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Victims' social constructions of residential robbery and the use of violence in South Africa.

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ABSTRACT

This research study aimed to explore victims' social constructions of residential robbery and the use of violence in the South African context. Violence and crime are embedded into the very fabric of South African society and pervade all aspects of life. While there is an extensive literature on crime and violence, residential robbery is a crime on which there is very little information. Also, very few studies focus on victims' accounts despite them being at the centre of crime and having the ability to share information to enhance the limited knowledge on residential robbery and the use violence in its enactment. The study not only aimed to supplement existing literature, but also provide a novel alternative lens by exploring the relationship between morality, bio-politics and the inherent value of life against property in relation to residential robbery and violence.

Eight participants were selected for this study. Participants were selected from various racial backgrounds, across genders and ranged from permanent skilled workers to part time minimum wage workers all of whom owned their own houses. Participants also belonged to different socio-economic groups varying from poorer-income communities to middle-higher income communities and were all directly affected or exposed to acts of residential robbery. Data was obtained through the use of semi structured interviews that were conducted face to face with each participant. Data was then analysed using Parker's Discourse Analysis which provided a comprehensive step by step guide to examining participants' discourses and constructions surrounding residential robbery.

The discourses cohered around three basic organising meaning structures; foundational discourses, core moral discourses and existential and power discourses. Each section included sub-sections that provided more detailed social constructions and discourses used by victims' surrounding the relationship between residential robbery, violence, morality and bio-politics. Foundational discourses comprise of the initial constructions and discourses discussed by victims' including; poverty and unemployment, race, crime of opportunity, gender and state failure. Core moral discourses consider various constructions of moral attitudes, behaviours within society and the link between morality and residential robbery. While lastly, existential and power discourses deal with the interplay between life versus 'things', the exchange between power, vulnerability and fear and lastly the politics of death

This study demonstrated the intricate discursive relationships that exist between morality, power, violence and the enactment of residential robbery. Victims' draw on discourses

surrounding these particular constructs to account for residential robberies. Morality and life holds significantly different meanings and value for different people from different social classes. On one hand, life remains scared and important for some while to others it's regarded as dispensable and a commodity which can be traded in the pursuit of wealth and material gain. By understanding residential robbery and violence from multiple lenses and different sources we have the ability to build a more holistic picture for future context in South Africa.

Keywords: residential robbery; violence; victims; morality; bio-politics; discourses; social constructions