

Summary of thesis projectⁱ

‘The Situational Context of Attacks on People with Albinism in Tanzania, Malawi & Zambia’

People with albinism in Sub-Saharan Africa are tragically targeted with violence, including murder and rape, because of their skin color and condition. This study focuses on the physical context of attacks against people with albinism, guided by the following research question: *Which factors from the Routine Activity Theory play a role in attacks on people with albinism in Tanzania, Malawi, and Zambia?*

In criminology, the Routine Activity Theory suggests that crime occurs when a motivated offender encounters a suitable victim at a moment when no one is present, capable and willing to intervene. This research focuses on several aspects of this theory, namely: the offender’s motives, the presence of others, the accessibility of the victim’s location, the victim’s visibility, the extent to which the victim was able to resist the attack, and whether these circumstances influenced the likelihood that the attack was completed.

The research is based on a dataset from Under the Same Sun and the Africa Albinism Network, containing reports of attacks on people with albinism. In collaboration with another researcher, details from each reported case were systematically recorded using a developed codebook. All data were handled with care and confidentiality to respect the privacy of the victims. Ultimately, 265 attacks were quantitatively analyzed to identify patterns.

The results showed no significant relationship between the presence of a capable guardian and the completion of an attack. Regarding the ability to resist an attack, the presence of a weapon and a known offender significantly influenced the completion of the crime. It was also found that the chance of a completed attack increased with the victim’s age. The element of visibility did not become clearly evident, however attacks mainly occurred in the evening or at night. Concerning accessibility, attacks that took place inside a home were significantly less likely to be completed than those occurring outside. Furthermore, the findings indicated that superstitious and financial motives were the primary drivers of these attacks. When combined in a logistic regression model, the variables together explained 44.3% of the differences in whether attacks are completed or not.

Although some theoretical expectations were confirmed, others were not or even contradicted expectations. The conclusion is that the Routine Activity Theory is only partially applicable to attacks on people with albinism in Tanzania, Zambia, and Malawi. Policy recommendations to protect people with albinism include disrupting the market by monitoring witch doctors and raising awareness about albinism, as well as investing in physical barriers to limit access to homes.

ⁱ *The thesis project was completed by Wouter de Vries as fulfillment of his MSc degree in Criminology at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Thesis supervisor: dr. Anneke Koning.*