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Crime according to Beeld: Fear in Black and White

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July 2008

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Media and crime coverage

Extreme news sells. Items that are different from everyday life, items that disturb people. Crime is therefore a good subject for newspapers' front pages from a commercial point of view. Unfortunately, crime in South Africa is not just a creation of the national media. It is a very real problem. And although most statistics suggest decreasing figures, some specific forms of criminality have become more common.

The South African Police Service (SAPS) Crime Report of 2006/2007 states that robberies at residential premises, which have increased by 7% since the previous year, have a severe effect on the psyche of the South African citizens.

"These phenomena touch the very essence of personal privacy and security of every individual in the RSA. Whenever somebody, wherever in the world, walks or drives around in streets and public places, he/she accepts a degree of security risk and should ideally take this risk into consideration. In most countries foreign tourists are also warned not to go to certain places at certain times of the day.

However, one's home (whether it be a shack in Khayelitsha or a three storey mansion in Sandhurst) is one's castle and forms the centre of one's privacy and personal security. The President in his State of The Nation address on 9 February 2007 stated that "We cannot erase that which is ugly and repulsive and claim the happiness that comes with freedom if communities live in fear, closeted behinds walls and barbed wire ever anxious in their houses, on the streets and on our roads, unable to freely enjoy our public spaces."¹

Looking at the SAPS crime report, the reason for the fear becomes obvious as a special chapter is dedicated to 'carjacking and robbery at residential premises', (12.0% and 11.2% respectively) of all so called 'aggravated robbery' cases. It is clear why South Africans may be afraid: the psychological impact of not being safe in ones own home (or car) is worse than incidents that happen in the street or on the road. Those living in suburbs are clearly a significant percentage of victims, with (among the 3.6% of precincts that accounted for 40% of South Africa's carjackings) 55% being suburban. House robberies are similar with 47% of incidents being suburban (for the 3.2% of stations that generated 40% of cases) during the first months of 2007/2008. It seems that a significant part of the criminal activities takes place in middle and upper class neighborhoods.

The Media Monitoring Project (MMP) noted a substantial amount of articles on the subject in the Afrikaans daily newspaper *Beeld*. Because there is competition from other newspapers and an increasing competition from other sources such as television and (less so) internet, many newspapers focus on their own niche market. *Beeld* is mainly read by the White, Afrikaans speaking community. Its average reader is 44 years old and has an average monthly income of a bit less than 16.000 ZAR. The percentage of readers that are White South Africans is

¹ SAPS Crime Report 2006/2007 www.info.gov.za/issues/crime/crimestats0607.pdf

86.2%.² According to a survey that was conducted by Ads24, family is the most important aspect of life to 98% of the *Beeld* readers.³

The subject of crime on residential premises matches the concerns of *Beeld*'s target group and it will be likely to affect the readers in an important way. It is therefore very important that the subject is dealt with in a fair and equal manner. That is why the decision was made to analyse the way in which this newspaper reported on the subject.

Monitoring and analysis

For a period of one month, from Monday the 3rd of March until Monday 7th of April, all *Beeld* articles on crime that took place on residential premises were monitored. Domestic violence was excluded from the analysis.

A total of 78 crime articles were published during the research period. Most of the articles are clearly about robberies on residential premises. Some are related to the subject and were therefore included. On two occasions, an incident is framed as criminal activity on residential premises at first, but turns out to be otherwise in a follow-up story. Because they contribute to the general image of crime that is given by *Beeld*, these are included in the analysis. These stories were "Oom Ben was stil, het niemand gepla" ("Uncle Ben was silent, he bothered no one", 06/03/08, p. 4) and "Seun (4) verdwyn toe hy 'gaan buite speel'", ("Boy (4) disappeared after playing outside", 10/03/08, p. 1). Two other articles are included in the research because they are dealt with in a similar way to the other incidents in the analysis. In one occasion, a father is shot when he ordered food in a McDonald's restaurant with his children ('Dwaalkoeel? Nee, dit was moord, se man', "Stray bullet? No, this was murder, says man", 10/03/08, p. 4). The second one tells the story of a baby who was shot while sitting on her mothers back, caught in an armed fight between robbers and security guards (04/03/08, p. 4).

A focus was on racial issues within the coverage, since previous media analysis indicates that race is likely to be an issue in reporting on crime. In previous MMP research that was published in 2002, the MMP found "that the media often failed to actively challenge racial profiling and stereotyping especially when reporting on crime, thereby contributing to public perceptions about criminality and related racially-based characteristics" (...) In addition, the MMP found that the different media placed less value on Black lives than on White. In-depth background information and greater provision of detail often accompany accounts of deaths, accidents and disasters that involved White people, while those involving Black people were generally bereft of detail and information⁴. A

² "Beeld's latest AMP's show growth among younger readers", issued by Beeld on 11/04/08, available online on: <http://www.biz-community.com/PressOffice/PressRelease.aspx?i=344&ai=23295>

³ "Beeld shoots some insight into readers profile using DIY photography" issued by Owlhurst Communications, 2004, available online on: <http://www.biz-community.com/Print.aspx?l=196&c=11&ct=1&ci=5212>

⁴ "Shades of Prejudice: an investigation in the South African media's coverage of racial violence" available online on: <http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za/tabid/64/ctl/ArticleView/mid/366/articleId/78/Shades-of-prejudice-An-investigation-into-the-South-African-medias-coverage-of-racial-violence-and-xenophobia.aspx>

more recent study conducted by MMP showed a shift in crime reporting “The study has also revealed a change in the representation of crimes. While in the past crime was largely represented as committed by Black people against White, this study shows that the media now tend to focus on crime committed by Whites against Black.”⁵

The reports mentioned above analysed various South African media. In this analysis, the focus will be solely on *Beeld*. This newspaper frequently has prominent coverage of crime, and on top of that it has a clear target audience, being an Afrikaans newspaper. An imbalance in attention for a certain group of society can easily occur. Pleasing the target group is essential for the survival of a commercial newspaper. And to some extent, a preference for crime inflicted on White families or in suburban areas can be expected. All newspapers will more or less select news stories that relate to their readers, as they are entitled to, but this should not be placed above ethical guidelines and bear in mind the effect coverage has on readers. Reporting on dramatic events, including crime brings with it a responsibility for the media: The long-term coverage of the subject needs to be balanced.

The articles were analysed according to three criteria:

- Are stories on crime sensationalised to a very great degree? How is this done? Images? Dramatic language? Headlines?
- Is crime equitable covered in both Black and White communities? This is an important issue because it can either contribute to or diminish the feeling of segregation amongst South African citizens and others in South Africa.
- Are the rights of those shown in *Beeld* respected? On a few occasions in the recent past, *Beeld* has neglected legal and ethical guidelines for journalists by identifying child victims and witnesses⁶.

Crime: Sensational front page news!

1. Visual elements

Of the 78 articles that were published within the research period, 47 were accompanied by a picture. Most of these pictures show the faces of people that were murdered, wounded or witnessed the criminal incident. They are used to

⁵Revealing Race: an analysis of the coverage of race and xenophobia in the South African print media http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za/Portals/0/Final_report_v5_Print_final.pdf

⁶. ‘Drama and conjecture, how not to report on tragedy’ by MMP, <http://www.getmad.co.za/MADGLAD/tabid/277/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/95/Drama-and-Conjecture-How-not-to-report-on-a-tragedy.aspx>) and ‘Beeld frontpage article violates criminal procedure act and flouts ethics’ by MMP, <http://www.getmad.co.za/MADGLAD/tabid/277/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/111/Beeld-frontpage-article-violates-Criminal-Procedure-Act-and-flouts-ethics.aspx>)

add human interest by putting a face to the story. In only one story is a picture included that shows a strong and positive survivor of the incident, this is of a young girl Razelle that is walking again after being shot by robbers (03/04/08, p. 1). This kind of photograph could have an empowering effect on *Beeld* readers, as well as challenging stereotypical images of women as helpless victims.

Clear victims, such as crying women, are more frequent, they appear side-long six of the articles, and ten pictures show child victims. In some incidents, there is reason to doubt whether the pictures were taken with permission, such as the pictures of a family that was robbed, including a close up of the youngest daughter, taken just after the incident (14/03/08, p. 1). Some of the pictures are quite intrusive, such as the close-up photograph of a wound that was inflicted by robbers (14/03/2008, p. 9), and women shown grieving over their brother and comfort each other during his funeral (08/03/08, p. 4) or the poorly composed picture of a deaf woman who is lifted in an ambulance after being mugged and physically abused (14/03/08, p. 8). Images of women crying, aside from being an infringement on their right to dignity and privacy reinforce the idea of women as passive victims. Such imagery is particularly disturbing from *Beeld* considering their excellent track-record in regard to gender.

However, *Beeld* does show a sense of good taste in a substantial number of pictures. Instead of portraying the people involved, a photograph of the scenery was published on several occasions, giving human interest quality to the story without inflicting more grief to any of the involved. This shows that imaginative photography can be evocative.

2. Language

Because there is a strong human interest element in the nature of the incidents, almost all articles show some dramatic sentiments in the language that is used. Although it is hard to report on crime without mentioning any upsetting information or emotional quotes, many articles analysed used many instances of dramatic sentiments.

Words like "hartseer" ("grief"), "koelbloedig" ("cold-blooded") and "huil" ("crying"), one time even "soos babas gehuil" ("cried like babies"), are used frequently to dramatise the events. Ten of the articles refer to the bloodiness of the event, for instance by describing how a dead body was found in a "puddle of blood". (10/03/2008, p. 10 and 26/03/08, p. 12). The same is true of headlines such as "Pa geskiet met sy baba op sy skoot, Seuntjie se ma: 'My kind, my kind'" ("Dad was shot with his baby on his lap. Son's mom: 'My child, my child'" 28/03/2008, p. 4), "Gegil en gegil' na kokende water..." ("Screaming and screaming after boiling water" 19/03/2008, p. 4) and "Buurman: Daar was verskriklik baie bloed" ("Neighbour: there was an awful lot of blood", 04/03/08, p. 1).

As no more than two articles talked about the broader context of crime, the main function of most articles is to describe what had happened. On several occasions, this included a detailed description of the physical abuse that was inflicted by robbers. This too can cause unnecessary harm to the victims and

witnesses of a crime, violating the ethical guideline of the Society of Professional Journalists; to *"Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief"*⁷. These ethical guidelines are further expanded on in the section about media ethics and the coverage of trauma.

3. Context and follow-up

Another consequence of not exploring the context of crime in-depth is that stories may contribute to the fear of readers of the article. Context can be given very superficially in stories, such as showing when, where and why the incident happened. But more in-depth context may be given through an analysis of crime in the area, or in the country. The use of multiple and varied sources can provide additional context, such as the police in the area or other security personnel, neighbours, or experts in the field. Good follow-up stories can also serve to give the reader a sense that there is a system to deal with crime and that those responsible may be caught and punished. Follow-up stories can also show victims as survivors of the crime incidents, which is empowering to them, and gives readers a sense that the events, no matter how terrifying, can be dealt with and the consequences overcome.

In general, there is very little further detail given about crime in general in the country. This means that the stories lack perspective in terms of the overall picture of crime in the country. Only one article gives facts and figures on crime, describing the SAPS report: "Geweldmisdade in Gauteng daal" ("Violent crime in Gauteng drops", 04/03/08, p. 7).

There are many follow-up articles that inform the reader on the aftermath of an incident; however, more attention is given to description of the crime or the feelings of the involved than to the actual legal procedure. Although several articles on the conviction of a perpetrator were found during the research period, not much information about the actual legal process was given. Only in the case of the young murder victim Estée van Rensburg the police investigation was quite extensively covered (02/04/08, p. 1; 03/04/08, p. 2; 04/04/08, p. 4).

Also, there are only few articles that really show a sense of progress on crime. More success stories such as that of Razelle Botha who, despite doctors' expectations, is walking again after being shot (04/04/08, p. 1) or the woman who identifies a robber after years ("Suspect arrested for murder thanks to pink telephone" 10/03/08, p. 2), could empower rather than frighten readers. Some of the articles quote the victims saying they want to leave the country. The clearest example is an article entitled "In die stadium is daar geen toekoms vir wittes in SA". ("At this stage there is no future for Whites in South Africa", 07/04/08, p. 4). Not only does it not provide a real solution, but it carries a clear racialised tone. The headline of this article, which quotes a man whose wife was raped by robbers and who now wants to leave the country, seems to suggest that crime is exclusively experienced by the White population. This is clearly a

⁷ <http://www.spj.org/ethics.asp>

misrepresentation of the situation, as can be seen in the statistics in the next section.

The *Beeld* articles with a lack of context may increase Afrikaners sense of alienation in the new South Africa and be encouraged to believe that there is much, in crime, to fear. In general, readers would benefit from articles that are explanatory and deal with possible causes and solutions and build some understanding of the subject, rather than individual stories that use frightening details and dramatic language to contribute to a sense of fear.

Crime in Black and White

1. Quantity of coverage

Research by the Institute for Security Studies in 2006 showed that crime was high on the public agenda amongst the White minority. White people were relatively more worried about crime than were Indians, Coloured, and Black people. Finding a job remained the highest concern for all population groups in the research.⁸ A 2007 report by ISS revealed that 36% of the participants answered yes when asked whether they knew someone who was a victim of crime in the last six months. Eleven percent of the participants stated they themselves were a victim of crime in the last six months.⁹ 48% of the White participants rated crime the most urgent problem, making it the second problem on their priority list. Black South Africans perceived it only the fifth most urgent problem, with 17% of the participants ranking crime as the most important issue.¹⁰

Percentage of participants who stated to have experienced a criminal incident in their intimate circle in the last 6 months¹¹

	Total	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Yes	36%	32%	56%	31%	66%
No	64%	68%	44%	69%	34%

⁸ 'Putting South Africa's Experiences of crime and policing in context, Afro Barometer' http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link_id=14&mlink_id=4116&link_type=12&mlink_type=12&tml_id=3

⁹ 'Paralysed by fear'; Perceptions of crime and violence in South Africa", Mari Harris, Director and Political Analyst, Markinor Stephano Radaelli, Research Executive, Markinor, Published in Crime Quarterly No 20 2007 http://www.iss.co.za/static/templates/tmpl_html.php?node_id=2814&mlink_id=5236&mlink_type=12&mlink_id=3

¹⁰ 'Good news and Bad' Public Perceptions of Crime, Corruption and Government, Robert Mattes, Centre for Social Science Research University of Cape Town, Published in Crime Quarterly No 18 2006, http://www.iss.co.za/index.php?link_id=3&mlink_id=4181&link_type=12&mlink_type=12&tml_id=3

¹¹ Source of tables: 'Paralysed by fear'; Perceptions of crime and violence in South Africa", Mari Harris, Director and Political Analyst, Markinor Stephano Radaelli, Research Executive, Markinor, Published in Crime Quarterly No 20 2007 http://www.iss.co.za/static/templates/tmpl_html.php?node_id=2814&mlink_id=5236&mlink_type=12&mlink_id=3

Percentage of participants who stated to have experienced a criminal incident themselves in the last 6 months

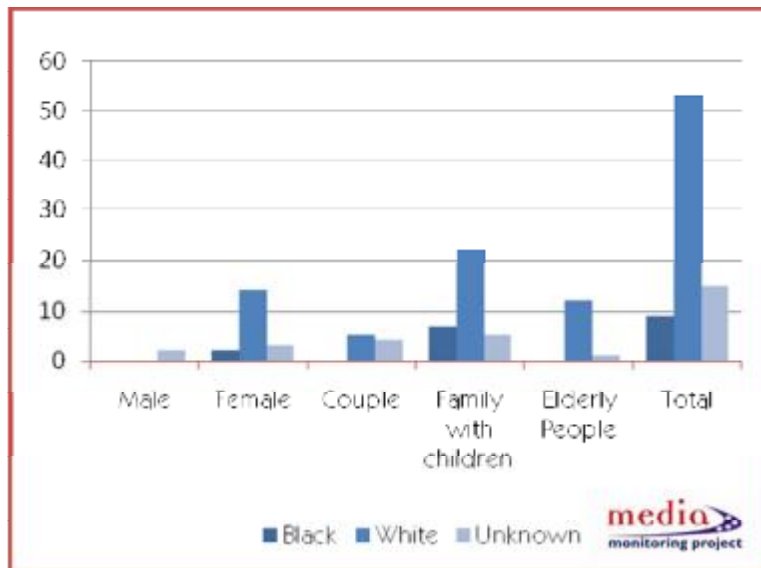
	Total	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Yes	11%	9%	20%	9%	22%
No	89%	91%	80%	91%	78%

This means that within the White community, *Beeld*'s target group, criminality is a prominent problem. And as a group, they are disproportionately affected by crime. However, the White community forms only a small percentage of the total South African population. In 2007, the total number of White inhabitants of South Africa were an estimated 4.351.781. The total mid-2007 population was estimated at approximately 47.9 million¹². The Indian population was at that time estimated at 1.173.581. This means the two relatively small population groups are highly affected by crime. The Black population was estimated 38.079.888, which is almost 80 percent of the population. Black crime victims therefore outnumber White victims of crime by a great number (respectively 3.427.182 and 870.340). Although the percentages almost certainly would shift somewhat when the figures would be specified on crime on residential premises only due to the large amount of these crimes based in suburbs, the Black community suffers heavily from crime and this should be reflected in the newspaper.

Beeld is a popular newspaper amongst Whites and a slight preference for White suburban based families could be expected in their reporting. Analysis of a month's crime coverage shows a strong preference for White subjects. Even if all of the subjects whose race is unknown would have been Black, together this would still be less than half of the coverage. Although research by the Institute for Security Studies shows that within the White population, the people that have experienced criminality is relatively high, their percentage of the total amounts of criminal incidents is nowhere near 50%. The table below gives an overview of the number of articles that were published during the research period, ordered by the population group of victims. A clear bias towards White families and females can be seen from this table.

Quantity of articles found in *Beeld* per population group

¹² <http://www.statssa.gov.za/timeseriesdata/pxweb2006/Dialog/Saveshow.asp>



A substantial part of the coverage consists of follow-up stories on earlier incidents. The 'White female' column for example is high because there were eight stories published on the young woman Estée van Rensburg, who was murdered in her parents' house. Not only the incident of her murder itself, but also the funeral and police investigation were reported on. The same goes for the 'White family with children column', where the Lap family, who were the victims of a home robbery in which the father died and a mother and son were severely injured, was covered in several articles, including their son's recovery in hospital.

The follow-up stories do not make much difference for the large gap between coverage on Black and White victims. The fact that their stories are followed up are just another indication for their perceived newsworthiness. It is interesting to see that apart from race, a traditional image of 'the victim' is portrayed in *Beeld*'s coverage. Families with children, women and elderly people are the most frequent subjects.

One reason for the lack of follow-up on some of the stories can simply be a lack of development in solving the crime. Another reason could be that readers do relate more to stories that are near to them. That is probably why the murder on Estée and the disappearance of a 4-year old White boy in a fenced apartment building were awarded a place on the front cover over other disturbing criminal incidents; they resemble *Beeld* readers' children and homes a lot closer than violent incidents in townships will.

2. Framing incidents and race

There were three follow-up stories on incidents that involved Black families. All of them involved the death or injury of a young child. Although this is remarkable, possibly reflecting a pro-family agenda, it is not clear that this has anything to do with race.

What is interesting is the framing of the incident in different articles. In one of the articles, about a young Black father who was shot while his baby son was sitting on his lap, the possibility of him having enemies is raised (28/03/08, p. 2). An article, about the father who was shot in a McDonald's restaurant suggested planned murder too, but was not followed up during the monitoring period (10/03/08, p. 4). The same goes for the 16-year young girl that died shortly after being found in her uncle's house (10/03/08, p. 7). No one knew why she was there, or what had happened to her. With no mention of robbery, rape or senseless violence, the reader could suspect a less random motive for her death. The articles raise questions that are never answered, because there is no follow-up on the stories. This keeps the incident vague to the reader, whereas the stories on White families are continuously framed as clear cases of senseless violence. Even if they are not, like in the case of 'Uncle Ben' who later turned out to have died of natural causes. ('Oom Ben was stil, het niemand gepla', 06/03/08, p. 4)

An excellent story which serves to balance the coverage published outside of the research period, but very much within the subject discussed above, they published a large article titled 'Teiken: Ras of rykdom' ('Token/signal: race or wealth') on the 16th of April that dealt with the feeling of many White people that race plays a role in violent crime ('Teiken: Ras of Rykdom', p. 15). The article quotes a researcher from ISS Pretoria to explain that in at least 95% of the criminal incidents, economical division plays a role rather than race. Rich people stand more chance of being a victim of crime. And White people in South Africa tend to be in a higher economical class at this moment. Yet this article states that the most severe and violent incidents are found in Black societies, where people do not have the financial means to secure themselves.¹³ This article balances the persistent focus on White victims of crime that was shown during the research period.

The research period shows too few examples to make any definite statements on the framing of the articles. But together with the striking difference in quantity it suggests an imbalance in the *Beeld* reporting where race is concerned.

¹³ 'Teiken: Ras of Rykdom', *Beeld*, 16/04/08, p. 15

3. Children: The face of crime

The use of names and images of children that were victims or witnesses of a crime is a commonly used method by newspapers for dramatic effect. Children, representing innocence often become the face of disasters¹⁴. However, identification of a child that is involved in a criminal case is legally prohibited. The Criminal Procedure Act, Section 154(3) states:

"No person shall publish in any manner whatever information which reveals or may reveal the identity of the accused under the age of 18 years or of a witness at criminal proceedings who is under the age of 18 years."

The Bill of Rights, of the Constitution of South Africa, state;

"The child's best interests are paramount in every matter concerning the child."

The need to consider, at all times, the best interests of the child, is also advocated by guidelines on best practice, including the Guidelines of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). For more information see "A Resource Kit for Journalists: Children's Media Monitoring Project"¹⁵

In the research period, *Beeld* violated these legal and ethical guidelines by identifying child witnesses no less than eleven times. All of them are identified in the article by mentioning their full name and age. In addition, children are identified in of these six articles in the accompanying photograph.

It can be very harmful for children who have lost a parent or witnessed their parents being molested by robbers to see themselves in the paper. Having their name and faces in the paper may also lead to secondary abuse from acquaintances and peers. Identifying them in this manner is not in their best interest and therefore contradicts the ethical guidelines journalists should follow.

Not only is this continuous publication of child witness identities very insensitive, it can also be dangerous. Since most of the articles mention the perpetrators have not been arrested yet, there is a risk of silencing witnesses. This is especially important for the two articles that suggest the possibility of planned murder ("Pa geskiet met sy baba op sy skoot" meaning "Father shot with baby on his lap" 28/03/08, p. 4 and "Dwaalkoe"el? Nee, dit was moord, sê man" meaning "Stray bullet? No, this was murder, says man" 10/03/08, p. 4). The article about the young father that was shot with his son on his lap mentions not only the name, age and picture of that son, but also all brothers and sisters of the deceased. This

¹⁴ MMP. Children: The Face of Disaster available at

http://www.getmad.co.za/Portals/0/Children%20and%20Disasters_2004.pdf

¹⁵ Available at

<http://www.mediamonitoring.org.za/Resources/Reports/tabid/64/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/32/A-Resource-Kit-for-Journalists-Childrens-Media-Mentoring-Project.aspx>

would seem a risky thing to do when the reason for the murder is unclear (28/03/08, p. 4).

The consequences of this illegal, unethical and very inconsiderate publication of identities are unknown and could possibly be very serious. The repetition of this violation shows a lack of respect for children's rights at *Beeld* newspaper, which makes it even more serious. Reporting on crime should not go hand in hand with violating the law.

4. Media ethics and the coverage of trauma, including crime

How the citizens of South Africa perceive criminality, is not only influenced by facts. Their awareness is, for an important part, influenced by what they read and see in the media. The media are granted their right to freedom of speech by article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Every newspaper has the freedom to choose from the wide variety of newsworthy incidents that happen every day and select what they think is interesting to their readers. They have the right to present the facts in a way they feel will serve their readers best. And they have the right to hold and air an opinion on the facts that happened. But the ethical guidelines for journalists also demand a responsibility from the journalist which balances their freedom of speech somewhat. They need to aim for best practice and keep the best interest of their readers in mind. News about the own safety will have a great impact on every single reader, that is why newspapers need to be very cautious in their reporting on this subject. They have a responsibility of limiting any unnecessary harmful effect that their article may have. This responsibility and others are stated in the Society of Professional Journalists' code of ethics¹⁶, used by international journalist associations, consists of four basic principles.

One of the four principles is the principle of minimising harm. It asks journalists, amongst other things, to:

- Show compassion for those who may be affected adversely by news coverage; and to
- Be sensitive when seeking or using interviews or photographs of those affected by tragedy or grief".

The media need to take responsibility for both the wellbeing of the people involved in the crime they report on and the effect the news will have on its readers.

¹⁶ <http://www.spj.org/ethics.asp>

Another principle is too "Seek the truth and report it". Some of the explanations of this principle are to:

- Tell the story of the diversity and magnitude of the human experience boldly, even when it is unpopular to do so;
- Examine their own cultural values and avoid imposing those values on others; and
- Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.

According to this principle, journalists should give a diverse and balanced overview of crime amongst all citizens, not just those that the readers or the journalist herself feels it is most related to. The real ethical issues in this case are the criteria for news selection and the value that is placed on different events. Special correspondent to the New York Daily News David Krajicek asks an interesting question in a guideline for journalists that cover crime and justice:

"How does your news operation choose its crime stories? Are decisions based upon socio-economics, race, gender or celebrity? Does geography play a role? Will a homicide in a gated suburb get more play than one in a "transitional" neighbourhood near downtown? If so, does a life have more news value in the suburbs?"¹⁷

In a society where different communities live relatively isolated from each other, the media can function to bridge some of the psychological separation between two groups. Best practice, in this case, would be to aim for stabilisation of society rather than further distancing groups from each other. An imbalance in crime reporting can contribute to the segregation of an already disconnected society.

Conclusion

The 2006/2007 SAPS crime report shows that the number of robberies on residential premises is rising. *Beeld* is therefore right to report on this worrying development. What is concerning though, is the neglect of the responsibility to 'seek the truth' and inform the public. Rather than giving answers to how this increase is possible and what the possible solutions are, the coverage in this research period shows a chain of individual incidents. Telling frightening stories without this background information creates a sense of unease. Not only in the average reader, but also to the people who were involved in the crime. It is possible that they experience secondary grief by the intrusive pictures and detailed description of the event in a national newspaper. The coverage is therefore not in line with the newspapers' ethical responsibilities to seek the truth and to minimise harm.

¹⁷ "Covering crime and justice" by criminal justice journalists, available online on:

<http://www.justicejournalism.org/crimeguide/chapter06/chapter06.html>

What is worrying is that there seems to be an imbalance in reporting on crime victims from different population groups. The choice to focus the analysis on robberies on residential premises will have influenced the prominence of stories on White crime victims to some extent. However, the categories of Black people and people of unknown race together form less than half of the coverage. While the SAPS report shows that this particular type of crime happens in suburban areas less than 50 percent of the occasions. From the report by the Institute for Security Studies, it becomes clear that White South Africans form only a small percentage of the total amount of crime victims. Crime does not discriminate (at least on the basis of race). But the impression from *Beeld* suggests otherwise.

Beeld was right in publishing a background article on criminality and race shortly after the research period, which put in perspective the trend of White victimisation, to which they made a substantial contribution with the analysed coverage. This article describes criminality as targeting wealth rather than race and balances the idea that 'there is no future for White people in South Africa' ('In die stadium is daar geen toekoms vir wittes in SA', 07/04/08, p. 4). Hopefully, *Beeld* will put an end to the continuous and frequent identification of child victims and witnesses soon. This is not only legally and morally incorrect; it also puts the child at risk. The examples of strong neutral photographs that were published during the research period are promising. In the recent past, *Beeld* has been winning several awards for their commercial strategy, for their graphic design and for their individual journalists.¹⁸ This newspaper deserves to be done justice by bringing all content up to the same standard.

¹⁸ Three Beeld reporters won a Media24 Awards for Excellence in Journalism in 2007; one journalist won The Taco Kuiper Award for excellence in investigative journalism in 2007, in the 2007 Sunday Times Top Brands Survey Beeld was awarded a top ten position and a fifth place in the Business Media: Print category.