

# Guns Violence in Thokoza: A Community Under Threat

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Thokoza is a township found in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng. This township has a rich history marked by both resilience and violence. In recent years, the community has been struggling with gun violence. This issue threatens the safety and security of residents and undermines the social structure that binds this community together.

The roots of gun violence in Thokoza are deep. This township, like many others in South Africa, has been shaped by a history of political violence and economic hardship. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Thokoza was a battleground for violent clashes between political factions, the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP). This resulted in a legacy of trauma and an increase in (illegal) firearms in the township. Despite efforts to disarm people post-apartheid, many guns remained in circulation and continuously find their way into the hands of criminals and ordinary citizens.

Today, the impact of gun violence in Thokoza and surrounding areas is felt sharply. Incidents of armed robbery, random shootings, and domestic violence involving firearms are alarmingly common. As a result, the presence of guns worsens conflicts between community members, turning what might have been a minor misunderstanding into deadly encounters.

For the residents of Thokoza this means living in a constant state of fear and uncertainty. Parents worry about their children's safety, business owners fear for their livelihoods, and the general atmosphere is one of tension and distrust. "Every night and day we hear gunshots, sometimes followed by people screaming, it's scary," said Phumla Mgoqi, a resident of Phola Park, Thokoza.

One of the most tragic consequences of this issue is its impact on young people. Young people in Thokoza are both victims and perpetrators of gun violence, for many, the presence of guns in their community becomes a norm, shaping their perceptions of power and conflict resolution. "It's sad, it's always the young people that are dying from guns in our community, every other week we hear of a young person who lost their life through gun violence," said Sandile Tyesi (27) a young person in Thokoza.

Efforts to address gun violence in Thokoza have been ongoing, but the challenge remains huge. Police are facing a big problem, including limited resources, corruption, and community mistrust. Police efforts to confiscate illegal firearms and crack down on criminals are not moving fast enough. They also need to look at the gun problem as a preventative than a reactive measure.

One community project that the community can do, is to collectively come together and establish peace committees, where community members plan to reduce gun violence in Thokoza and surrounding areas. These committees could work closely with local leaders, schools, and police to create a safer environment. This might

bring a sense of collective responsibility, aimed to break the cycle of gun violence and build a livelier community.

“Also, a lasting change requires a hands-on approach. Addressing the root causes of gun violence in Thokoza means tackling issues such as poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunities for young people. It also means strengthening the number of police and ensuring that the justice system is both fair and effective,” said Mr Thobani Siwela, who lives in Kosovo, Phola Park.

The growth of gun violence in Thokoza is a pressing issue that demands urgent attention. While the community continues to face big challenges, by working together the people of Thokoza can work towards a future where the sound of gunfire is replaced by the sounds of peace and progress.

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