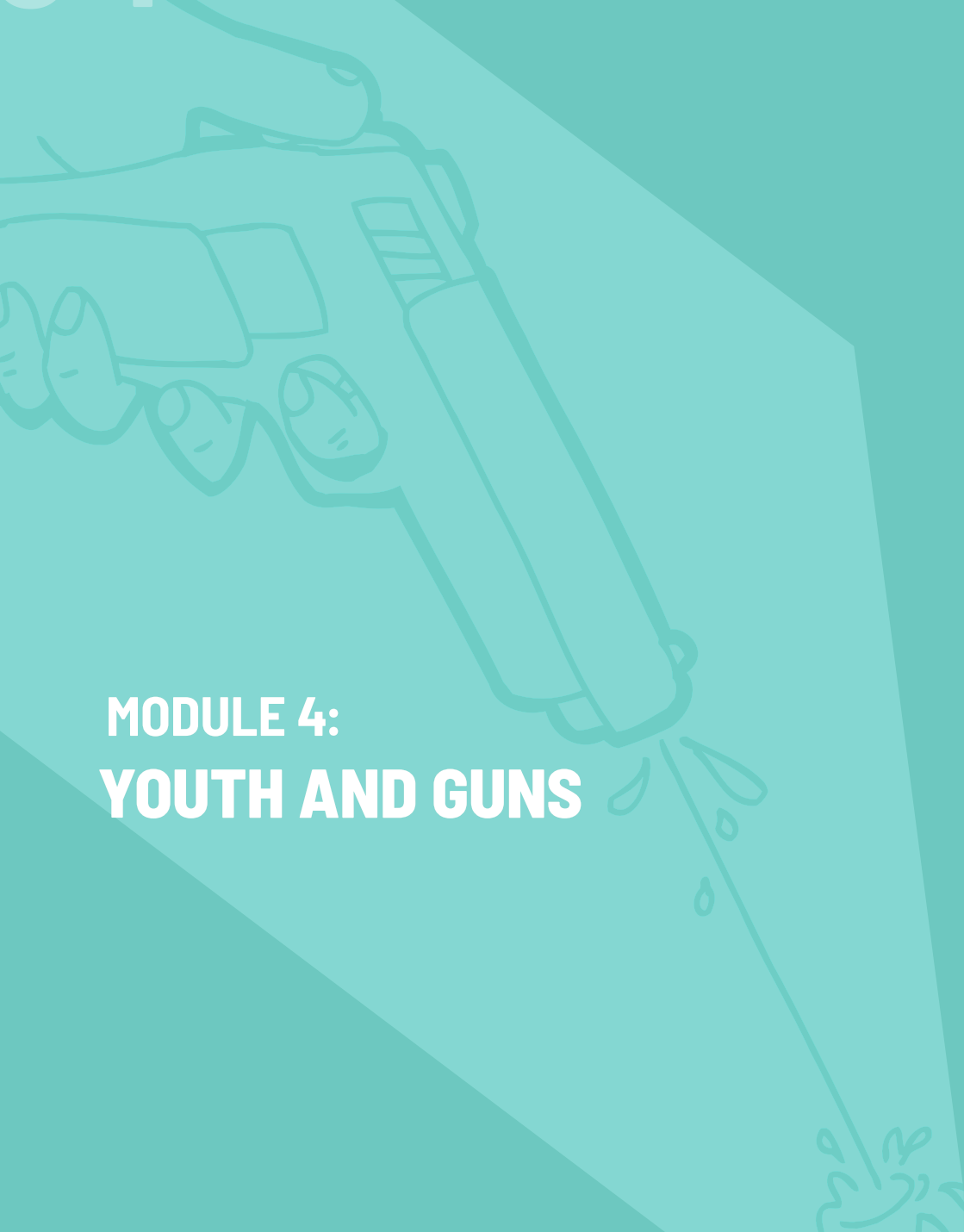


04



**MODULE 4:
YOUTH AND GUNS**

Youth and guns

Globally, young people – particularly young men – make up both the majority of perpetrators AND victims of violence and crime.

Here are some shocking numbers that show just how badly violence and guns affect the lives of young people across the world:

- ➔ Murder is the fourth leading global cause of death in young people between the ages of 10 and 29.
- ➔ In SA gunshots have overtaken stab wounds as the primary cause of murder for youth aged 15 and older, though this figure starts rising from age 10.
- ➔ Research shows that children are disproportionately affected by stray bullets fired into the air or at missed targets.
- ➔ Young people are the main perpetrators of gun violence, 56% of those accused of murder with a gun are between 12-24 years old.

**"GLOBALLY,
MURDER IS
THE FOURTH
LEADING CAUSE
OF DEATH IN
YOUNG PEOPLE"**

Children and gun violence in South Africa

Between 1991 and 2010 (20 years) 467 children under the age of 12 were admitted to a Cape Town children's hospital after being shot. Of these children:

43%

VICTIMS OF CROSSFIRE

14%

VICTIMS OF 'ACCIDENTAL' SHOOTING

9%

SHOT DELIBERATELY BY AN ADULT

5%

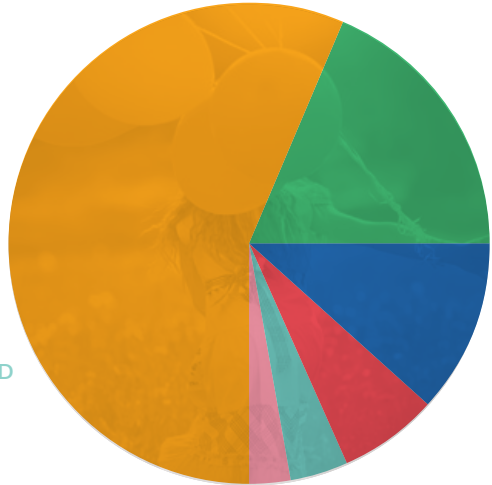
SHOT BY GANGSTERS

3%

SHOT DELIBERATELY BY ANOTHER CHILD

2%

SHOT WHILE PLAYING WITH A GUN



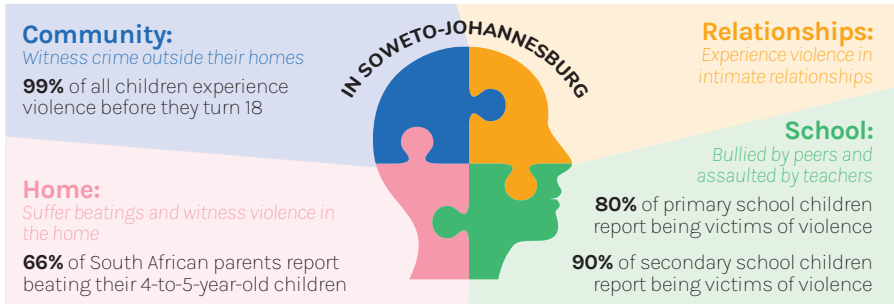
Why young people use violence

There is no single reason that explains why some youth, especially boys and young men, engage in acts of violence. It is a combination of many factors, including:

"THERE IS NO SINGLE REASON WHY SOME YOUTH RESORT TO VIOLENCE"

- ➔ Exposure to high levels of violence in society – many South African youths are repeatedly exposed to violence in their homes, schools and communities as well as amongst their peers, both as victims and witnesses.
- ➔ Dysfunctional family structures – including the absence of family support at a time when children most need it.
- ➔ Absent fathers – they may be absent emotionally, abusive or simply not there.
- ➔ Drug and alcohol abuse – by the youth themselves, as well as in the home by family members.
- ➔ Having anti-social peers – friends who are aggressive, bully those around them, and generally get into trouble.
- ➔ An inefficient education system – leading to high drop out rates and low matric pass rates.
- ➔ High youth unemployment rates – leading to poverty, disillusionment, boredom and, in some cases, crime.

Exposure to violence



FACTS ABOUT SA YOUTH



1 out of every 3 children that start Grade 1 will pass matric



55% of young people aged **15 to 24 were unemployed** in 2020



South Africa had the **highest recorded youth unemployment rate** in the world in January 2020

What does exposure to violence do to youth?

Children and youth exposed to violence, including gun violence, commonly experience:

- Difficulty concentrating in the classroom, which can lead to lower marks and lower educational and career aspirations.
- Emotional detachment from friends and family.
- Difficulty seeking support.
- Difficulty expressing emotions.
- Anxiety and stress about their surroundings.
- Less interest in activities they used to enjoy.



Youth and gangs

One of the most violent activities affecting many youth in South Africa is gangsterism.

What is a gang?

Gangs have different levels of involvement and types of participation. Here are a few basic facts about gangs:

- A gang is usually a group of more than three people – mainly young men.
- They have a common identity, name or other identifier.
- They are found in most cities across the world, especially in overcrowded and low-income urban areas.
- They are often formed to replace poor parental attachments and become a surrogate family.
- They almost always have connections to drugs.
- A high percentage of gang members have dropped out of school early.
- For many young people, gang membership is a rite of passage into manhood.
- Gangs are rife in communities that have a high unemployment rate, poverty and drug and alcohol abuse.
- Illegal guns are highly prized by gang members because they are outside of any control and do not require any licences.

**"FOR MANY
YOUNG
PEOPLE, GANG
MEMBERSHIP
IS A RITE OF
PASSAGE INTO
MANHOOD"**

Why do children and youth join gangs?

- People are usually recruited into gangs from a young age because of their vulnerability and because they won't be harshly sentenced if arrested and under the age of 18.
- In the absence of positive role models, children and youth are drawn to gang bosses, who often have flashy cars, beautiful women and obvious power.
- Overall, gang life promises material rewards.
- Gangs entice children and young people into gang activities by making new recruits feel important and by giving them a sense of belonging.

"GANGS OFTEN RECRUIT YOUTH BECAUSE THEY WON'T FACE HARSH PUNISHMENT"

Once children and youth are part of a gang, it is often difficult to leave. Why is that? They may have committed crimes as part of the gang, or they may have seen crimes committed by the gang, so they could become a threat to the gang if they leave. Gangs also ensure that their members are highly indebted to them, making leaving difficult.

Protecting youth from violence

Dealing with the risk factors that make children and youth vulnerable to violence and gun-related violence will take time and a lot of resources.

In the short-term there are things that can be done, such as:

- Reduce the availability of guns in the community and in the home.
- Limit access to alcohol.
- Implement social programmes to give young people an alternative to gangs and other unhealthy activities.
- Implement initiatives to teach young people skills to deal with conflict in a non-violent way.



What do youth think about guns?

GFSA commissioned a survey to assess the attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and experiences of young South Africans regarding guns and gun violence. 238 young people from Gauteng and Western Cape took part in the survey, which revealed that:

- Youth believe that people own guns either for safety and security or to carry out criminal activities.
- Youth believe that gun owners are more respected in their communities, so young people are confusing respect with fear.
- More than half (63%) of the respondents in the study have no desire to own a gun.
- 95% said they were not well informed about gun laws.
- Victims of gun violence are still afraid to speak about their experiences publicly.
- Solutions to gun violence suggested by the respondents:
 - Young people should be thoroughly educated on guns and their risks to discourage young people from owning a gun.
 - The taxi business should be regulated to help reduce conflict amongst taxi drivers and prevent taxi wars.
 - Illegal guns across the country need to be seized and destroyed.
 - Safety and security should be tightened.
 - Perpetrators should be harshly punished and rehabilitated.



"95% OF YOUTH SAY THEY ARE NOT WELL INFORMED ABOUT GUN LAWS"

Facts

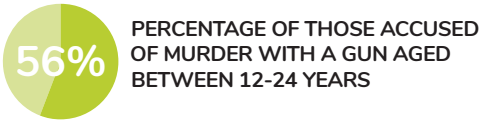


99% OF CHILDREN EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE BEFORE THEY TURN 18
(SOWETO)

6x LIKELIHOOD OF YOUNG VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE COMMITTING CRIME



43% OF CHILDREN
ADMITTED TO HOSPITAL FOR GUNSHOTS SHOT IN CROSSFIRE (1991-2010)



56% PERCENTAGE OF THOSE ACCUSED OF MURDER WITH A GUN AGED BETWEEN 12-24 YEARS

+15 YEARS OLD
LEADING CAUSE OF MURDER IS GUNS

DID YOU KNOW?

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM GUNS



The best way to protect your children from injury and death by a gun is to keep your home free of guns and avoid households where guns are kept.

Never leave children unsupervised in a home with a gun. Ensure that the gun is locked away in a safe with the safe key out of reach, but remember, children often know where the safe key is kept.

DON'T BUY TOY GUNS FOR CHILDREN



When we give a child a toy gun we are sending a message that guns are fun and that we approve of guns. Children also receive conflicting messages when they are told to stay away from real guns because they are dangerous, yet are given toy guns to play with.

In South Africa, a country traumatised by violence, we want to give children the right message: Guns are not fun! GFSA urges parents and care-givers not to buy toy guns for children, but to buy toys that encourage imaginative, peaceful play.

This does not mean that children will not or should not play games involving make-believe guns, but it is important for role models not to be seen to support guns and gun violence.

Myths

- ✘ **Myth: Children don't know where their parents hide the keys to the safe in which guns are stored.**

Fact: While most parents think their children don't know where the safe keys are stored, often children know how to access the safe.

- ✘ **Myth: Children know the difference between real guns and toy guns.**

Fact: Few children younger than 8 years can tell the difference between a real gun and a toy gun. Some replica guns are so realistic that even police officers struggle to know the difference without holding the gun.

- ✘ **Myth: If you have a gun in the home you must teach your children to never, ever touch the gun, even if it's not locked away.**

Fact: Telling children to never touch a gun is called gun-proofing. Experiments with children who have been gun-proofed show that this doesn't work: children who have supposedly been gun-proofed will play with a gun they have been told not to touch. Gun-proofing children also makes them responsible when the gun owner has been irresponsible with his gun.

- ✘ **Myth: A child is not capable of firing a gun.**

Fact: Many parents think their children are not capable of firing a gun, but even very young children are strong enough to pull the trigger on most guns.

- ✘ **Myth: Gangs are a police problem.**

Fact: Gangs are everyone's problem. Communities, government, police, educators and even families and friends of gang members need to commit and work together to end gang crime.

**"GANGS ARE
EVERYONE'S
PROBLEM"**



Take action

How you can prevent youth violence in your community:

- ✓ Get involved with sports, youth clubs, or volunteer activities to develop skills, interests, and connections with peers and adults who make good choices, such as choosing to stay away from drugs and alcohol, and staying in school.
- ✓ Be aware of the effects of toy guns, and television programmes, movies, music, and video games that promote violence, and consider non-violent alternatives.
- ✓ Get involved in or start a youth violence-prevention programme in school or in the community. This would involve learning important skills like conflict resolution.
- ✓ If you or someone close to you has been a victim of gun violence or witness to gun violence, it is advisable to seek help. Start by finding out which organisations in your area offer support, and if there are none, take action to introduce this important service in your community.
- ✓ If you belong to a youth or community group, campaign for Gun Free Zones especially in areas that are frequented by children and young people.



**IN SA, GUNS ARE THE
LEADING CAUSE OF
MURDER FOR CHILDREN
OLDER THAN 15**

Notes
