A methodological dilemma: the street corner approach versus an institutional approach to accessing victims of torture and CIDT
Appendix D[1]

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Introduction

Over the last two years, 2010 and 2011, there has been an increase in media reports on torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment (CIDT) in South Africa. However, there are no reliable data on the prevalence of torture and CIDT in the country. A number of factors contribute to this lack of statistical evidence. Torture, being associated with the brutality of the apartheid regime, is not considered to be occurring in democratic South Africa. It has been found that many people do not know that it is against the law to be tortured, ill-treated and harassed by law enforcement officers.

Another contributing factor is that there are few institutions that are systematically investigating and monitoring the practice of torture in post-apartheid South Africa. The Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD), which covers a wide range of issues including police corruption and abuse of power, is perhaps one exception. Existing evidence suggests that the ICD has not been very effective in dealing with allegations of torture and CIDT due to the fact that it cannot prosecute. One of the major limitations of the ICD is that it can make recommendations to the Commissioner of Police, but has no powers to enforce them. Parliament is currently in the process of drafting and finalising the Independent Complaints Directorate Bill, which will give the ICD powers to independently investigate and make recommendations that would be binding on the SAPS (South African Police Service). Thus, currently, there is evidence to suggest that victims of torture and CIDT do not report their cases as they feel that the ICD is a toothless institution.

The lack of data raises several questions. Who are the victims of torture and CIDT in the new South Africa? What is the profile of these victims in terms of gender, class, race, and age? Where do these victims live? What are their experiences? Do they get any legal, medical or psychological assistance? Where do they go to get such assistance? How can these victims be identified and be assisted? What are the best research methods that could be used to identify victims of torture and CIDT?

Against this background the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) developed two research projects to identify and profile current survivors of torture and CIDT in the new South Africa. Two research methods were used to investigate patterns and effects of torture, and victims' access to medical, legal and psychosocial services - the street corner approach and the institutional approach.

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[1] This paper also serves as an appendix to an unpublished *internal* CSVR paper called "Finding our way: developing a community work model for addressing torture. Version 1, 2011". In 2012, a condensed version of the paper which incorporated the appendices was made available with the same title on the CSVR and Dignity websites (by Bantjes, M, Langa, M & Jensen, S).

This report compares and contrasts the strengths and limitations of the institutional and street corner approaches as research methods for investigating and profiling torture in South Africa. It becomes evident in the report that each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Thus, choosing which approach to use depends on the goal of a specific project and the nature of the target group that the project aims to reach or access.

The first two sections of this report provide some background information on these two approaches and how CSVR researchers applied them to identify and access victims of torture and CIDT. The following sections discuss the strengths and limitations of both approaches. In conclusion, it is recommended, where possible, that these two approaches be used in parallel as they complement one another.

Street corner approach as an innovative research method in understanding the world of potential research participants

The street corner approach is a popular research method in the social sciences including sociology, anthropology and criminology. The method involves 'hanging out' on street corners with participants as part of data collection. It is argued that this method is effective in gaining intimate knowledge about the social life of potential participants as the researcher 'lives' within the street corner community (Babbie, 2008). The method has frequently been used in ethnographic work on gangs, violence and policing (see, Barker, 2005; Jensen, 2008).

CSVR used the street corner approach as a research method to identify and profile young males[2] who are considered to be at risk of torture and CIDT. This involved the researchers regularly going and spending time on street corners, in shopping complexes, taverns and car wash spots to meet young males, many of whom have had violent encounters with the police. The research was conducted in Kagiso, a black township on the Western side of greater Johannesburg[3]. This township was chosen as a research site because CSVR was already working with ex-combatants living in the area.[4]

Institutional approach as an important research method in gaining access to potential participants within specific institutions

Existing literature, considers prisoners to be at high risk for torture and CIDT (see for example Dissel, Jensen & Roberts, 2009). Thus, CSVR wanted to understand patterns of torture and CIDT by police amongst ex-prisoners and to profile potential participants[5]. To do this the CSVR researchers used the institutional

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[2] The choice of young males as the target population was informed by the existing literature that being 'young, male and black' puts one at risk of police harassment and abuse. This is because police rely on stereotypes of race, gender and class to categorise all young black males *as being unruly and violent (Barker, 2005; Jensen, 2008).* So police see their use of violence as a means of instilling discipline and asserting power over this group of young males (Jensen, 2008).

[3] For more detailed discussion on the findings see Langa, M. & Merafe, M. (2011). *Profiling torture and CIDT in the hands of the police: a case study of Kagiso Township*, Gauteng. Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

[4] See Langa, M. (2011). Guidelines for home visits. Appendix F. Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

5 For a more detailed discussion of this approach see Langa, M. (2011). Institutional approach in gaining access to victims of torture and CIDT. Unpublished report written for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, Johannesburg: Braamfontein

approach. This involved contacting institutions that work with individuals who are considered to be at risk of experiencing torture and CIDT. For the prison population, these organisations included National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO), Khulisa, South African Prisoners Organisation for Human Rights (SAPOHR) and Phaphama Initiative.

Strengths of the street corner approach as against the limitations of the institutional approach

Overall, the street corner approach was found to be an effective research method in accessing 'marginalised' young black males of whom many were victims of torture and CIDT in the new South Africa[6].

Street corner 'boys' as gatekeepers themselves

When embarking on the study, it is important for the researcher to identify the gatekeepers. Kelly and Van der Reit (2001) define gatekeepers as individuals or representatives that control access to a specific community. Gatekeepers may deny, frustrate or facilitate the researcher's entry into a community. With regard to the street corner approach, potential research participants act as gatekeepers themselves. Success of access can depend entirely on who facilitates the researcher's entry. Members of the street corner are not a homogenous group. Their positions or access to power are ranked hierarchically. So the credibility of the contact person who introduces the researcher to the street corner community is important in denying, delaying or facilitating the researcher's access to this population. While there is no set of rules about who the researcher should approach to gain entry into this community, it is important for the researcher to know something about the power dynamics of the identified street corner population, and to think carefully about the best strategy for approaching them.

In contrast to the street corner approach, in institutions the main gatekeepers are not the target population, but rather the managers of institutions that work with at risk groups. In most cases, the process of trying to set up appointments with key institutional gatekeepers takes longer than planned. Cancellations and postponements of meetings result in delays in making progress towards accessing potential research participants within those institutions. For CSVR, this was one of the major limitations of the institutional approach as the waiting period for gaining entry into institutions that work with ex-prisoners took longer than was expected. When using the street corner approach access to the target population was gained within a short period of time, once the street corner males, who were acting as gatekeepers themselves, were satisfied that the researchers were not police informers.

No bureaucratic processes with the street corner approach for building trust

The institutional approach requires getting permission to access potential participants usually which involves the researcher complying with institutional protocols, such as writing letters or submitting proposals for approval by managers. As mentioned above, delays in getting permission are common as managers have the power to respond in their own time, or not respond at all.

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[6] See Langa, M. & Merafe, M. (2011). *Profiling torture and CIDT in the hands of the police: a case study of Kagiso Township*, Gauteng. Johannesburg: Centre for Study of Violence and Reconciliation.

There are no bureaucratic processes or set procedures in the street corner approach. However, trust emerges as an important issue. The process of gaining trust within this community may take more or less time depending on the profile of the researcher. For example, in the Kagiso research project, the fact that one of the researchers lives in the area was very helpful for gaining entry into the street corner community. This researcher was familiar with the street corners which facilitated the establishment of trust with potential participants. Language, gender and race were also factors in establishing trust. The fact that the researchers speak local languages, se-Tswana and isi-Zulu, and also, *tsotsitaal* - township lingo - facilitated access to this group of corner 'boys'.

Informal conversations on street corners

The street corner approach involves having informal conversations on street corners. The research participants are in their own space - 'joints' - relaxed and doing their own thing, some drinking, others smoking 'zol' - cannabis. As a result, potential participants open up and express their views and opinions on various topics. Once trust was established, in the Kagiso research, street corner 'boys' were conformable talking to the researchers about their violent encounters with the police. Many of the conversations took place in groups which was beneficial, because it allowed participants to share their insights and to build upon responses of other group members, thus enriching the narratives. These conversations were informal and it was interesting that group members reminded one another about gaps in their stories of being beaten up and harassed by the police. These group discussions also provided an opportunity to do some psycho-education about the effects of torture, and about services that the participants may access for legal, medical and psychosocial assistance.

In contrast, the institutional approach may involve meeting potential participants in offices of the host institutions, which could be experienced as too formal and intimidating by some participants. In this context, participants may not feel at ease to freely express their views. This can be a major limitation as compared to meeting the participants in their familiar 'spaces' where they are likely to be more relaxed and feel free to talk about anything, including their involvement in illicit activities and other risk-taking behaviours.

Snow balling technique to access more participants

The street corner approach provides the opportunity for the process to snowball as participants may suggest other corners that the researchers can go to and meet other corner 'boys' who are also at risk of being harassed by the police. This can help in raising awareness amongst members of the target population. During the Kagiso research, some participants gave the researchers details of their friends to go and talk to about their experiences of torture and harassment by the police. Street corner 'boys' know one another and their networks can be fruitfully used to access participants. Initially, the Kagiso research targeted twenty participants. In the end, 40 participants were spoken to because they heard about the project and approached us to talk about their violent encounters with the police. The research project became very popular within the street corner community resulting in a snowballing effect, which allowed for more in depth learning about the social life of the participants.

In contrast, the institutional approach is limited to participants who attend meetings or workshops organised by the host institution, which is a limitation. Furthermore, the offices of some of these institutions may not be accessible to potential participants due to distance from where they live and prohibitive travelling costs. In

contrast the street corner approach allows the researcher to be in the environment of the participants where they have a degree of power to organise. Thus, for example, they can choose venues for holding meetings. A good example is that in Kagiso members of street corners took the lead in finding a venue at a local school where the researchers were able to facilitate a workshop on torture and CIDT, and on information about places to go to for legal, medical and psychosocial assistance.

Strengths of the institutional approach as against limitations of the street corner approach

The section below highlights the strengths of the institutional approach as compared to limitations of the street corner approach.

Accessing a wider range of members of the target population

One of the benefits of the institutional approach is that it provides the researcher with the opportunity to access participants from a range of communities, because participants are recruited from various institutions. As mentioned above CSVR targeted several institutions, including NICRO, Khulisa, SAPOHR, and Phaphama Initiative, all of whom work with ex-prisoners from a range of communities.

In contrast, the street corner approach is limited to a specific population in a particular community. For example, in the case of the CSVR research, the target population was limited to Kagiso. Although the data that was gathered was useful and very informative, the findings cannot easily be generalised to other township populations in South Africa.

Usually the institutional approach is less costly as compared to the street corner approach since many participants can be met in one meeting. When conducting the street corner approach on the other hand, the researcher can expect to move from one street corner to another to meet a representative sample of the target population. In addition, repeated visits to the field may be necessary in order to reach a specific number of the participants. Where financial and human resources are limited it may be more difficult to implement the street corner approach.

Whereas institutions provide structures and procedures for organising follow up interviews, the mobility and instability of the street corner community make it more difficult to keep track of and contact with participants. For example, during the Kagiso research it became difficult to find some participants for follow-up interviews as they had moved. Others had been arrested, while others were just not contactable. This can negatively affect the quality of data collected. Thus, for example, out of forty participants spoken to only seventeen filled in a final questionnaire.

Building trust through the institutional approach

It is easier to build trust through the institutional approach as potential participants are more likely to trust people who partner with their host institutions.

In contrast, lack of trust may be a barrier in the street corner approach as it is possible for potential participants to see the fieldworker as a spy or police informer, especially if they are involved in illegal

activities. As a result of this, it may be difficult for the fieldworker to gain entry into this community. In fact, this was one of the difficulties encountered in Kagiso. At the beginning of the field work on street corners, some participants were quite suspicious, possibly seeing the researchers as secret police agents. In some instances, business cards had to be presented as a form of identification and proof that the researchers were not police agents. Fortunately, in this case this was successful. In other contexts it may take longer for trust to be established. Such delays should always be taken into account when planning time frames for research or intervention projects using the street corner approach.

Furthermore, the street corner approach may raise ethical dilemmas about the safety of the researcher as the methodology involves 'hanging out' on street corners, which can be dangerous for the researcher due to corner 'boys' involvement in criminal or illicit activities. In addition this raises the ethical quandary of whether the researcher should report these illicit activities or not. Reporting such activities would obviously comprise trust, but turning a blind eye raises questions about the ethics of the research project.

Sustainability of the intervention is key in any community work

Potential sustainability of the work is provided by the institutional approach. This is especially the case if leaders of the institution are interested in the work. Key leaders can be identified and trained to sustain the interventions, such as raising awareness and advocating for the prevention of torture and CIDT. Equally, because participants may attend a range of activities at their host institution, there is potential to have access to and see them over a long period of time. Potentially this improves the sustainability of the work. In contrast in applying the street corner approach, it may be difficult to identify key leaders who could sustain the project, as the community is fluid and mobile, thus negatively affecting the sustainability of interventions.

Opportunities for assessment

Assessment tools are used to assess patterns and effects of torture and CIDT, and services that the participants may have accessed for legal and psychosocial assistance. Institutions which have structure and where formal meetings are held are more conducive to implementing assessment tools. In the street corner approach the informal nature of the interaction, and the environment in which the interaction takes place make it difficult to get people to fill in and return questionnaires or to administer assessment tools. In Kagiso, it felt awkward to introduce a questionnaire into an informal group conversation. It was also difficult to ask the participants to fill the questionnaire in at the beginning of the group meetings because, as mentioned earlier, many were still suspicious. Some may even have suspected that filling in a questionnaire could be incriminating, despite repeated assurances that the researchers were not secret police officers.

Language may have been another barrier as the questionnaire was in English. It should be mentioned that many street corner 'boys' had dropped out of school, so asking them to complete a questionnaire could be a reminder of a school test environment, in which one was expected to give correct answers. In addition, some may have been embarrassed about their inability to read English or their inability to understand some of the technical terms used in the questionnaire.

Respecting potential participants' rights

It is important that the rights of potential participants are respected in any research project. The process of recruiting potential participants is more likely to comply with ethical guidelines in the institutional approach,

as the host institutions may serve as a watchdog to ensure that the rights of participants are not violated. For example, it is possible that dealing with previous experiences of torture may not be a priority for some prisoners as they may be more concerned about here-and-now issues, such as employment opportunities. In an institutional context they could more easily be protected from opening up discussion on their past experiences.

In contrast when using the street corner approach, the researcher may unintentionally fail to comply with ethical practices as there is no one to serve as a watchdog. This could put participants at risk of having their rights violated, by for example, researchers publishing participants' narratives without their consent.

Concluding remarks

It is evident from this brief discussion that each of these two approaches has strengths and weaknesses. The success or failure of each of the approaches depends on the nature of a specific project, the context and the characteristics of the target group. In this report, the street corner approach was useful in profiling torture and CIDT amongst a vulnerable group who otherwise would not have been reached. The institutional approach is particularly useful for networking with institutions that work with people who have been exposed to torture or are at risk, and who use known institutions to assist them with other social problems. Networking with other organisations is potentially very useful for lobbying, advocacy and cross-referral purposes. Thus, it is important that both approaches are maintained as strategies which can be used in parallel when doing torture work with a range of vulnerable groups.

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