

FARM MURDERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

2020/2021 financial year

AfriForum NAVORSING

A report by AfriForum Navorsing

Contents

Introduction 1

A definition of farm attacks 1

Statistical analysis of data 1

The statistics 2

Farm attacks 2

Farm murders 2

Murders per month 2

Murders per province 3

Time of occurrence 3

Farm vs. smallholding 4

Victims 5

Attackers 6

Conclusion 7

Introduction

One of the core responsibilities of the South African Police Service (SAPS) – that is stated in Chapter 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa – is to "prevent and to investigate any crimes that threaten the safety or security of any community". [1]

Although this is the responsibility of the SAPS, Minister Cele Bheki's refusal to classify farm murders and farm attack as a priority crime, the SAPS cannot fully uphold its constitutional duties.

On 5 February 2021, the charred bodies of an elderly couple were discovered in Gauteng. The couple was tortured outside of their house; hair, nails and blood found at the scene provided proof of this horrendous event. The couple was then dragged inside their house. It is believed that the couple was shot before the house was set on fire, but not before they were tied up on the floor next to each other. A Bible was placed between the couple; thereafter a heater was switched on with curtains placed on top of it.

Unfortunately, murders like these are not isolated incidents.

A definition of farm attacks

The definition for farm attacks used by AfriForum Research for this report is the definition published in the National Rural Safety Strategy:[2]

> …[a]cts of violence against person(s) living in rural areas, including farms and smallholdings, refer to acts aimed at person(s) residing in, working in, or visiting rural areas, whether with the intent to murder, rape, rob or inflict bodily harm. In addition, all acts of violence against the infrastructure and property in the rural community, which are aimed at disrupting farming activities or other commercial concerns, whether the motive(s) are related to the commission of other crime(s), ideology, land disputes, land issues, revenge, grievances, racist concerns or intimidation are included in this definition.

The definition excludes cases that relate to domestic violence or alcohol abuse, or cases that resulted from commonplace social interaction between people or any labour disputes.

Statistical analysis of data

The integrity, data collection and verification process is of the utmost importance. The data used in this report was thoroughly verified and the information was collected from various reliable sources, including media outlets, different security networks, social media and – in some cases – directly from the families affected.

It is important to note that the farm murder statistics that are used in this report are subject to change. This is because information sometimes only becomes available long after the incident had occurred, or because of insufficient or conflicting information regarding a case.

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[1] See https://www.saps.gov.za/about/about.php.

[2] South African Police Service. 2019. The National Rural Safety Strategy. Available at https://www.saps.gov.za/resource_centre/publications/national_rural_safety_strategy_2019.pdf. Accessed on 4 May 2021.

This report will focus mainly on the **farm murders** that were committed during the 2020/2021 financial year (from April 2020 to March 2021).

The statistics

Farm attacks

There were 395 confirmed farm attacks during the period under review. This is down from 465 attacks that were recorded for 2019/2020. Most of the attacks occurred in August 2020, with the least murders committed in April 2020. It must be noted that these numbers are subject to change and may not necessarily be a true reflection of all attacks that occurred because the media or different networks do not always report on every single attack.

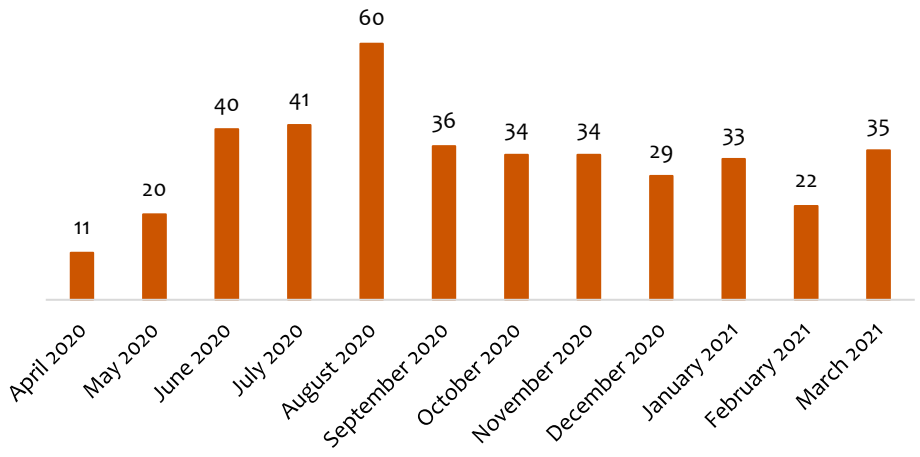


Figure 1: Farm attacks per month for 2020/2021.

Farm murders

AfriForum recorded 59 confirmed farm murders during the period under review, a notable increase from 41 murders for the 2019/2020 financial year.

There seems to be a trend in the most recent years, where farm attacks are decreasing, but farm murders are increasing. This may be because many attacks are prevented by different security networks; however, in cases where the attack do take place, it takes a more violent turn.

Murders per month

Most recorded murders occurred in December 2020, followed by July and August 2020. April 2020 and January 2021 saw the least number of murders, as shown in figure 2.

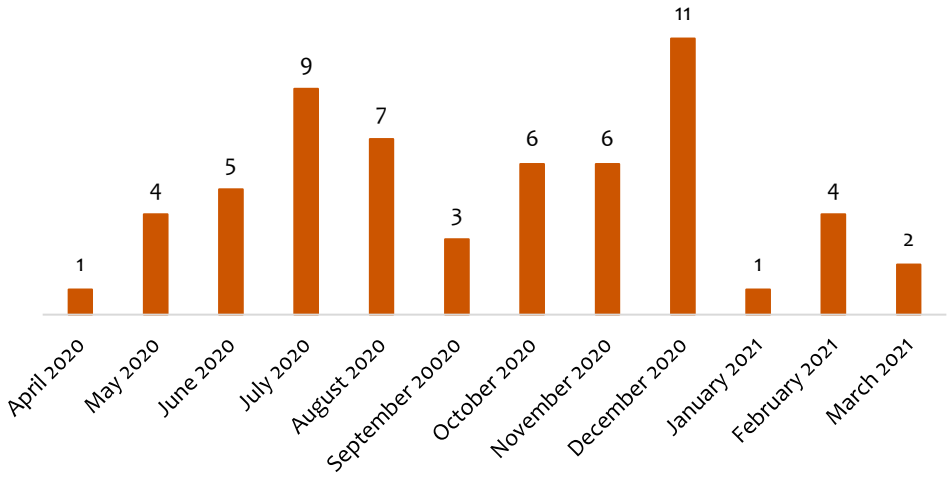


Figure 2: Farm murders per month for 2020/2021

Murders per province

Most farm murders were committed in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, followed by the Free State and Mpumalanga. No farm murders were recorded in the North West. The increase in not only general crime in KwaZulu-Natal, but also in farm murders is concerning. During the 2019/2020 financial year, farm murders in KwaZulu-Natal only accounted for 7% of total incidents, with 3 murders. This extreme increase in murders in the province must be researched and addressed.

Table 1: Farm murders per province

Province	Murders	Percentage
KwaZulu-Natal	15	25%
Gauteng	14	24%
Free State	9	15%
Mpumalanga	9	15%
Eastern Cape	4	7%
Limpopo	3	5%
Northern Cape	3	5%
Western Cape	2	3%
North West	0	0%

Time of occurrence

Day of the week

Most murders were committed on Mondays and Saturdays, whereas the least were committed on Wednesdays.

The day on which the attack takes place is influenced by the motive of the crime – whether the attacks were pre-mediated or opportunity-driven also influences the day and the time of the attack.

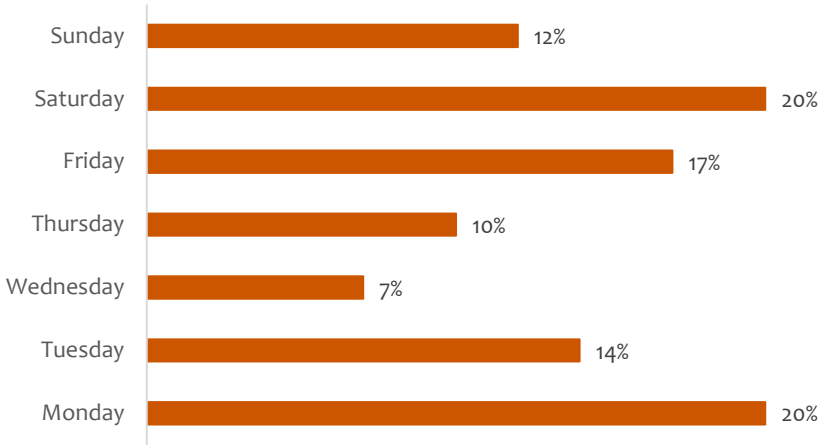


Figure 3: Percentage of farm murders per day

Time of day

Most farm murders were committed between 18:00 and 03:00.[3] This is the time slot in which victims are their most vulnerable – most likely taking a break after a day's work or asleep – and are caught off guard. Victims have little to no time to protect/defend themselves from the attack, seeing as the offenders use the element of surprise to their advantage.

Table 2: Percentage of farm murders per time interval

Time	Percentage
00:00–03:00	12%
03:01–06:00	3%
06:01–09:00	2%
09:01–12:00	2%
12:01–15:00	2%
15:01–18:00	5%
18:01–21:00	19%
21:01–24:00	15%
Unknown	40%

Farm vs. smallholding

The majority of the murders took place on a farm, as per the definition.

[3] The exact time for 40% of incidents remains unknown.

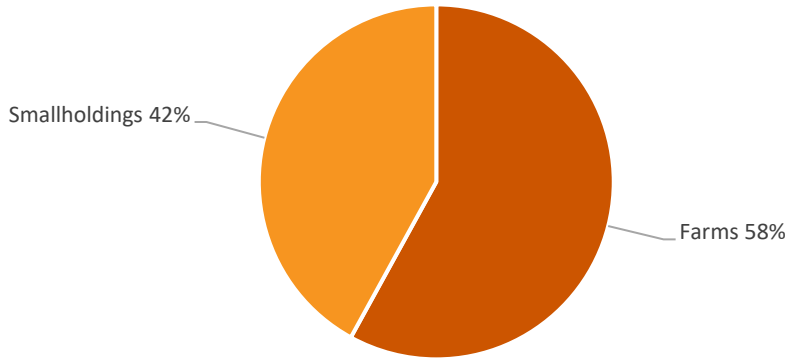


Figure 4: Percentage of attacks per farm and smallholding

Victims

In some of the attacks, not all the victims are murdered, but they are still affected. When we consider farm murders specifically, 100 people were the victims of farm attacks, while 59 of those murdered.[4]

Occupation

The majority of murder victims were farm owners or farmers on the property. In one case, the occupation of the murder victim remains unknown.

Table 3: Occupation of victims

Occupation of victim	Percentage of murders
Owner/farmer	59%
Unpaid family	16%
Visitor	10%
Farm worker	8%
Foreman	5%
Unknown	2%

Ages[5]

The most vulnerable victims were between 60 and 69 years old, whereas the majority of victims (64%) are older than 50 years. These age groups will most likely fail to defend themselves, and they are murdered.

[4] In two cases, the number of victims is unknown.
[5] The age of six victims is unknown.

This highly targeted group of victims often also has to endure abuse. Even though they are little to no threat to attackers, they are still tortured and brutally killed.

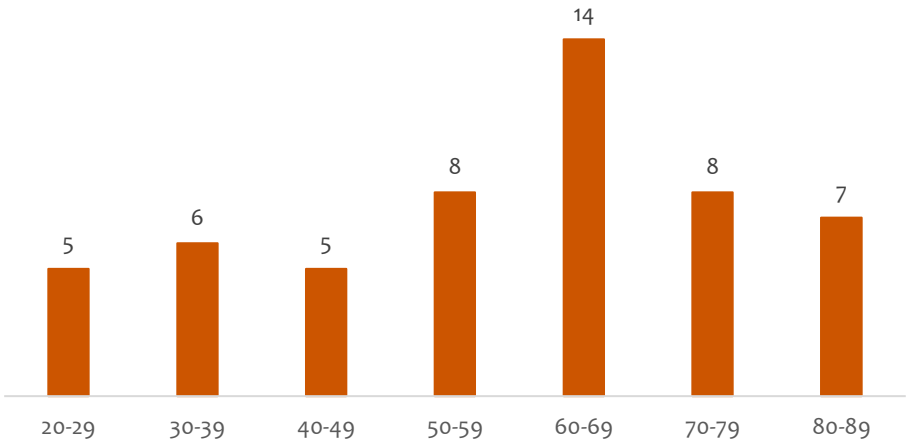


Figure 5: Age of victims

Gender[6]

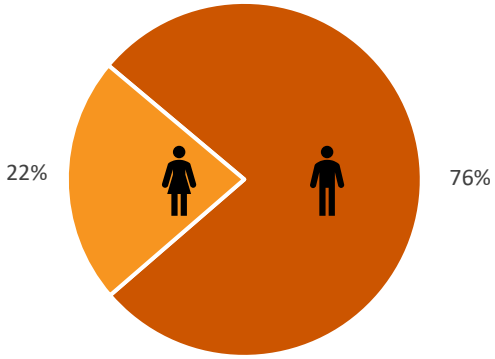


Figure 6: Gender of victims

Attackers

Attackers most commonly operate in groups of two to five people. In many cases, more people are involved in the attack, but not every attacker is identified or seen by the victims during the attack.

[6] In one case (2%), the gender of the victim remains unknown.

Torture

At least one form of torture was inflicted on victims in 22% of the incidents. Methods of torture include burning victims, beating victims to death, stabbing them multiple times or strangling them.[7]

Weapons used

The most commonly used weapons in these attacks are firearms, knives or any blunt object available to the attacker.

In many cases, the victim was killed without any tools and was therefore beaten or even kicked to death. In cases where the victim was tied up, household items were used to do so, such as cell phone chargers, wires or shoelaces.

Stolen items

The most common items stolen from the scene include vehicles, cell phones, and household electronics such as laptops and televisions. Firearms (pistols, shotguns and rifles) are some of the most stolen items.

In six incidents, nothing was stolen from the murder scene.[8]

Conclusion

It is not just the farming community that is affected by these crimes – and the responsibility of protecting themselves should not solely rest on their shoulders.

The question remains: How many more victims must go through these traumatic events before the government decides that this is serious enough to warrant a sustainable, effective plan? How many more citizens have to be tortured, killed, and traumatised before this is seen as serious?

When farm attacks and farm murders are classified as priority crimes, more in-depth scientific research can be conducted on this crime phenomenon. This will lead to more effective counter-strategies and prevention methods, although sufficient resources will have to be provided to implement these successfully.

This will go a long way in preventing these crimes and successfully prosecuting offenders according to their crimes' brutality.

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7 In 14% of the incidents it is not known whether the victims were tortured.

8 In 18 cases it is unknown what items were stolen (if any).