AfriForum

THE IMPACT OF FARM MURDERS:

A BRIEF ASSESSMENT



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Introduction

Farm attacks have a devastating effect on victims, and in the case of murder, these effects never fully heal for the deceased's family and friends. Furthermore, these attacks have a detrimental psychological, social and economic impact on the community. This report is intended to be used by AfriForum' s expert witness and the state prosecutor during the judicial hearing in November 2022 in Hartswater in the Northern Cape. The aim of the report is to highlight key aspects of the impact of farm attacks and murders. The case involved the Brand family, who was kidnapped and murdered over the weekend of 28 July 2020.

This report provides a general overview of the impact and consequences of farm attacks and murders on the community.

Based on the latest statistics from AfriForum Community Safety, there were 24 farm attacks in the Northern Cape from 2019 to August 2022, during which nine people were murdered (figure 1). However, the town of Hartswater is located on the border between the Northern Cape and North West and while the Brand family was kidnapped from their smallholding in Hartswater, the murder suspects were apprehended in Taung, which is about 30 km away in North West.[1] If farm attacks that occurred in North West are also factored in, the number of attacks rise dramatically, as can be seen from figure 2.

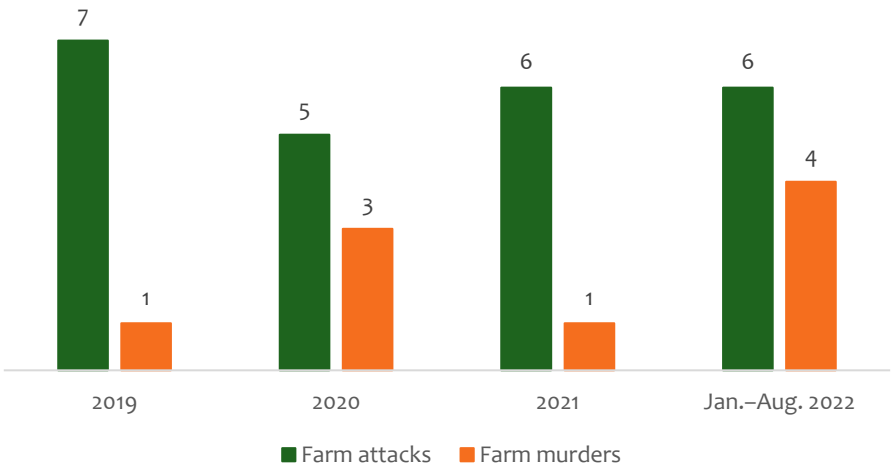


Figure 1: Farm attacks and farm murders in the Northern Cape[2]

[1] Netwerk24. 2020. *Hartswater: 5 vas ná grumoorde*. 5 July. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/nuus/misdaad/ete-staan-nog-net-so-20200728. Accessed on 13 September 2022.

[2] Data extracted from AfriForum's community safety database.

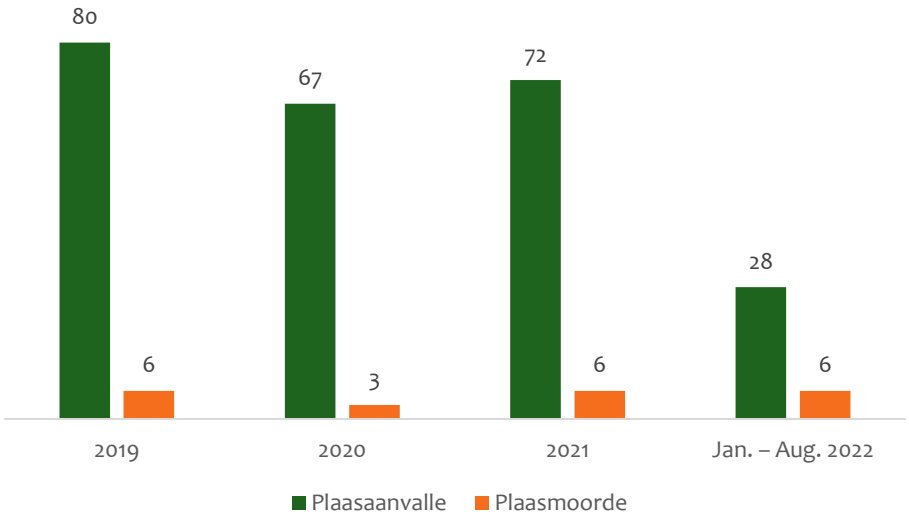


Figure 2: Farm attacks and murders in the Northern Cape and North West[3]

While all forms of violent crime have an impact on their victims, farm attacks and murders are distinct due to a few distinguishing characteristics:[4]

- the frequency of the attacks
- the extraordinary levels of brutality associated with these attacks
- the unique role of farms (they are food producers and employers)
- the circumstances in which people on farms live, which include being geographically isolated

Instances of farm attacks in the Northern Cape over the past few years:

- On 2 July 2019 Gert Gagiano and two family members were attacked and robbed on the farm Kotzesfontein near Vioolsdrift by three attackers who were armed with pangas. All three victims survived the attack and were taken to the hospital.[5]
- On 8 October 2019 a foreman on the farm Skeerkloof was shot dead.[6]
- On 14 February 2020 an elderly couple, both in their 70s, was attacked, tied-up and robbed on the farm Eureka in the Delportshoop district.[7]

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3 Data extracted from AfriForum's community safety database.

4 Roets, E. 2018. *Kill the Boer*. Pretoria: Kraal Uitgewers, p. 27.

5 Netwerk24. 2019. *Panga-aanvallers sak toe op plaas buite Vioolsdrif*. 3 July. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/Netwerk24/panga-aanvallers-sak-toe-op-plaas-buite-vioolsdrif-20190703. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

6 Kemp, C. 2019. *Tieners vas ná skietery in Petrusville*. Netwerk24, 10 October. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/Nuus/Misdaad/tieners-vas-na-skietery-in-petrusville-20191010. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

7 Davids, K. 2020. *Bejaarde egpaar oorleef plaasaanval*. Netwerk24, 16 March. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/Nuus/Misdaad/beJaarde-egpaar-oorleef-plaasaanval-20200216. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

- On 18 March 2020 a farmer was attacked and burned with a hot iron on a farm near Niekerkshoop.[8]
- On 15 August 2021 an 18-year-old man was assaulted to death on a farm near Noeniepunt.[9]
- On 11 June 2021 a foreman was hacked to death with a panga on a smallholding outside Daniëlskuil after he responded to a distress call from the farmer, who was being burgled.[10]
- On 12 February 2022 an 87-year-old farmer was murdered on his smallholding near Jan Kempdorp.[11]

Social impact

In a study by AfriForum titled "Trends in farm murders and an analysis of arrest and prosecution from 2016–2020", which analysed among other things the arrest and conviction rates of farm murders, it was stated that the Northern Cape had an arrest rate of 75% but a conviction rate of 11% during the period under review.[12] Because of the sieve effect, the arrest rate will likely always be higher than the conviction rate. The sieve effect is a process in which the criminal justice system acts like a sieve, with most recorded crimes unable to result in convictions because weak cases are filtered out at various levels of investigation and prosecution.[13] However, a moderate to low arrest and conviction rate may have a negative effect on the public's trust in the criminal justice system. Likewise, as argued by Strydom and Schutte[14]

> farm attacks have a strong emotional impact on society. Anger against the system's inability to curb or avoid farm attacks is often voiced by farmers. The inability to eradicate farm attacks results in farmers losing faith in the security services and even blaming them for taking part in these attacks,

8 Van der Merwe, A. 2020. *Niekerkshoop-plaasaanval: Boer met warm yster gebrand*. Maroela Media, 18 March. Available at https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa-nuus/niekerkshoop-plaasaanval-boer-met-warm-yster-gebrand/?fbclid=IwAR1fbW1zK6kJ_nCLVfjgAQzW_hCbUE9imfUf49laBBLn8Az-1-gtriWYFik. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

9 Burger, A. 2021. *Verdagte nog nie in hof ná 18-jarige se dood op plaas*. Netwerk24, 22 August. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/Nuus/Misdaad/verdagte-nog-nie-in-hof-na-18-jarige-se-dood-op-plaas-20210822?fbclid=IwAR2MatejCpmLyiF9eav-A9aFZW-koTOMlCWiVtIEx-Ute49z8BBZIg7EXvg. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

10 Van der Merwe, A. 2022. *Plaasvoorman grusaam vermoor*. Maroela Media, 15 June. Available at https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/sa-nuus/plaasvoorman-grusaam-vermoor/?fbclid=IwAR0j8LRjzBh7DjUn_HbdEYV1cZU–H0B9MtYJcwuxNE2bz0422SMRDZ7zkU&fs=e&s=cl. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

11 Burger, A. *Vermoorde 'brose boer (87)' van N-Kaap 'sou nie vlieg skaad'*. Netwerk24, 15 February. Available at https://www.netwerk24.com/netwerk24/nuus/misdaad/vermoorde-brose-boer-87-van-n-kaap-sou-nie-vlieg-skaad-20220215. Accessed on 22 June 2022.

12 AfriForum. 2022. *Trends in farm murders and an analysis of arrests and prosecutions*. Available at https://afriforum.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/20220301-Johan-N-Plaasmoordverslag-2022-ENG-GFdB.pdf. Accessed on 22 June 2022, p. 21.

13 Legget, T. 2003. The sieve effect: South Africa's conviction rates in perspective. In *South African Crime Quarterly* 5, pp. 11–14. DOI: https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3108/2003/v0i5a1060. Accessed on 30 September 2022.

14 Strydom, H. & Schutte, S.C. 2005. An empirical investigation into the experience of farm attacks in the South African farming community. Acta Criminologica 18(2): pp. 115–123. Available at https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/EJC28869. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

while they also threaten to take the law into their own hands, arm themselves and build structures in and around their farms to protect themselves.

In addition, Strydom and Schutte argues that, in terms of the political consequences, the high incidence of farm attacks in South Africa that has high media coverage, creates an impression of political instability to the outside world. This, in turn, has a negative effect on the country's economy regarding local and international investment trust, job creation and tourism.

Psychological impact

In a study into the psychological consequences of victims of farm attacks, Lorraine van Zyl groups the victims of farm attacks into two categories, namely primary and secondary victims. Primary victims can be described as "the direct victim of a farm attack" who suffered detrimental psychological consequences or, in the case of murder, died because of the farm attack.[15, 16]

Secondary victims can be referred to as victims who have witnessed violent acts against their family members, friends or farm workers during attacks. Exposure to these violent acts can trigger significant physical and mental reactions, such as panic, dread, rage, horror or helplessness.[17]

Mental and emotional reactions because of a traumatic event include some of the following:

- hyper vigilance
- disrupted or intrusive thoughts
- feelings of being disconnected from the self
- shame and self-hate
- a weakened self-esteem
- experiencing an inability to feel safe[18]

These traumatic experiences might lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), unhealthy coping mechanisms such as alcohol abuse or substance abuse, as well as profound personality changes.[19]

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15 Van Zyl, L. 2008. Victims of farm attacks: Psychological consequences. In *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 32(1): p. 134–149. Available at https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC28606. Accessed on 22 June 2022.

16 Geldenhuys, K. 2020. The trauma from which victims of farm attacks suffer. In *Servamus Community-based Safety and Security Magazine* 113(3): p. 30–33. Available at https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC-1bb4daed11. Accessed on 22 June 2022.

17 *Ibid*.

18 Van Zyl, L. 2008. Victims of farm attacks: Psychological consequences. In *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology* 32(1): p. 134–149. Available at https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.10520/EJC28606. Accessed on 30 September 2022.

19 *Ibid*.

According to the *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (DSM-5), diagnostic criteria C2 for PTSD include:[20]

> Persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s), beginning after the traumatic event(s) occurred, as evidenced by one or both of the following:
>
> 1) Avoidance of or efforts to avoid distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).
>
> 2) Avoidance of or efforts to avoid external reminders (people, places, conversations, activities, objects, situations) that arouse distressing memories, thoughts, or feelings about or closely associated with the traumatic event(s).

After a traumatic experience, individuals might experience profound behavioural changes, and will inevitably experience a disruption in their daily activities. A study by Strydom and Schutte on farm attacks also highlighted various relationship problems, including increased levels of aggressive behaviour, miscommunication between couples and intercommunity relationships.[21]

The observation of daily activities is of particular importance since an impairment of a farm's daily activities – namely to produce food – will negatively impact agricultural production and output. Because of this impact, it is necessary to highlight the economic consequences of farm attacks briefly.

Economic impact

While the direct fiscal impact on the South African economy in terms of the loss of agricultural and food output because of farm attacks is under-researched, some broad conclusions can nevertheless be drawn regarding the negative economic impact of farm attacks. For example, according to a 2017 survey conducted on commercial farmers by the University of South Africa's Bureau of Market Research in collaboration with Agri SA, the total direct cost of agricultural crime (which includes farm attacks) was R5,45 billion, with an additional R2,28 billion in replacement expenses [22]

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[20] American Psychiatric Association. 2013. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders. Fifth edition. Available at https://cdn.website-editor.net/30f111239915 48a0af708722d458e476/files/uploaded/DSM%2520V.pdf. Accessed on 22 June 2022, p. 271. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

[21] Strydom, H. & Schutte, S.C. 2005. An empirical investigation into the experience of farm attacks in the South African farming community. *Acta Criminologica* 18(2): pp.92–95. Available online at https://0-journals-co-za.innopac.wits.ac.za/doi/10.10520/EJC28869. Accessed on 14 September 2022.

[22] Politicsweb. 2018. *25% of commercial farmers experienced robbery in 2017 – Agri SA*. 7 October. Available online at https://www.politicsweb.co.za/documents/25-of-commercial-farmers-experienced-robbery-in-20. Accessed on 9 October 2022.

Dr Heinrich Matthee, an internationally recognised authority on political risk, identified various themes concerning the economic consequences of farm attacks:[23]

1. Farm murders diminish agriculture's potential to boost both the national and the rural economies of South Africa and act as multiplier on an already struggling economy.
2. Farm murders result in significant employment losses because the agriculture sector is one of the largest employers in the country.
3. In certain parts of South Africa, particularly in underdeveloped and stagnant small-town communities, farm murders severely disrupt the already fragile rural social economic order.
4. In broad terms, food security is defined "as having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food", and farm murders worsen the onset of food insecurity.

The South African Government has also confirmed the fourth theme. In 2020 Jackson Mthembu, the Minister in the Presidency, stated that "the farming community is an integral part of our economy, and crime on farms poses a threat not only to the personal safety of farmers and farmworkers but also to the country's food security."[24]

Conclusion

Although there is a lack of empirical research on the impact of farm attacks on specific communities, farm attacks and murders indeed have a detrimental psychological effect on the survivors of these attacks. At the same time, it can be expected that this may have a ripple effect on victims' families and communities. Moreover, because of the unique circumstances of farm murders (such as the frequency and level of brutality, as well as the economic consequences), the prevention of these crimes will be greatly beneficial to and is in fact essential for the survival of the communities in which farmers live.

[23] Matthee, H. *South African Monitor: Assessing and promoting civil and minority rights in South Africa. Report IX.* End 2018 to beginning 2019, pp. 30–33. Available online at https://sa-monitor.com/category/reports/latest-reports/. Accessed on 21 June 2022.

[24] Mahlakoana, T. 2020. Cabinet: Farm attacks pose a threat to SA's Food Security. *EWC*. Available online at https://ewn.co.za/2020/10/23/cabinet-crime-on-farms-poses-a-threat-to-sa-s-food-security. Accessed on 21 June 2022.