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# SOUTH AFRICA'S BIGGEST-SELLING SATURDAY NATIONAL NEWSPAPER

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## Power cuts put children in danger

New research sheds light on load shedding risks

SHAUN SMILLIE

**A**S SOUTH Africans face the threat of more load shedding, a first-of-a-kind study has revealed the cost that planned blackouts are having on the health of children.

The research – to appear in the latest issue of the public health journal *Epidemiology* – examined the admissions of children at the Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital in Cape Town and found that during load shedding, paediatric admissions increased 10%.

The researchers, Christian Gehringer, Heinz Rode and Michael Schomaker, compared the number of admissions on the day of a load shedding and 48 hours after it to non-event days.

They further discovered that the admission increase linked to load shedding was more pronounced on weekdays. The study highlighted two incidents where children suffered burns because of load shedding.

"In one of the cases a little boy was brushing his teeth when he was burnt by a candle. The wound became infected and his parents took him to hospital a day later," said Gehringer.

The other admission was for a child who was injured when he stepped into a pan containing hot fat. The pan had been placed near an outdoor fire because the family couldn't

use the electric stove. Both incidents happened at night.

Gehringer decided to initiate the study while working at the Red Cross Children's Hospital. He said that doctors working in the burns unit had noticed admissions related to load shedding.

Rode, who works at the hospital, said that load shedding had contributed to the admission of children, not only to the burns unit but to other trauma units as well.

“**In one case a boy was brushing his teeth when he was burnt by a candle**”

Completing the study presented a number of challenges. Eskom, according to the researchers, would not provide information as to the days when load shedding happened. They had to find an alternative method of establishing this.

They turned to social media and were able to obtain data from the City of Cape Town. The researchers examined the 2014-15 period.

Schomaker explained that the increase in admissions during load

shedding in the week had to do with people finding it difficult to plan around the blackouts because of long commutes and work commitments.

The inability to plan properly led to more accidents. The study comes as Eskom warns of possible load shedding in the coming weeks because of striking workers. "The chances of load shedding this weekend are, however, low," said Eskom spokesperson Dikato Mothae.

The authors concluded in their study that: "The association we measured is consistent with our hypothesis that failures of the power infrastructure increased risk to the children's health."

Gehringer believed that this was the tip of the iceberg.

DA spokesperson on health in Gauteng Jack Bloom said the study showed that load shedding was damaging more than just the economy.

"Ten percent is pretty high, and this is showing the health cost to load shedding, and this what we are probably seeing across the country," he said.

There have been media reports of children's deaths possibly caused by load shedding. In 2014, Natasha Marits blamed load shedding and a faulty generator for the death of her premature baby boy in Kimberley Hospital. But the authors said that more research was needed to get a clearer picture of the health effects.

## YOU MUST BE KIDDING



Tshego Hatang, 10, at Gilman's Point on Mount Kibo, Kilimanjaro. He was climbing with his father, Sello, chief executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, as part of the centenary Trek4Mandela. It aimed to summit on Women's Day following a group of climbers who reached the peak on July 18 on Mandela's 100th birthday. Everest expedition leader Sibusiso Vilane, who led both treks, described this week's climb as particularly gruelling with gusting, icy wind. Not all the climbers made it, he said. Hatang said he had to stop Tshego going all the way to Uhuru Peak, Kilimanjaro's highest. Instead, the child reached Stella Point, the second highest peak, because he was exhausted.



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ZELDA VENTER

**A**N ONLINE love scam is thought to have generated hundreds of thousands of rand from lonely, unsuspecting women – money which is now sitting in a police bank account.

Many women paid all the money they had to men they had never met for love – one even couriered a ring to her online "lover" after her bank account was depleted.

But it was all a scam, and now the National Director of Public Prosecutions (NDPP) has turned to the high court in Pretoria to have R80 560 traced in the bank account used by the scammers forfeited to

## State wants proceeds from online dating scam

the state.

The money is being held in a police bank account after a preservation order, while the forfeiture application was postponed to December 4.

The NDPP said it believed this money to be proceeds of crime.

Molahleni Mopedi, a police officer at the cybercrime unit, stated in court papers that he'd received a tip-off about a Nigerian national operating an online dating scam from a house in Kempton Park.

He described a man there who

identified himself as Henry Bishop, but it was established his real name was Donald Dibe.

Mopedi also found cellphones which contained names and numbers of several women.

On further investigation it emerged that the women had paid various amounts over to the men they had "fallen in love with" via Dibe's online "dating" website.

Mopedi said it became evident Dibe was requesting bank account details from women and was working with other individuals to com-

mit online fraud.

Mopedi called the numbers on the phones and uncovered a web of women who had allegedly been scammed by Dibe and accomplices.

All the women had the same tale to tell: how they fell in love with the men they had chatted with online, and when asked they paid money over to them.

In one instance, a woman identified only as M said she had paid R198 000 in cash to her "lover", who called himself James.

She later couriered her diamond

and sapphire ring worth R10 000 to him.

Mopedi said when he met M he could see she was emotionally broken.

She paid the money into a bank account at his request and then he just kept asking for more.

Another woman, identified as W, met her "lover" via Facebook.

He told her he had sent her a gift, but the "courier man" told her to pay him R3 960 before the package could be released.

She said she never received her

package nor heard from him again.

A woman identified as "A" had a similar tale to tell. She was elated when she met her "lover" on the online dating site Zoosk.

They communicated on WhatsApp and she was even more delighted when he phoned her and she heard his "French" accent.

He told her he had financial problems and she said she only received a disability grant.

By the time he had her hooked, she had opened a bank account for him and deposited her social grant

in it. He eventually withdrew all her cash.

A woman identified as H surfed an online dating site and came across a man calling himself Johnson Gilmore, who said he came from the UK, but was staying in Kempton Park.

They exchanged email addresses and contact details and they communicated for a while via WhatsApp, as he refused to use Skype.

He told her he had family problems and that his sister had died.

From November 2015 to March 2016 she made 47 payments totalling R140 000 at Checkers in Springs until all her money was spent.



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