

FARM ATTACKS AND FARM KILLINGS: TRENDS IN 2016

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Introduction

In 2016 the figures for farm attacks and murders show an alarming rise for the sixth consecutive year. For this report cases from 1 January 2016 to 30 November 2016 were processed and it is already more than during the entire 2015 calendar year.

In order to provide a better comparison between the TAU SA/ANI database and incidents that were reported to the South African Police Service (SAPS), figures will in future be processed per financial year; this will agree with the period of the SAPS statistics and will make comparisons between the various databases more reliable.

Incidents of farm attacks and murders are verified by TAU SA since 1990. The past two years this information is supplemented by ANI to provide a more comprehensive and accurate database for this type of crime.

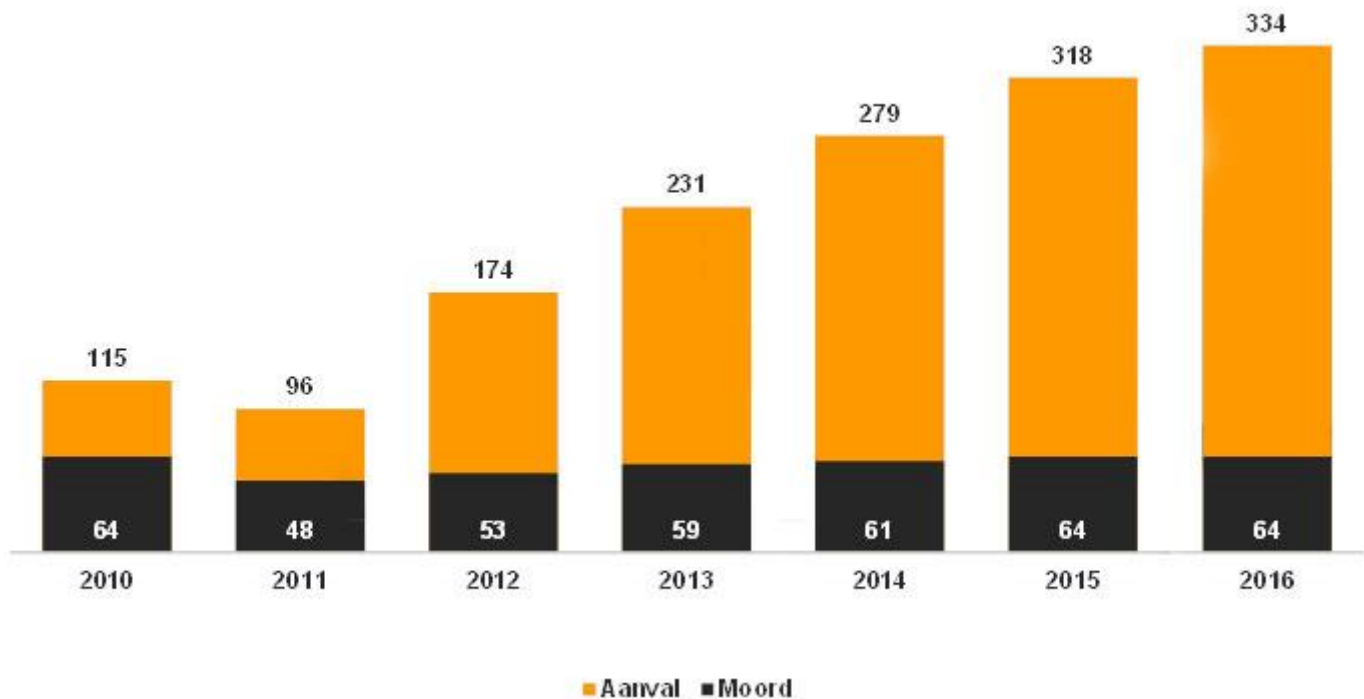
Definition of a farm attack

The National Priority Committee for Rural Safety defines a farm attack as follows:

Acts of violence against farms and smallholdings are those acts aimed at any person or persons living on, working at or visiting farms or smallholdings with the intent to either murder, rape, rob or otherwise inflict bodily harm or to intimidate.

It is important to note that cases of domestic violence and/or crimes caused by a dispute between family and/or friends are not included in the definition of a farm attack.

Increase in farm attacks and farm murders



The table shows the steady increase in farm attacks over the last six calendar years clearly. As mentioned earlier, the figures for December 2016 were excluded from the totals for the year. In previous years, the number of farm attacks and murders over Decembers were a cause for concern. It is therefore of utmost importance that people who live in rural areas consider their safety as a priority for the month ahead.

Identified trends in farm attacks

Several factors and trends were identified during the analysis of the verified data for 2016.

The first contact between aggressors and victims usually takes place by means of an ambush set for the victims or they are overwhelmed while working outside or are for example switching water pumps on and off. Victims are also overwhelmed in their homes when the doors are open or they are being surprised when the house is accessed at night while they sleep.

Access to the victims' property is acquired by cutting electric fences and fences or under the pretext that they want to purchase cattle/sheep or other goods. Where owners make use of CCTV cameras, the cameras are disconnected and/or broken down without the owners being aware.

Items most commonly stolen include the contents of the safe, weapons, ammunition, cell phones, laptops, tablets, jewellery, electronic equipment, cash and vehicles. From the available data it was determined that more than 90 firearms were stolen from the victims during attacks.

In 18% of the analysed attacks the victim was wounded during the attack with a firearm. In the majority of cases, 78%, the victims were assaulted and/or seriously injured with multiple weapons. In 6% of the incidents an attacker was shot by the victim in self-defence during the attack.

The most dangerous day of the week

The majority of farm attacks occurred, like in previous years, on a Sunday, followed by Saturday, Wednesday and Friday. Fewer attacks took place on a Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. Attacks may be more likely on a Sunday, because attackers can ambush their victims on their return from church, usually at a set time. People also tend to be more around the house on weekends; attackers may take advantage of this because they can be assured of access to the safe's keys.

Time of day

Attackers typically strike at farms and smallholdings between 20:00 and about 03:00. By striking in the dark, they can enter the property unnoticed and without the victim's knowledge. Victims are attacked in their homes while they sleep and only awaken when the attackers are already in the house or while they are trying to break down security gates, burglar bars and doors to gain access. It is also easier to flee from the crime scene at night, thereby avoiding arrest.

Average number of attackers per attack

Although there are cases where only one perpetrator was involved in a farm attack, there have been cases where up to ten attackers struck at a farm or smallholding. More attackers per incident may indicate a more organised group or gang, which also tend to gain sufficient information about the property and the routine of the owners and workers in advance. The layout of the targeted property may even be pre-investigation for weeks.

Attackers are likely to cover their faces with balaclavas and to wear gloves and overalls during the execution of the attacks.

Number of victims and their average age

Based on an analysis of the 334 verified attacks, it was estimated that there were more than 400 individual victims. This number includes the owner, his family, friends, relatives, workers and workers' families.

Based on available information in the database the average age of victims was calculated as 56 years.

Vulnerability of farms compared to smallholdings

The analysis showed that in about 75% of cases farms were attacked and in 25% of cases smallholdings. The reaction time of neighbourhood watches, security structures, security companies and the proximity of police stations in areas with smallholdings may be a reason why attacks have decreased on these properties. Farms in rural areas are often far from the nearest police station and farm guards are sometimes unable to respond quickly to emergency calls. It allows attackers to effectively make use of getaway cars or to leave hijacked vehicles abandoned some distance from the targeted property and escape by foot or with another vehicle.

Farm workers as victims

In 12% of the verified cases workers have also been targeted. However, this percentage may be much higher, because media reports not always include information on the workers who were present during an attack.

Torturing of victims

Although it seems that torture during attacks decreased, some attacks this year were exceptionally cruel. The available data show that victims were burned in some cases with boiling water and irons. Unnecessary physical force was used for reasons that could not be justified; victims were, for example, killed by hitting them repeatedly with a pick or by cutting their throats open with knives.

Weapons used during attacks

Weapons that were used during attacks included firearms (pistols, rifles, shotguns), machetes, knives, axes, pipes, clubs, blunt objects and a spear.

Victims were tied with ropes, electric cables, cable ties, shoelaces or wires.

Rape and attempted rape

The available information mentions 10 cases of rape or attempted rape. An analysis of crime statistics in all areas shows a significant dark figure for rape, that is, in many cases it is not reported. In some instances, the victims asked the media to withhold information about rape because of the sensitive nature of this type of crime.

Kidnapping

This year five cases have been verified where a victim was kidnapped during a farm attack. The victims were forced into a car and dropped or killed in another area.

Hijackings

In 23% of cases the victim's car was hijacked. However, in 6% of cases the car was found abandoned a short distance from the crime scene.

Conclusion

By analysing reported and verified incidents trends can be identified. However, many cases are not reported, or not enough information is available to include it in the shared database. We urge victims to report incidents to TAU SA or ANI, thereby assisting the rural community in future and informing them about changes in the modus operandi of criminals.