 Older Persons in South Africa: The Forgotten Victims

Compiled and presented by Roedolf Kay
National Coordinator
South African Older Persons’ Forum

SAOPF
South African Older Persons Forum

"Human Rights don’t stop at sixty"
Why a special focus on the safety and security of older persons?

• The safety and security of older persons does not seem to be a targeted priority for SAPS;
• The abuse and exploitation of older persons is largely under-reported and is escalating at an alarming rate;
• Despite the fact that abuse and exploitation of older persons is common and widespread, no concrete plans / programmes are in place to curb these offences;
• The financial abuse of older persons, specifically relating to their old age grants, is an escalating trend;
• Claims of witchcraft are used against primarily older women; the prevalence of human rights abuses under the pretext of culture has escalated alarmingly;
• Many of the attacks against older persons are horrific, brutal and downright evil;
• As a vulnerable group, older persons should be protected by police.
Security at Pension Paypoints

- The SAOPF is particularly alarmed by the countless reports of exploitation of older persons and people with disabilities at pension paypoints throughout the country;
- Money-lenders, thugs, fly-by-night funeral policy traders and various other criminal elements are exploiting thousands of the most vulnerable members of our society;
- Money-lenders often withhold pensioners IDs and pension cards for the purpose of extorting money;
- These “loan sharks” are charging interest rates of between 30 and 50 %, is well above the legal interest rate;
- Although SASSA’s payment contractors TRY to enforce the 100-metre-zone rule at paypoints as stipulated in the regulations to the Social Assistance Act, older persons and people with disabilities are exploited directly outside the zoned areas.
Witch Hunts:

• In South Africa the belief in witchcraft is still very strong, common and widespread especially in rural areas;
• The prevalence of human rights abuses under the pretext of culture has escalated alarmingly;
• Those alleged to be witches and wizards are victims of “jungle justice”, extrajudicial killing, forced exile and disappearance; burning, hanging, stoning and beatings are among the types of violence the accused are subjected to and often result in death;
• Claims of witchcraft and witch hunts are primarily directed at women, although there have been reports of witch hunts against men;
• Accusers are likely to be neighbours, members of the immediate community, and in some cases family members.
Woman, 81, stabbed fifty times

January 13 2010 at 10:49am

An 81-year-old woman was stabbed 50 times and her throat slit allegedly by her neighbour who accused her of witchcraft in KwaKwiliiza near Mtubatuba, KwaZulu-Natal police said on Wednesday.

"An 81-year-old woman was found with her throat slit and 50 stab wounds in her body last night," said Captain Jabulani Mdletshe.

"It is alleged that her neighbour killed her after he accused the elderly woman of killing two of his family members through witchcraft."

He said police were called to the scene but the man had already escaped. - Sapa
Concern at witchcraft excuse for murders

February 3 2012 at 11:20am
By Bhekizizz Mbanjwa

The KwaZulu-Natal provincial executive council on Thursday expressed concerns over the “growing trend” of elderly people killed on suspicion that they were witches.

“We call on our people never to use suspicion of witchcraft as an excuse to commit murder. Any attack is not acceptable,” said Premier Zweli Mkhize after a meeting of the council.

The cabinet was reacting to recent incidents where people – mostly the elderly – were killed for allegedly being witches.

Last month in Lindelani Elsa Dubazane, 62, burnt to death in a mud shack while her husband Raphael Zulu, who had managed to escape the burning shack, was “necklaced” a few metres away.

The couple had been accused by residents of witchcraft. Eleven suspects have been arrested for this crime.

More recently, 50-year-old Masisi Mhlongo, Fanelesi-bonge Ntuli, 6 and Amahle Nkumulo, 5, were burnt to death inside their home in Mapnumulo, near Stanger.

Police were still investigating the deaths as some have suspected foul play.

According to some reports, it is believed that Mhlongo could have been attacked as she was accused of
Abuse of Older Persons:

- Exploitation and abuse of the elderly is a major social problem in South Africa;
- The Older Persons Act 13 of 2006 was designed to address the unacceptable levels of abuse and neglect suffered by older persons in residential care as well as in those living in the community; the Domestic Violence Act is also applicable to elder abuse violations;
- Reports indicate that SAPS members are largely unfamiliar with the Act and the role that they should play in terms of the OPA -elder abuse is an offence;
- Stakeholders in the aged sector and older persons are of the impression that SAPS members are often unwilling to investigate reported cases of abuse;
- Older persons have lost faith in SAPS; when older persons call SAPS for assistance they either take an exceptionally long time to respond or do not respond at all;
- It has been reported that the attitude of SAPS members toward older persons reporting abuse is ageist and that they are not taken seriously;
- Elderly are very reluctant to report abuse and hence there is a veil of silence surrounding the problem partly due to SAPS’ members attitude and seeming unwillingness to investigate;
- A lot of focus in the media is on abuse in facilities but the larger proportion of older persons live in the community;
The increasing problem of drug and alcohol abuse is having an enormous effect on older persons;
• Older persons are seen as soft targets and have their grants and possessions taken to fund these addictions;
• Older persons are often the recipients of aggression when addicts are under the influence of drugs or alcohol;
• The perpetrators are usually family members which means that the abuse takes place within their own homes;
• Community policing especially of older persons who are a vulnerable group should be introduced (or re-introduced).
Gogos set up safehouse as rape case stokes fears

Canaan Mdletshe

Grandmothers in KwaZulu-Natal have moved into a single house to thwart potential rapists.

The women, aged between 67 and 90, made the decision after a 28-year-old habitual criminal appeared in court yesterday for allegedly raping a 94-year-old woman in front of her great-grandchildren.

The crime occurred less than a month after the man was released from prison under President Jacob Zuma’s special Freedom Day remission programme.

Leaning on her walking stick, Thokozile Gumisa, 68, called for the suspect to “rot in jail”.

“I stay alone with my two grandchildren aged nine and 12, and I am scared that he might do it to me as well. Maybe he got an appetite for grannies like myself and it means I am no longer safe. I am even afraid of going to the outside toilet alone,” she said.

Julia Hadebe, 67, said: “We are now so afraid that we have to stay in groups because if you are alone you might be attacked and raped.

“We fear our own children and grandchildren in our community more than we fear animals.”

In 2006, he was found guilty of housebreaking and sentenced to three years’ imprisonment, two of which were suspended for five years.

Then, in January this year, he was again arrested for housebreaking and sentenced to six months in jail.

Upon his release, after serving five months of his sentence, the man is alleged to have robbed a woman of her cellphone at knifepoint on July 10.

He allegedly raped the 94-year-old woman in her rondavel on Saturday.

At the court, police covered his face and chased away photographers and TV cameramen.

“This is my case and I don’t want it to be jeopardised by having the suspect’s pictures all over the newspapers and television. Please leave this court,” a policeman shouted.

Shackled and wearing a blue tracksuit and tornakkies, the accused entered the dock under heavy police guard.

Prosecutor Jabulani Maphumulo read out the charges and the man then whispered that he would conduct his own defence.

“Let me warn you, you are charged with serious crimes and I won’t lie to you, your case will go to high court and it is advisable that you get the services of a legal expert,” Magistrate Virushka Jamuna said.

The suspect indicated he would apply for a legal aid lawyer.

The matter was adjourned to August 9 for a bail application.

Indy staff weigh up options

Staff at the media company, which owns the Cape Times, The Star, Pretoria News and Sunday Independent, are looking for funding to acquire a stake of about 23%.

“There is no reason why staff should not aim for a bigger stake; it all depends on funding and on other partners in the purchase,” said Dasonis.

Independent Newspapers is controlled by Independent News and Media, an Irish group that acquired a host of South Africa’s oldest newspapers in the 1990s.

Rumours abound that the debt-ridden Irish group wants to sell the South African operations.

The Times reported earlier this month that some politically connected individuals might be interested. Among those named were Marcel Golding, Moeletsi Mbeki and Cyril Ramaphosa. — Tj Strydom
Violence against older persons:

- Whenever and wherever crime is on the rise in South Africa, older persons are at greater risk;
- Attacks on older people, however, seems to be motivated by more than just criminals seemingly thinking that older persons’ makes for “soft targets” - racism, hate, drug abuse, distorted cultural believes and political motives also seems to come into play;
- Older persons from all socioeconomic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds and who have varying functional abilities are all vulnerable to personal attacks;
- Older persons’ is a vulnerable segment of our society and as such need targeted protection from police;
- It is pivotal to the safety of older persons that SAPS implement targeted protection protocols to strengthen the safety of older persons.
Sensitising the SAPS on the issues of Older Persons:

- SAPS members are often the first point of contact for older persons in distress, it is therefore very important that they are able to gain the trust of older persons;
- Learning about aging can help to change negative stereotypes or at least help SAPS members to become aware of them;
- SAPS members needs to be sensitised and provided with strategies for working with people who have Alzheimer’s disease and the related dementias;
- SAPS members also to be sensitised with regard to not only dealing with situations of abuse, but also identifying signs of abuse such as signs of physical abuse but also mental signs such as depression and extreme fear.
Example Case:

3rd Degree

Death For Minor Offense (9 June 2009)

Tuesday, June 09, 2009
by TVSA Staff

Coming up on 3rd Degree:

Episode Title: 3rd Degree Feedback
Broadcast date: 9 June 2009

Last July, a 69-year-old man with Alzheimer's was apprehended at a Shoprite in Kriel, Mpuamalanga for attempting to steal a R7.99 chocolate. While petty theft is considered a minor offence, Shoprite detained Frederick Brown in a holding room and handcuffed him to a chair where he allegedly sustained injuries.

He was later pepper sprayed by police, an act caught on CCTV, and taken to the police station where he was locked up in an unfurnished, dark holding cell. The police refused to let Brown's family see him and did not call a doctor, although they were aware of his mental condition.

Five hours after his arrest, Brown died of a heart attack in police custody. Brown's family wanted answers, but when the police and Shoprite investigated, they found that nobody was responsible for his death.

3rd Degree investigates what happened on the to ask: could Brown's death have been prevented?

3rd Degree is on etv on Tuesday's at 21h30.
Conclusion / Recommendations:

• The Crime Research and Statistics of SAPS stipulates reporting on the neglect and ill-treatment of children but not that of older persons despite the fact that specific legislation applies to the protection of older persons against abuse as is the case with women and children;
• Stats on crimes against persons over the age of 60 years should be recorded; the OPA stipulates that when the victim of a crime is 60 years and older this should be considered an aggravating circumstance;
• The SAOPF is willing to work with SAPS to try and draft a strategy for all provinces and districts to safeguard our social grant recipients;
• It is unacceptable that the elderly are being targeted directly outside paypoint and the police is doing little to protect them;
• The prevalence of witch hunts in SA is causing thousands of older persons to live in fear for their lives and some killed, this type of crime requires targeted protection;
• SAPS need to send a clear message to perpetrators of elder abuse, exploitation and violence is a situation will not be allowed to continue;
• The SAPS Commercial Crime Unit must put an end to exploitation of older persons is in the grip of loan-sharks, thugs, fly-by-night funeral policy traders;
Conclusion / Recommendations (Cont...):

- SAPS members needs to be adequately trained in the stipulations of the Older Persons Act specifically as it applies to abuse;
- SAPS should be aware of the definitions of elder abuse and older persons in need of care and protection;
- Members of SAPS must remove the perpetrator in situations where this would be in the best interests of the older person;
- SAPS should arrest perpetrator where relevant;
- Protection for the victim of abuse should be provided by SAPS where possible and VEP services made available to them;
- Sensitising of SAPS members with regard to the issues of older persons, specifically abuse and Alzheimer & its related dementias is essential to the successful policing and prosecution of age related crime and security concerns for older persons;
- As a result of our country’s history, many older persons are still unable to trust SAPS; shoddy service and bad behaviour reinforces this belief;
- Older persons should be treated with respect and dignity by members of SAPS and not re-traumatized;
8 Jun 2012 : Elderly Muldersdrift couple shot in bed;
10 Jul 2012: Elderly George farm-couple held up by knifeman;
19 Jul 2012: A woman (70 or older) died following a house robbery in the Bedfordview;
20 Jun 2012 : An elderly woman and her two grandchildren in Ngwavuma, Zululand, were burnt to death by community members;
4 Jul 2012 : Two Phoenix pensioners are recovery after being attacked with a 5 pound hammer;
24 Jul 2012: An elderly Klopper Park resident has been murdered;
24 Jul 2012: Elderly Ugie couple stabbed, wife dies;
25 Jul 2012 : 71-year-old woman bludgeoned to death;
26 Jul 2012 : Pamela Wheeler, 76, was tortured into revealing the combination to a small safe
28 Jul 2012 : An elderly woman has been robbed at her house in the Generaal De Wet area of Bloemfontein;
28 Jul 2012: DV gogo forced to flee in attack after being accused of practising witchcraft;
29 Jul 2012: The 94-year-old granny who was allegedly raped by a 28-year-old convict. “I begged for mercy”;
31 Jul 2012 : Another KZN gran raped;
01 Aug 2012: Elderly KZN woman raped. An 82-year-old woman has been raped in her house at Mambedwini section, in Swayimane;
02 Aug 2012: Lotto scammers bust for trying to cheat pensioner ;
“A society that does not value its older people denies its roots and endangers its future.” Nelson Mandela