Farm Attacks: The role of statistics and crime analysis

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27 September 2017

Introduction[1]

The public debate on farm attacks and farm murders have been prevalent in affected communities, among victims of these crimes and in the media, but rarely on a political platform. On 14 March of this year the Parliament of South Africa held a debate during a National Assembly regarding attacks and murders targeted at farming communities in our country. One factor continuously debated is the validity and reliability of available statistics of crimes committed during farm attacks. Because various political parties and departments involved quote these statistics to raise awareness of this issue, or to denounce the matter, the trustworthiness of the figures are often questioned.

The agricultural organisation TAU SA and AfriForum Research Institute (ANI) have worked together in recent years to gather information on farm attacks, but TAU SA has been the most reliable independent source on statistics since 1990. In May 2016, a PAIA application was submitted to obtain the farm attack and farm murder numbers recorded from the South African Police Service (SAPS). The submission was successful and ANI was able to compare the number of farm attack incidents and murders with the available independent records collected.

Data collection and verification

The collection of data of farm attacks by ANI consists of first hand reports from either the victims and/or their families, neighbours of victims or individuals from the direct community, safety and security structures functioning within the specific community, media reports and through social media. Each reported case must be verified to be included in the dataset. The facts of each specific case need to be confirmed by a reliable source. There is however a significant dark figure pertaining to the amount of farm attack incidents as opposed to the more accurate farm murder incidents reported.
Attacks where there are more smallholdings situated within a semi-rural area, are also frequently attacked and recorded by the SAPS. These incidents, however, rarely are reported on by the media. A reason for this might be the frequency by which attacks and crime in general are committed in these vulnerable communities due to their target-proneness. For this reason, the independently collected figures for farm attacks are lower than that reported annually by SAPS.

Definition

The Rural Protection Plan defined farm attacks in 2007 as:

> *Attacks on farms and smallholdings refer to acts aimed at the person of residents, workers and visitors to farms and smallholdings, whether with the intent to murder, rape, rob or inflict bodily harm. In addition, all actions aimed at disrupting farming activities as a commercial concern, whether for motives related to ideology, labour disputes, land issues, revenge, grievances, racist concerns or intimidation, should be included.*

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[1] This presentation is adapted from a report released in April 2017 entitled *Farm attacks and farm murders in South Africa*, authored by Lorraine Claasen from the AfriForum Research Institute (ANI). Full report available at stopthemurders.co.za

Financial year statistics[2]

The table below was figures included in the PAIA application to SAPS from 2016. It should be noted that the figures from 2007/2008 to 2009/2010 were not made available to the public due to the eradication of statistics released on these crimes. The information outstanding for this period, was only used for operational purposes by SAPS and was therefore not included in their annual report of the relevant years. [3]

PERIOD	NUMBER OF MURDERS	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS (ATTACKS)
1996/1997	84	433
1997/1998	142	490
1998/1999	144	827
1999/2000	144	823
2000/2001	147	908
2001/2002	140	1 069
2002/2003	103	903
2003/2004	88	773
2004/2005	82	694
2005/2006	88	636
2006/2007	86	794
2010/2011	80	532
2011/2012	56	523
2012/2013	59	566

PERIOD	NUMBER OF MURDERS	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS (ATTACKS)
2013/2014	57	517
2014/2015	60	490
2015/2016	49	446

[2] **This presentation is adapted from a report released in April 2017 entitled *Farm attacks and farm murders in South Africa*, authored by Lorraine Claasen from the AfriForum Research Institute (ANI). Full report available at stopthemurders.co.za**
[3] **During a meeting with AfriForum on 4 May 2016, the SAPS announced the numbers of the 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 financial years.**

The need to compare independent statistics calculated by calendar year with the figures released by SAPS's figures released by financial year was crucial in drawing comparison between the two sets of data. The official annual report of crime statistics for the 2016/2017 period by SAPS has not yet been released.

Data analysis[4]

The total amount of independently verified farm attacks for the 2016/2017 financial year period is 357 farm attacks and an alarming 74 farm murders. These figures are, however, subject to change as more cases are continuously recorded through data collection.

*The following results are based on the analysis of farm attacks and farm murders incidents **independently** collected for the **2016/2017** period.*

Farm murders per province:

PROVINCE	TOTAL
Gauteng	21
KwaZulu-Natal	11
Limpopo	8
Mpumalanga	12
Northern Cape	1
Northwest	9
Eastern Cape	3
Free State	6
Western Cape	3
TOTAL	**74**

Victims

In the 357 incidents reported in this period, there were more than 553 victims involved. The average number of victims per attack is four and the average age of victims is 55 years. In 62% of the incidents, victims of the age of 51 and older were attacked.

Age of farm attack victims:

0–20	21–50	51–70	71–100
13%	25%	40%	22%

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Day of the week:

Monday	12.5%
Tuesday	12.5%
Wednesday	11.9%
Thursday	14.5%
Friday	15.1%
Saturday	17.6%
Sunday	15.9%

The most attacks occurred from Thursday to Sunday.

Time of the day:

Midnight – 6:00	6:01 – 12:00	12:01 – 18:00	18:01 – Midnight
36%	16%	14%	34%

The majority of attacks occurred from 18:00 to 06:00.

Attackers[5]

More than 740 attackers were involved in the 357 incidents, with an average of four attackers per incident. On average from the data, it seems that more attackers struck on farms than on smallholdings. It is not known in how many cases attackers were known to the victims, due to the increasing use of balaclavas that disguise the identities of the attackers.

- During 69 (19%) of the incidents it was reported that weapons and ammunition was stolen from the victim.
- In 84 (24%) of the incidents the vehicle of the victim was stolen and used as a get-away vehicle.
- During 112 (31%) of the incidents victims were fired at, or there was an active attempt to murder the victim(s).
- In six of the cases it was made public that a woman was raped during the attack. This number can however be higher because the information could be withheld from the public due to the sensitivity of this sort of crime.
- In four cases the victim was abducted during the attack and set free or murdered elsewhere.
- In three cases fires were intentionally started at the main house or elsewhere on the farm in order to lure victims from their home, after which the attackers struck.

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[5] **This presentation is adapted from a report released in April 2017 entitled** *Farm attacks and farm murders in South Africa*, **authored by Lorraine Claasen from the AfriForum Research Institute (ANI). Full report available at stopthemurders.co.za**

The characteristics of farm attacks

Characteristics of farm attacks was identified and included in a report entitled *An overview of farm attacks in South Africa*[6]. These characteristics provide an overview of the nature and extent of criminal behaviour predominantly displayed during an attack.

- Some attacks are more *organised* and planned than others, like with any other crime. Firearms, tools to break into a house, wire or cables used to restrain victims or a getaway car brought with the perpetrators to the targeted property indicate the offender's *intent* in premeditating and planning the attack in advance.
- Perpetrators who have already selected their target often stake out the property weeks in advance, sometimes trying to *gather information* from farm labourers about the comings and goings at the homestead and the general layout of the farm and the house.
- There is usually *more than one attacker committing* the crimes. Having someone to work with, restrain victims, collect the loot or keep watch allows the attack to be completed in a shorter time period.
- There are cases where at least one of the attackers was *known to the victim*, in other cases the attackers were complete strangers.
- The initial contact with the victim can occur in various ways. Some attackers *ambush* their victims by either waiting or hiding inside their homes or at the farm gates to overpower the unsuspecting victims arriving home. Others *surprise* the victims inside their homes by gaining access to the home through windows, or confront them somewhere else on the property. Attackers may also lure the *victim*s outside the house on the pretence of buying cattle or products, looking for a job or even by setting the grass *outside the home* alight. This allows the attacker to overpower the victims, leaving them powerless and with phones or firearms out of reach.
- The *victims of the attacks* are not limited to the farmer and their spouse or family but also include domestic workers and farm labourers.
- Most victims are *overpowered, assaulted* and r*estrained* upon initial contact with the attackers. There are cases where the victims fought back in self-defence, often shooting the perpetrators and causing them to flee.
- Victims are mostly *restrained* with shoe laces, telephone wires or electric cables tied around their hands and legs.
- Victims may be harmed with various objects during attacks. Attackers assault victims with *steel pipes, pangas, axes, knobkerries, shovels, pitchforks, broomsticks and knive*s, or by kicking, beating, slapping and hitting the victims.
- Victims are often *threatened* in order to gather *information* about the whereabouts of the safe, the keys to the safe and the location of money, firearms and other valuables. Threatening to kill them or their spouses or cause them serious physical harm, or pouring methylated spirits over the victims may force the victims to give the information that the attackers demand.
- Various victims are horrifically tortured by pulling out their nails, pouring *boiling water* over their bodies, burning them with electric irons, breaking their fingers, pulling them behind a moving vehicle, or repeatedly hitting them with objects before they are ultimately murdered.
- The attackers ransack the house, looking for valuables and loot.
- Female victims are sometimes *raped* during the attack.
- Victims are *shot*, sometimes fatally, when they try to resist the attack, try to *defend their families*, shoot at the attackers and much too often for no apparent reason at all.
- The attacker's *loot* may, if anything, include firearms, money, vehicles, jewellery, electronic devices, clothes, shoes or farming equipment.

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[6] Claasen, L. 2012. The significance of the level of brutality and overkill in *An Overview of Farm Attacks in South Africa and the potential impact thereof on society.*

- Attackers either flee the *scene* on foot, in a getaway car ready for the escape or in the farmer's own vehicles. It is concerning that in numerous cases the vehicle stolen is left *abandoned* a short distance from the farm or property where the attack occurred.

Crime analysis

The application of crime analysis is fundamental to any strategic planning and operation regarding addressing specific crime issues which may ultimately lead to crime reduction. Of critical importance is using the correct procedures and systems in data collection and data input to form the foundation of any intel driven operations. Because of the importance of information – an extremely valuable commodity – relevant departments and organisations can effectively operate based on these principles on an organisational level, according to Christopher Bruce[7].

Bruce further emphasises the importance of devoting individuals, units and entire divisions to information collection, processing and the dissemination thereof. Dr Rick Adderley[8], who is regarded as an expert on data mining, stated that data collection also works on the 80/20 principle. It takes 80% of the time to collect and prepare data and 20% to utilise it for operational use. This ratio seems to be elevated in South Africa when the time it takes to collect and verify data is concerned. By reducing the collection, validation and preparation time, more predictive analysis and activity-based intelligence can drastically affect apprehension and eventually prevention rates.

Crime analysts is crucial, according to Bruce, to provide information to police agencies regarding crime, disorder, calls for service, police activity and other relevant areas of police interests. The goal is ultimately to aiding and assisting policing departments to do their jobs better. Areas where crime analysts can specifically help police departments – all relevant to policing crime in rural areas, are as follows[9]:

- Solve crimes
- Develop effective strategies and tactics to prevent future crimes
- Find and apprehend offenders
- Prosecute and convict offenders
- Improve safety and quality of life
- Optimize internal operations
- Prioritise patrol and investigations
- Detect and solve chronic problems
- Allocate resources
- Plan for future resource needs
- Enact effective policies
- Educate the public

Not only will local police stations in rural areas benefit from such an intel-driven approach, but other law enforcement and criminal justice agencies can utilise the benefits of crime analysis in their own planning of operations. It is extremely important to realise that statistics and raw data is of no value unless it is delivered to the public and the information is shared in an open-sourced environment to all relevant role-players.

Summary

Two important factors are highlighted by Bruce regarding the process of crime (or any data) analysis:
1. **Data** becomes **information** when it is effectively **analysed**.
2. **Information** becomes **knowledge** when it is effectively **communicated**.

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[7] Bruce, CW. 2009. *Fundamentals of Crime Analysis* in Exploring Crime Analysis. Published by IACA.
[8] Adderley, R. 2017. Presented paper entitled *Targeting crimes and criminals through data*, hosted by The Alan Turning Institute
[9] Bruce, CW. 2009. *Fundamentals of Crime Analysis* in Exploring Crime Analysis. Published by IACA.

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Herein lies the challenge in the battle against farm attacks – and crime in general – in South Africa. Intel and data collection starts on the ground, meaning within the community. Pro-active data mining and predictive analysis can assist all individuals living in rural communities.

The willingness of communities to work together, along with a proposed division of analysts – either government or privately operated – can lead the way in not only communicating valid information and knowledge about suspect activities or individuals, but it can also empower communities to fight what has become an almost daily headline in local news – *"Another farmer murdered."*