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## **Covid-19** – Crime

### **Experts warn on Covid-19 crime surge**

30 June 2020 -Cape Argus -SISONKE MLAMLA [sisonke.mlamla@inl.co.za](mailto:sisonke.mlamla@inl.co.za)

THE collapse of the economy partially due to Covid-19, unemployment and poverty could result in the country being engulfed in an avalanche of crime, civil disobedience and protests, security experts have warned.

Senior researchers at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Johan Burger and Rudolph Zinn, said the country's first levels of lockdown substantially reduced violent crime, making it one of the few countries in the world to record fewer deaths overall as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic in that period.

"But what were the likely long-term effects of the pandemic and our responses to it? After a brief reprieve, could South Africa face even higher crime levels than before the pandemic struck?" they asked.

"The well-accepted correlation between levels of inequality and crime is of particular concern.

"A projected worst-case scenario of an estimated 21% rise in the unemployment rate over the next few months could lead to considerable increases in both violent and property-related crimes.

"This is especially likely if the many other criminogenic factors in our society such as corruption, guns, drugs and alcohol are not addressed."

Zinn said the movement from level 5 to 3 of the lockdown restrictions have already resulted in an increase in various crime categories.

"Recent media reports and the police minister have stated that there is a noticeable increase in trauma and murder cases linked to alcohol consumption."

Stellenbosch University (SU) sociology professor Lindy Heinecken said rising inequality, poverty and unemployment would be exacerbated by Covid-19, with the greatest impact "physically and emotionally being felt by the poor".

Heinecken said that would fuel anger and resentment unless the state is able to put sufficient safety nets in place to mitigate the discontent. She said people would not revolt against the state, or the system, where there was a belief that their needs were being attended to. "When the state fails to deliver, citizens will revolt.

“People don’t resort to crime, because they want to do crime. It depends on what crime. But the country has to look at the structural factors that affect the well-being and livelihoods of people. This includes unequal access to education, which affects employment, investing in entrepreneurial skills, developing programmes for youth development, strengthening the social capital within communities to develop support structures.”

Heineken said: “We are going to see greater instability politically, economically and socially and it is going to take strong leadership and commitment to address the challenges stemming from this.”

Good secretary-general Brett Herron said with business closures and unemployment expected to rise, inequality, unemployment and poverty would also rise, “and it was these conditions that we must address.

Herron said that would not only bring a more sustainable solution to crime it would also bring “a more just, equitable and fairer society which we are all invested in sustaining”.

He said South Africa’s economy was just about to collapse when Covid-19 hit us. “Covid-19 may turn out to have pushed us to rock bottom.”

SU’s Anika Berning, from the Business Management Department, said the move to level 3 of the lockdown was an immense step for the economy as about 15 million people returned to work. While many businesses were happy to open their doors, others unfortunately remained closed.

Berning said the economy, already in recession, would keep plummeting. She said before the pandemic, the country had an unemployment rate of 29.1% and the Chamber of Commerce predicted it could rise to 50%.