk geval binne agt en veertig uur, beskikbaar wees vir die teenstaan van moontlike interdikte."*⁴ (The necessary sworn affidavits must, as demanded, be available as quickly as possible, but always within forty-eight hours, to oppose possible interdicts). "*Ondervraging moet intensief en doelmatig onderneem word onder andere om ander arrestasies en aanhoudings te bewerkstellig.*"⁵ (Interrogation must be undertaken in an intensive, goal-oriented manner to facilitate, amongst other things, further arrests and detentions).

- 10 These orders were brutally put into operation. Those arrested were subjected to protracted and severe torture. Methods used to extract 'confessions' included electric shocks, suffocation with a wet bag, severe physical assault and being deprived of food and water. Some BMW members recall being forced to drink water from the toilet bowl to quench their thirst. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the torture, however, was the systematic sexual abuse to which these youngsters were subjected. This included being sodomised with the barrel of a revolver and a baton. Activists were deliberately placed in cells with hardened criminals and gangsters who repeatedly raped them. Jacques Adonis was thrown into a cell with common law criminals who were told "*Maak met hom wat jy wil.*"⁶ (Do what you want to him). Those members of the BMW who made statements to the Commission were between fourteen and twenty-one years old at the time of their detention and torture.
- 11 The consequences of participating in the violent activities of the BMW – prolonged detention, brutal torture and imprisonment with common criminals – will be felt by the individuals concerned, their families and friends and the community of Bonteheuwel for decades. Those BMW members who came to the Commission all displayed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. They reported similar symptoms in comrades who chose not to approach the Commission. Most had to discontinue their education and many had not been able to resume it.

Because of this, they are unemployed or have low-skill, low-wage jobs. Some have turned to drugs and alcohol to obliterate their painful memories. Others have transferred their 'skills' of violence and armed conflict to gangsterism. Violence against family members is not uncommon, and many find long-term, trusting relationships impossible to sustain.

- 12 BMW members were teenagers in the 1980s; at the time of the Commission hearing, they were only in their twenties. They should have been involved in studies, work, friendships and establishing families. The fact that so many of them remained unable to function adequately can be attributed to the unstable and violent life they led as BMW members, and to the extreme forces of torture and abuse they experienced at the hands of the security forces. In addition, the UDF and the ANC supported and encouraged these young children, aged between eleven and eighteen years, to participate in organised violence, without preparing them for the consequences of such actions.

After the unbanning of the ANC, they (the BMW members) were left to their own devices. As things simmered down, they found themselves naked and vulnerable, lost and exposed, without direction. These guys were literally born on the streets, born in the eye of the storm. They did not have a history before 1986. They had little schooling or skills, except in zipguns and petrol bombs. They were the shocktroops.⁷

I felt that the true purpose of the severe police interrogation was to break us mentally, to ensure that we were not able to function normally again. I could say that the cops succeeded in their interrogation, because if I look at the guys now...⁸