

Attitudes towards weapon carrying in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces of South Africa

By

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Introduction

South Africa continues to be one of the most violent countries on the African continent. The high level of violence is demonstrated by the pervasiveness of interpersonal violence which has been ranked as a major cause of morbidity, mortality and disability. Interpersonal violence continues to be a national phenomenon that impacts on many groups across diverse settings. It has been described as a significant problem in both urban and rural settings. A study explaining violence in South Africa by Simpson (1993) argued that the “culture of violence” has its roots in the apartheid social, economic and political system, which institutionalized and imbedded violence in the psychic of the population as not only normative, but also a legitimate means of resolving interpersonal social, economic and to some extent political conflicts.

Although interpersonal violence in South Africa affects people of all walks of life, the demography of violence in South Africa suggests that the majority of victims and perpetrators are youth and black. Attitudes and beliefs towards interpersonal violent behaviour is an important domain in understanding the dynamics and prevalence of interpersonal violence. A study by Choe et al. (2012) suggests that experience of violence as a primary or secondary victim or the witnessing of violent acts could significantly contribute to having violent attitudes and behaviours. Another study elsewhere by Langhinrichsen-Rohling & Neidig (1995) found that

exposure to violence increases the propensity to using violence as a means of resolving interpersonal conflicts.

Previous studies attributed the culture of violence in South Africa to three main interrelated factors. These include: the pervasive poverty among the majority black population; rapid urbanization mostly driven by rural-urban migration of the black population after the transition from the apartheid social and political system and the failure to adjust effectively to the urban social and economic environment (Dissel, 1997); and youth gangsterism, which is common in sprawling urban areas and informal settlements in South Africa and has become an effective substitute to traditional rite of passage from adolescents to adulthood (Pinnock, 1996). The failure of the traditional family structures and support systems as agents of socialization has also contributed to the gradual adoption of criminality and other forms of deviant behaviours attitudes and beliefs which either tolerate or encourage the use of violence as a necessary tool of survival.

The broad objective of this paper is therefore to assess and estimate the prevalence of favourable attitudes and beliefs towards weapon carrying in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces of South Africa. The attitude was asked as follows:

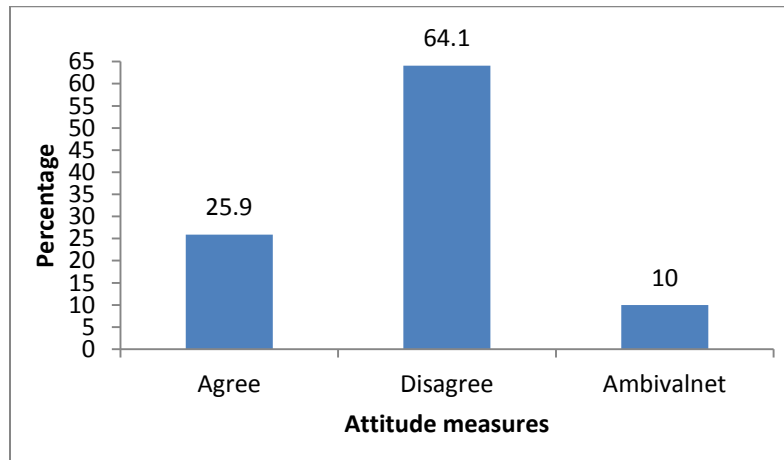
- i. “possession of a weapon makes one feel safer”

These attitudes were assessed by the use of a three points scale including agree, disagree or not sure. Respondents who agreed with the statements were regarded as having favourable attitudes to violent behaviours. Furthermore, differentials in these attitudes were examined and tested against the experience of violent deaths and other selected characteristics of respondents which

included age, sex, population group, marital status, level of education, religion, employment status, type of settlement and region of residence. Also examined were the effects of income and use of alcohol on each attitude. Previous research elsewhere suggests that individuals who have experienced violence have significantly different attitudes and beliefs towards violent behaviours than the general public (Gwartney-Gibbs & Stockard, 1989). However, in this paper, the focus was on examining the effect of experiencing violent death as a secondary victim on having favourable attitudes and beliefs towards violent behaviours after controlling for the effect of selected demographic, social and behavioural characteristics of the respondents.

Attitudes and beliefs towards violent behaviour were assessed by asking respondents to report their attitudes on possession of weapons by members of the public. The respondents were asked to report attitudes to the statement that “possession of a weapon makes me feel safe.” The results of the assessment is presented in Figure 1, which shows that more than one-quarter of the respondents reported favourable attitudes to the statement that “possession of weapons makes people feel safe”, more than 6 in 10 disapproved with the statement that possession of weapons makes people feel safe and only 10% were ambivalent to the statement that “possession of a weapon makes people feel safe.”

Figure 1 **Distribution of respondents by attitudes to possession of weapons**



Differentials in attitudes to possession of weapons

The need to possess and carry weapons is high in settings where the prevalence of violence is high and people with favourable attitudes to weapons' possession argue that they do so for protection because of the perception that official social institutions such as the law enforcement agencies do not offer them sufficient protection from criminal elements in their society (Carter et al., 2013; Shaw *et al.*, 2011). In this section differentials in accepting or favourable attitudes to possession of weapons was assessed by examining the attitudes of respondents to the statement that "possession of weapons makes people feel safe" by selected demographic, social and behavioural characteristics of respondents.

Demographic differentials in attitudes to possession of weapons

Differentials in favourable attitudes to weapons' possession were examined by demographic characteristics of the respondents including sex, age, population group, household size and experience of a violent death and the results are presented in Table 1. The table shows that

favourable attitudes to possession of weapons due to perceived or actual vulnerability varied by sex. More males (26.7%) than females (23.3%) reported favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of the belief that it makes people feel safe. Favourable attitudes to possession of weapons as a safety measure was significantly associated with sex at $p < 0.0001$. The table also shows that favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon because of the belief that it makes people feel safe was significantly more prevalent in the 25-34 year age group (28.8%) followed by the 35-44 (25.1%) year age group. Conversely, fewer respondents (24.8%) in the less than 25 year age group (24.8%) and only 21.5% of respondents in the 45 years or older age group reported favourable attitudes to possession weapons because of perceived or actual vulnerability. Favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon was significantly associated with age at $p < 0.01$.

Table 1 also presents differentials in favourable attitudes to possession of weapons by population groups and household size. The table shows that more blacks than other races significantly reported favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of the perception that it makes people feel safe. Although, favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon on the grounds of safety was significantly associated with population groups at $p < 0.05$, this result could have been affected by the small number of other races in the study. The result presented in Table 1 also suggests that the need to carry a weapon because of perceived or actual vulnerability was affected by household size. Favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon because of the perception that it makes people feel safe was significantly more prevalent among respondents from smaller households. More than 4 in 10 and 2 in 10 of the respondents from households with 2-3 and one member respectively reported favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon compared to households with 4 or more individuals. Attitudes to possession of weapons because

of the perception that it makes people safe was significantly associated with household size at $p < 0.0001$.

Table 1 Distribution of attitudes to possession of weapons by demographic characteristics

Characteristics	Agree	Disagree	Ambivalent	Number	X²
Sex					
Male	26.7	66.8	6.6	641	15.8, $p = 0.0001$
Female	23.3	63.7	13.3	679	
Age group					
<25	24.8	65.2	10.1	577	17.2, $p = 0.009$
25-34	28.8	57.2	14.0	278	
35-44	25.1	66.3	8.6	175	
45+	21.5	72.3	6.2	289	
Population group					
Black	25.3	65.4	9.3	1227	6.6, $p = 0.037$
Others	20.7	62.0	17.4	92	
Household size					
1	20.6	69.1	10.3	165	156.1, $p = 0.0001$
2-3	40.5	40.5	19.0	378	
4-6	16.3	77.1	6.6	497	
7+	21.9	75.3	2.9	279	
Deaths in household					
Natural or no deaths	23.8	65.9	10.3	1224	14.0, $p = 0.001$
Violent deaths	40.0	55.8	4.2	95	
Total	24.9	65.2	9.9	1319	

Experience of a violent death defined in this study as witnessing or knowledge of a victim of violence perpetrated by other persons has been reported by a previous study as reason for some people to have favourable attitudes to possession of weapons. The data presented in Table 7.1 shows that possession of weapons due to perception of vulnerability is significantly more prevalent among respondents who reported experiencing violent death. Forty percent of the respondents who experienced a violent death reported favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon than only 23.8% of those who did not experience a violent death. Experience of a violent death was significantly associated with favourable attitudes to possession of a weapon at $p < 0.001$. The differential results confirm the hypothesis that attitudes to possession of weapons

because of perceived or actual vulnerability is significantly influence by experience of violent deaths in the study population.

Socioeconomic differentials in attitudes to possession of weapons

Possession of weapons has serious socioeconomic dimensions. The need for possession of weapons is often fuelled by ideological views, which could have serious socioeconomic consequences. In this sub-section, differentials in favourable attitudes to possession of weapons are examined by selected social characteristics of the respondents which include religious affiliation, level of education, employment status, current regular source income status and marital status. Also examined are the differentials in attitudes to possession of weapons by province of residence and type of residential neighbourhood.

Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa are the two most popular provinces for violent crime. The high levels of violent crimes in these two provinces have been attributed to high levels of poverty and inequality. The high level of violent crime could be associated with the proliferation of small firearms in the metropolis in these provinces. Accordingly, this study examined the attitudes of respondents in the two provinces of Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal to possession of weapons because of the belief that it makes people safe and the result is presented in Table 7.2. The table shows that compared to only 22.6% of respondents reporting favourable attitude in Kwazulu-Natal, prevalence of favourable attitude to possession of weapons due to perceived vulnerability is higher in Gauteng (34.6%). The province of residence was also significantly associated with possession of weapons because of the belief that its makes people feel safe at $p < 0.0001$.

The results presented in Table 2 shows that having a favourable attitude to possession of weapons was more prevalent among respondents from minority religious affiliations (31.5%), respondents with no education (30.0%) followed by those with primary education (24.7%) and among respondents with no employment at the time of the survey. The table also shows that over one-quarter (28.4%) of the respondents who reported having no regular source of income also had favourable attitudes to possession of weapons, Favourable attitudes to possession of weapons due to perceived or actual vulnerability was significantly associated with type of religious affiliation, level of education and regular source of income status at $p < 0.01$.

Possession of weapons has been found by a previous study as an important factor in influencing the prevalence of marital violence. A study in the United States of America found that more marital murder of women by their husbands involved the use of own weapons. Most of the weapons are legally acquired because of the perception that having weapons in the home increased personal and family security (Rennison, 2001). In this study, differential in favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of the perception of vulnerability was examined by marital status of the respondents and the result is reported in Table 2. The table shows that one quarter of currently in union respondents reported a favourable attitude to possession of weapons compared to about 21% of formerly married respondents. Over one-quarter of never married respondents also reported favourable attitudes to possession of weapons. Possession of weapons was found to be significantly associated with marital status at $p < 0.05$.

Table 2 also present differentials in favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of the belief that it makes people safe by the highest level of education of respondents. The table shows that the prevalence of favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of perceived

vulnerability decreased with increase in the level of education. Thirty percent of the respondents with no education reported favourable attitudes to possession of weapons compared to 24.7%, 23.1% and 23.2% among respondents with primary, secondary and tertiary education respectively. Possession of weapons because of perceived vulnerability was significantly associated with the level of education at $p < 0.007$. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that having favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of the perception that it makes people safe was more prevalent among respondents having no regular source of income (28.4%) and currently using alcohol (31.3%). Regular source of income status and current alcohol use status were significantly associated with favourable attitudes to possession of weapons for protection at $p < 0.01$.

Table 2 **Distribution of respondents by attitudes to possession of weapons by socioeconomic characteristics**

Characteristics	Agree	Disagree	Ambivalent	Number	X²
Province of residence					
Gauteng	34.6	53.3	12.1	257	20.5, p=0.001
KZN	22.6	68.1	9.3	1062	
Religious affiliation					
Christian	22.5	68.0	9.4	967	13.5, p=0.001
Others	31.5	57.4	11.1	352	
Marital status					
Currently in union	25.0	62.4	12.6	452	9.5, p=0.049
Formerly married	20.9	73.4	5.8	139	
Never in union	25.7	65.2	8.9	728	
Type of neighbourhood					
Rural	25.2	67.7	7.2	405	4.9, p=0.288
Urban	25.1	63.9	11.0	717	
Informal	23.9	65.0	11.2	197	
Highest level of education					
No education	30.0	56.1	13.9	287	17.8, p=0.007
Primary	24.7	69.0	6.3	300	
Secondary	23.1	67.0	10.0	663	
Tertiary	23.2	69.36	7.2	69	
Employment status					
Unemployed	26.4	63.4	10.2	941	4.5, p=0.101
Employed	21.4	69.6	9.0	378	
Have a regular income					
Yes	22.3	68.8	9.0	746	9.7, p=0.008
No	28.4	60.6	11.0	573	
Alcohol use status					
Uses alcohol	31.3	57.9	10.8	297	9.6, p=0.008
Does not use alcohol	23.1	67.3	9.6	1022	
Total	24.9	65.2	9.9	1319	Total

Predictors of favourable attitudes to possession of weapons

The multinomial logistic regression model was used to identify factors that influenced favourable attitudes to possession of weapons because of the perception that it makes people safe. Violent death status was defined as having experienced a violent death or having no experience of a violent death. A respondent was considered as having ever experienced a violent death and coded “1” if he/she has witnessed one or know someone who was a victim of violence if a respondent did not witness or know someone who was a victim of a violent death, then he/she did not experience a violent death and coded “0”. The dependent variable in the analysis was attitudes to possession of weapons which was categorized as favourable, unfavourable or not sure. The model was used to test the hypothesis that “persons who have experience of a violent death were significantly more likely to have had a favourable attitude to possession of weapons after controlling for demographic, social and behavioural covariates. The results are presented in models 1 and 2 in Table 3.

Model 1 presents the unadjusted results on the effect of experience of violent death status on attitudes to possession of weapons. The result shows that compared to those who were not sure, respondents were significantly more likely to have had a favourable attitude to possession of weapons because of perceived vulnerability if they had experience of a violent death (OR=4.11, CI=0.143-11.76). Although some of the respondents who experience a violent death were 1.75 times more likely to have had unfavourable attitude to possession of weapons because of perceived vulnerability, experience of violent death was not a significant predictor of the unfavourable attitude (CI=0.73-5.81) possession of weapons of any kind.

Table 4 Multinomial logistic regression model showing Odds Ratios predicting favourable and unfavourable attitudes to the perception that possession of weapons makes people feel safe

Predictors	Favourable vs Not sure		Unfavourable vs Not sure	
Experience of deaths				
Violent deaths	3.71**	1.26-10.84	1.75	0.59-5.13
Natural/no deaths ®	1.00		1.00	
Sex				
Male	2.30****	1.46-3.63	2.45****	1.59-3.79
Female ®	1.00		1.00	
Age groups				
<25	0.48*	0.22-0.99	0.28****	0.14-0.57
25-34	0.47*	0.23-0.97	0.25****	0.12-0.50
35-44	0.74	0.32-1.71	0.13	0.24-1.19
45+ ®	1.00		1.00	
Population Group				
Blacks	2.28*	1.06-4.94	2.03*	1.00-4.13
Others ®	1.00		1.00	
Religious affiliation				
Christian	0.64	0.36-1.11	0.83	0.48-1.42
Other ®	1.00		1.00	
Marital status				
Currently in union	0.59*	0.34-0.91	0.52**	0.33-0.83
Formerly in union	1.21	0.50-2.94	1.94	0.84-4.50
Never in union ®	1.00		1.00	
Province of residence				
Gauteng	1.09	0.65-1.82	0.65	0.40-1.08
Kwazulu-Natal ®	1.00		1.00	
Household size				
1	0.15****	0.05-0.42	0.32***	0.15-0.66
2-3	0.22****	0.09-0.50	0.14****	0.06-0.23
4-6	0.26**	0.12-0.66	2.57*	1.14-5.78
7+	1.00		1.00	
Level of education				
No education	0.33	0.10-1.08	0.18***	0.06-0.55
Primary	0.72	0.21-2.40	0.51	0.16-1.59
Secondary	0.56	0.19-1.65	0.52	0.18-1.44
Tertiary	1.00	1.00	1.00	
Have regular source of income				
Yes	1.04	0.65-1.66	0.73	0.46-1.13
No	1.00		1.00	
Alcohol use status				
Uses alcohol	1.13	0.61-2.12	1.13	0.62-2.07
Do not use alcohol	1.00		1.00	

Model 2 presents the effects of experience of violent deaths on attitudes to possession of weapon because of perceived vulnerability after controlling for the effects of selected demographic, social and behavioural characteristics of the respondents simultaneously. The result shows that although experience of a violent death significantly increased favourable attitude to possession of weapons due to the perception of vulnerability by 3.71 (CI=1.26-10.84) times, the effect of experience of violent death was attenuated by 40%, which suggests that the control variables eroded some of the effects of experience of violent death on having a favourable attitude to possession of weapons. Other factors predicting increased favourable attitude to possession of weapons due to perceived vulnerability were being male (OR=2.30, CI=1.46-3.63) and being a black African (OR=2.28, CI=1.06-4.94). The finding suggests that being a male and a black African increased the perception of vulnerability to violence leading to having a favourable attitude to possession of weapons. Model 2 also shows that respondents were significantly more likely to have had an unfavourable attitude to possession of weapons if they were male (OR=2.45, CI=1.59-3.79); Black African (OR=2.03, CI=1.00-4.13) and lived in household with 4-6 members (OR=2.57, CI=1.14-5.78).

Conversely, respondents were significantly less likely to have had a favourable attitudes to possession of weapons due to perceived vulnerability to violence if they were under 25 years of age (OR=, CI=0.22-0.99) and 25-34 years of age (OR=0.47, CI=0.23-0.97); currently in union (OR=0.59, CI=0.34-0.91); and living in a lone household (OR=0.15, CI=0.05-0.42), living in a household with 2-3 members (OR=0.22, CI=0.09-0.50) and living in a household with 4-6 members (OR=0.26, CI=0.12-0.66). Respondents were also 0.28 (CI=0.14-0.57), 0.25 (CI=0.12-0.50) and 0.52 (CI=0.33-0.83) times significantly less likely to have had an unfavourable attitude to possession of weapons if they were aged under 25 years, 25-34 years

and currently in union respectively. Unfavourable attitude to possession of weapons due to perceived vulnerability to violence was also less likely if the respondents lived in a one (OR=0.32, CI=0.15-0.66) and 2-3 (OR=0.14, CI=0.06-0.23) member households, and had no education (OR=0.18, CI=0.06-0.55).

Conclusion

The burden of weapon violence on society is large and triggers great interest on research towards weapons and attitudes people hold towards them. Globally, different countries reacted in various ways towards regulations such as gun ownership and other dangerous weapon carrying and ownership. These reactions provide an indication on how people perceive these weapons in the society and whether measured in years of productive life lost, disability, fear, or economic costs. The toll is unprecedented among high-income nations. Weaknesses in current gun laws contribute to this burden by establishing low standards for legal gun ownership and significant loopholes in policies designed to keep guns from prohibited persons.

For years researchers have been interested in attitudes towards guns, however, for few have made any real attempt at understanding the magnitude of these attitudes in the selected two provinces; Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal provinces in South Africa. The current research shows that as age increases so does the likelihood that a person supports weapon carrying. This is true for gun owners and non-gun owners alike. While researchers have previously found support for self-interest theory when applied to gun control, these findings would suggest that there is an age component to this theory. Self-interest theory does not explain why people over the age of 50

support gun control. This argument can be made based on the high levels of people over the age of 50 who both own guns and support gun control.

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