**SOUTH AFRICANS ARE EXPERIENCING A DEEPENING CRIME CRISIS, CONSEQUENTLY THE CRIME STATISTICS SHOULD BE RELEASED QUARTERLY.**

**Dr Chris de Kock, Analyst: crime, violence and crowd behaviour.**

|  |
| --- |
| **Abstract:** In this short article a historical overview of how frequently crime statistics and related crime information were released to the public over the past twenty years is provided. From the overview it is clear that at some time in this twenty years crime statistics were released monthly, quarterly, half yearly( per semester) and annually. A conclusion is reached that of all these different time intervals that statistics was released, the quarterly crime statistic releases of the late nineties were the most acceptable to the most role-players. The contextualised quarterly crime reports ensured that crime statistics is not outdated more than three to six months, where the current annual releases is outdated six to eighteen months. These quarterly reports created a national as well as international understanding of the nature of crime in South Africa and led to many crime prevention initiatives. In the early two thousands the quarterly reports were replaced by annual crime reports and only in 2007/2008 there were a move towards semester reports. But with the change in administration in 2008/2009 it moved back to annual reports.The argument in this article is that government should seriously reconsider quarterly crime reports/releases of crime statistics for the following reasons:* Crime statistics is basically the property of the people.
* South Africans experience a deepening crime crisis.
* South Africans should be empowered to keep the police accountable for crime reduction at all levels, since they had failed in this over the last few years and they had lowered the reduction targets twice over the last ten years.
* Other Government departments, parastatals, and especially local government can’t play their role in crime prevention without regular updates of the crime statistics/information.
 |

**1) INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**.

At present, as since the establishment of SAPS in 1995, the release of the police crime statistics is a prerogative of the Minister of Police and through him/her the Government of South Africa. In the twenty years since 1995 crime statistics were released in various ways depending on the Minister. So in the first year of Minister Sydney Mufamadi, crime statistics was released whenever the Minister decided to release it, with the criticism that this may lead to a situation where statistics is only released when the situation looks good and that it is kept away from the public if it is bad. It was then decided by the Minister’s office that National, Provincial and area (the old 43 police areas) statistics should be released quarterly and that when it is released it should be fully contextualized by analysis and research and be provided to research NGO’s a few days before the release on the condition of confidentiality and that they attend the release to be available for comments and further analysis to the media. The rationale behind this was that although South Africa at that stage had very high unacceptable levels of especially violent crime people can adapt to it if they understand where it comes from and what they can do to help combat the scourge. Also if overseas tourists and investors understand the generators of and conditions for crime in SA they would understand that the risk of crime to them/or their investments is much less than what the naked/un-interpreted figures project and that their investment in and visits to SA will indeed help to eventually achieve a society with “normal” levels of crime. These quarterly contextualized reports (the so-called pink and blue reports) were well received and led to a responsible and constructive crime debate with many anti-crime initiatives from Government, non-governmental organizations and communities.

In 1997 the Minister for Safety and Security, Minister Sydney Mufamadi, appointed the “Committee of Inquiry into the Collection, Processing and Publication of Crime Statistics“(also known as the Orkin Committee since it was chaired by Dr. Mark Orkin the then DG of Statistics SA and later the President of the HSRC-Human Sciences Research Council). This committee which included three international and various local experts, as well as police officers who were involve the collection, analysis and dissemination of crime statistics inter alia found the following on the contextualized quarterly reports:”…the Quarterly Reports produced by CIMC were interesting, clear, useful and honest about the gathering and processing problems facing police crime statistics. The reports also include statistics from other sources such as docket analysis and survey data to supplement recorded police figures.” But the Orkin Committee **inter alia** also found that: a) crime statistics should be released more frequently, b) local communities (e.g. Community Police Forums) need crime statistics and information to play their role in crime prevention, and c) the station should urgently be empowered with a analysis capability (both human and physical) to generate inter alia through the mapping of crime, the analysis of crime hotspots, and docket-analysis, intelligence which can be used to fight crime. Especially the overseas experts were unwavering in their view that only if crime statistics is made very relevant to the line function of the station they will see to it that all statistics are registered correctly at station level which will ensure valid and reliable statistics at national level. As a result of these recommendations a monthly one page national crime update of the national crime figures were implemented and the National and Provincial Crime Information Analysis Centres started to develop an analysis capacity at station and area level. The monthly, one page, national crime update, was more confusing than illuminating because it was not contextualized at all and as a result of the comparisons over very short periods of time subject to frequent huge fluctuations which could mostly not be explained. Every time it was released, the top management of the SAPS had to explain so much that they did not actually had much time till the next release to ensure crime reduction. The constant fluctuations which could not always be explained also did not promote confidence in the national crime statistics.

 With the appointment of Minister Steve Tshwete (1999) and halve a year later National Commissioner J.S. Selebi, the “policy” on the release of crime statistics changed again. Both the Minister (Tshwete) and the new National Commissioner (Selebi) were intensely aware of the role and the importance of crime statistics in the fight against crime. During the term of this Minister and the first halve of the term of Commissioner Selebi, crime (and thus crime statistics and the analysis results of crime statistics) dominated most meetings at national and provincial level and there was also a drive towards the development of analysis capacity at station level as part of the empowerment of police stations. While the emphasis moved towards the operational use of crime statistics during the Tshwete period it shifted away from the strategic contextualization to the public. The quarterly and monthly reports disappeared and statistics were again released when the Minister saw fit which again raised the question if he does not only release when it is favourable to the Government.

 The now often misused excuse of especially station commanders that they can’t release crime statistics because the “Minister” placed a moratorium on crime statistics came from a moratorium which Minister Tshwete placed on the release of crime statistics between 18 July 2000 and 31 May 2001. This was not an initiative from the Minister or the National Commissioner, who actually recommended it to the Minister, to hide crime statistics from the public as was popularly believed, but a genuine initiative to improve the quality of crime statistics through the implementation of more than 50 action steps. Originally this was triggered by severe criticism of SAPS crime statistics, especially rape statistics, by President Thabo Mbeki at the moment that Minister Tshwete and National Commissioner Selebi took up their posts. Unfortunately this placed a question mark on the release of crime statistics by Minister Tshwete after the lifting of the moratorium in May 2001 and even today some station commanders still try to hide behind this moratorium of more than a decade ago.

After the death of Minister Tshwete, Minister Charles Nqakula was appointed and soon afterwards a policy for the release of crime statistics were drawn up. This policy in very short stipulate inter alia that:

1)Crime statistics for all levels of policing (National, Provincial, and Station) will be released annually together with the release of the Annual Report of the SAPS, which should be released within six months after the close of the financial year.

The consequences of the release of crime statistics as part of the release of the annual report were that: a) the crime statistics were now released as financial year figures which is actually not in line with international practice since crime have a tendency to follow a calendar year trend b) it was accepted that the crime figures is part of the annual report of the police and as such it can only be released together (as a chapter or annexure) with the annual report c) it actually made crime statistics the primary indicator of police performance which again had the effect that when there were progress with crime reduction, management could hardly wait to release and claim all of the reductions as due to the hard work of the police, but when critical trends went up they wait till the last moment to release and suddenly there is a serious problem with the community or crimes are “stubborn” as the current National Commissioner( General Phiyega) would say.

2) It was still stipulated in the policy that the crime statistics should be contextualised and explained by analysis in the crime statistics section of the SAPS Annual Report (e.g. docket analysis, statistical analysis and environmental assessment).

3)It was also stipulated that the crime trends, hotspots, peak times, and modus operandi as identified by the station CIAC(Crime Information Analysis Centre) should be communicated to the public so that through heightened awareness crime prevention can proceed. This information can be provided to the public without mentioning any statistics. Crime statistics at station level can only be released once a year together with those of the provinces and the country.

4)Quarterly crime statistics could be provided to any government department at any level of government( national, provincial and local) and parastatal after the Minister of Police received his/her quarterly report for the specific Quarter. The only conditions for this was that it should be relevant to the specific institution and that they have to use it strictly internally and ensure that it does not leak.

Towards the end of the Nqakula period the Minister started to release the crime statistics and the crime statistics report much earlier than the annual report and he started to release semester reports, with the idea to eventually move back to quarterly reports. Before that could happen the Minister was replaced with Minister Nathi Mthethwa. Minister Mthethwa reverted back to the release of crime statistics as part of the Annual Report of SAPS and this continue to today.

**2) MOTIVATION FOR MORE FREQUENT RELEASES OF CRIME STATISTICS.**

From the historical background it is clear that at least since the dawn of democracy in SA there was this tension between the release of crime statistics and information to the people to be aware of the situation and to always be alert and prepared to protect themselves from becoming the victim of crime and the National Interest (a) not to scare South Africans to such an extent that they become locked into their own dwellings and can’t live a normal life and (b) not to scare of local but especially foreign investment and tourism. Some sceptics will say that the so-called “National Interest” is actually the interest of the ANC Government of the day. In this twenty years since 1994 the release of crime statistics always fluctuated between this personal (individual) and national interests. According to this authors’ view (who was the head of the unit in the police which was responsible for the production of the crime statistics releases for nearly 18 of the 20 years) the best balance was achieved with the quarterly reports in the late nineties except that those did not include the placing of the station data on the police website.

In the last three years and especially in the last few months it had become more and more obvious that government will have to urgently reconsider the frequency and format of the release of crime statistics as well as crime information generated from crime statistics. The reasons for this is the following which is not necessarily presented in order of importance.

**2.1) Reported crime statistics is actually provided to the SAPS by members of the public and is as such the property of the very same people of South Africa**.

Of this fact the author of this document was reminded telephonically in no uncertain terms in September 2013 by nobody else than the National Commissioner, General Riah Phiyega, herself- a good five months after his retirement. That came after he criticized the crime ratio calculations of 2011/2012 financial year which was not historically adapted to the 2011 census. Her view was actually how he dare interrogate the statistics of the public. He actually questioned as an independent crime analyst and member of the public, what the police is doing with the public’s statistics.

Every time a member of the public report a crime to a police officer or at a police station and a docket is opened with one or more counts of a crime/s and it is than registered on the Crime Administration System (CAS), it becomes crime statistics. This crime statistics, in its time and spatial configuration, together with the statement/s and biographic information of the victim/s (which should be part of the dockets) become the raw material which should be analysed by the police analysts (both operational and strategic) to become crime intelligence. Modern crime intelligence today is up to 90% based on the information in the docket, which could not be opened without the participation of the public. So the more victims reporting the crime and even attempted crime and the more information they provide, and if the analysis is done properly, the better the intelligence which should form the foundation of everyday policing. If this intelligence is properly operationalise it will lead to significant crime reduction.

But the public who provides this intelligence and will hopefully provide it in the future, should at least expect regular, responsible contextualized feedback on the crime situation and b) what they should be on the lookout for in their local environment (hotspots, modus operandi, peak times, suspects) to prevent becoming the victim of crime.

**2.2) South Africa is in a similar crime crisis as during the late nineties and early two** **thousands**. During the 2012/2013 and 2013/2014 financial years those crimes which are more police-able( like street/public robbery, house robbery, carjacking and business robbery and residential burglary) and which according to the VOCS(Victims of Crime Surveys) of Statistics SA generate the most feelings of insecurity and fear, had increased very significantly. If these trends continued during 2014/2015, which will only be known in two months, and currently 2015/2016, South Africa will be back where it was in 2002/2003. But South Africans have to wait to September 2016 before it can be calculated if this will be the case. In the meantime everybody is speculating. Sometimes this speculation is based on: mere feeling and what other people is saying, the last statistics which was released (which is now anything between 28 and 16 months outdated), the subcategory/specific crime figures which is kept by other organizations external of SAPS and leakages from SAPS.

SAPS crime statistics for Gauteng for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 January 2015 which leaked to the **Beeld** newspaper (see Beeld 16 April 2015: front-page as well as page 4) reveal major increases in that period in Gauteng. Given the dominance of Gauteng on the SA crime scene and the fact that these leaked statistics was for a period of ten months it in all probability provides a good indication what the national crime picture will look like when it is released by end of September. But it may in the end look a little better or much worse because the statistics for the other eight provinces did not leak. On 25 July 2015 **iafrica**  reported that the South African Insurance Crime Bureau indicated respectively a 41% and 17, 8% increase in hijackings in the Western Cape and Gauteng. Then on Sunday 19 July 2015 the **City Press** (p.4) reported that British American Tobacco (BAT) indicated that 1 412 of their vehicles were “attacked” in the last year. Now if one keep in mind that all of this information and much more than these few examples move through cyberspace around the world in seconds and it may not reflect the true reported crime picture and it is not explained/ contextualized at all, one can just wonder what damage it is doing to South Africa and its people. Now if the Minister of Police did release contextualised quarterly reports within say three months after the close of each quarter at least nine months of the statistics of 2014/2015 would have been released by the time that **Beeld** published the leaked Gauteng figures. That would have empowered all South Africans as well as the whole world to evaluate the leaked figures as well as the shocking figures of the SA Insurance Crime Bureau and British American Tobacco. This author is absolutely convinced that if there were quarterly reports, even where people experience the crime as a crises no leakages or hype around subcategory/ specific crime figure releases of companies/NGO’s would occur or if it occurred it would be easy to evaluate these releases and leakages.

On a daily basis since the beginning of this financial year (1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016) this author read and hear about especially house robberies and carjackings where well known personalities as well as lesser known people are robbed in broad daylight. If the police react on these at all it is mostly with an attitude of powerlessness (so as if they don’t know what to do). For example an incident which occurred while this article was written which were very much in the news locally and internationally, was the incident where 6 families were held up during a braai in Johannesburg (News24, 22 June 2015). “…29 people, including 17 children, were attacked by three robbers during a braai at a house in Linden …” according to News24. In the same report a Captain of Linden police station is reported to say: “Since March, police have been battling to keep up with the increase in armed robberies. It’s a concern for the police. We planned to track down the suspects, but it looks as if it’s not working.” This will clearly stimulate more insecurity and even fear amongst South Africans if the police are powerless themselves.

**2.3) It will put pressure on the SAPS to improve its performance on crime reduction.** There can be no doubt that SAPS failed dismally in even achieving its lowered crime reduction targets in the past three years. The fact that they according to their own Strategic Plan, 2014-2019. South African Police Service (p. 24) again lowered their targets from their previous lowered targets of for example a 34% decrease in contact crime in the period 2009/10 to 2013/14 to only a 10% decrease in the period 2014/2015 to 2018/2019 and actually eliminated the target for TRIO crimes is the clearest sign that they themselves had accepted defeat. By adopting this plan the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Police which is the supreme oversight structure of policing in South Africa also seemed to accept defeat. Targets/aims are there to together with remuneration, and patriotism motivate police members. There will be low to no motivation to fight the scourge of street/public robberies, house robberies, business robberies and or carjackings which kill and maim the body and soul of South Africans and generate fear in those who want to visit this beautiful country. The decrease in the numerous assault GBH and assault common cases which is at least three times more than the aggravated robberies, which is mostly due to South Africans changing their lifestyle or reporting it less will achieve the two percent decrease in contact crime.

The more public debate about crime the more the line function of the police which is crime combatting will come under scrutiny and the more police leadership nationally, provincially and at local police station level will be kept responsible and accountable for crime reduction to ensure that people in their area of jurisdiction are and feel safe. In the last few years since the highly successful crime reduction years of 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 police leadership were very successful in hiding the rapid development of the current crime crisis in the illogical so-called longitudinal analysis, where there is no focus on fluctuations. Furthermore the use of broad crime types where crime reductions of less police-able crime cancel out crime increases of more police-able crimes. This continues “borrowing against crime reduction gains from the past” will soon run out and in all probability the longitudinal analysis will then also be something of the past. This can already be seen in the shortening of the longitudinal period from ten to five years on page 9 of the Strategic Plan, 2014-2019. South African Police Service.

 What also work in favour of especially the national leadership of the SAPS when it comes to crime is all the other newsworthy events surrounding the SAPS and even the Minister of Police (e.g. Nkandla, Marikana, the Hawks, Ipid and Crime Intelligence). Basically all these events capture the attention of the media, analyst, NGO’s and even watch dog institutions to such an extent that crime are a little bit on the backburner and the police leadership can even succeed to convince the Portfolio Committee on Police that the crime reduction targets can be lowered yet again to a point that in future they can’t be kept accountable for massive increases in street/public robbery, house robbery, carjacking and business robbery.

**2.4) Environmental scanning and other analysis that other government departments and especially local governments are doing to play there role in crime prevention can’t proceed with at least regular, relevant crime statistics released to them.**

Local government, especially in the metropolitan areas and other bigger cities has to do very regular analysis of the geographical distribution of crime to identify environmental features which are conducive to crime. Just to mention a few examples:

**-**-If there is a subway between a train station and a taxi-rank and women are constantly raped and sexually harassed late at night in this subway it should be the responsibility of the city or metro council to address this by increasing illumination, presence of guards/ metro police, and /or CCTV cameras. If there is veld with long grass between the bus station and an informal settlement and again women are raped and men and women are robbed here when it becomes dark the council should either cut the grass or put up a fence to prevent commuters to take shortcuts through the veld. During the Khayelitsha Commission of Inquiry (2014) there were constant references by especially female residents of the location of the toilets which are on one spot far from their shacks. If they have to visit these during the night they have to walk quite a distance in the dark and this is where they become the victims of rape. Clearly this may also be the case in other informal settlements in South Africa and by relocating these toilets closer to the shacks this crime can be prevented to a larger extent.

**-**-Analysis at station level over more than a decade found that housebreaking in housing units adjacent to green areas and freeways with only a prefab or flimsy fence are more prone to house breaking than those which does not border such green areas and freeways. This imply that city governments should constantly monitor the situation in green areas and on the boundaries of green areas so that they can immediately “clean-up“ green areas if crime manifest in or on the boundaries of these areas.

**-**- Events like sport meetings, peak hour traffic, roadworks and load shedding can all create conditions which are conducive to crime. So for example in 2013/2014 while the rapid transport system infrastructure was constructed in Pretoria and various streets were closed, it resulted in massive gridlock peak hour traffic, where the street robbers had a field day robbing “sitting duck” motorists of their money and valuables . If the Tshwane metro council were aware of this they could implement certain measures which could ease the congestion and ensure a flow of traffic which would then made it more difficult for the street robbers.

These are just a few examples of how government departments and especially local authorities should through constant spatial analysis identify certain environmental factors/features which is conducive to crime and which should then be removed. This monitoring and analysis can be done by Crime Analysts at station level if the analysts receive adequate training how to do it, have the capacity to do it and the station management are keen that this information should be supplied to the local authorities and other relevant government departments and parastatals. The current release of crime statistics policy also allow for a quarterly release of crime statistics/information to government departments and parastatals to be used in their role in crime prevention.

At a seminar on 8 June 2015, at ISS (Institute for Security Studies) in Pretoria with the theme “Can violent cities deliver economic growth? Lessons from South Africa and Colombia”, where papers were delivered **inter alia** by the Head: Johannesburg City Safety Strategy and the Mayoral Committee Member: Safety and Security, Cape Town, it was very clear that at least in these two largest metros of South Africa which also generate the most of crime of all nine metros in South Africa, the Authorities receive no regular crime information from the SAPS. So the constant monitoring and environmental scan for crime hotspots and how the local authority can eradicate these hotspots through environmental change is difficult if not impossible.

It is actually no wonder that on a weekly basis and sometimes twice weekly, Talk Radio 702 report smash and grab incidents at various robots, four way stops and bridges (the Grayston off-ramp in particular is very popular) and the presenter/host will say that they will report it to the Metro without any reference to the SAPS. Strictly speaking the crime analyst at the station in which the particular robots, four way stop, bridge etc. where the smash and grabs occur, are located, should through their daily analysis immediately identify the problem and present it to the station management which should decide which action step/s will be taken. For example; a) increase police visibility at the spot, b) place invisible surveillance and a quick reaction team nearby to strike and arrest, c) warn motorists and d) ask the Metro Council to clear the intersection of all hiding places and escape routes as well as to constantly remove all sellers and beggars which can be used as a decoy by the smash and grabbers and e) task intelligence to establish where the loot is stored temporary and how and to where and to whom it is then taken. The SAPS station management should through the operationalization of the information that the crime analyst provide to them ensure that no smash and grab hotspots develop (e.g. there is smash and grabs during peak hour traffic at 15h30 to 18h30, Corner Grayston and N1 North, there are three suspects of which two are so-called window cleaners, which than check in the vehicle if there is anything which can be taken, and then they say something to a third suspect, which run from behind the vehicle, smash the window with a sparkplug and grab the items and run to a bushy area on the southwest side of the corner where he then disappear. The same suspect with a red shirt is back within a half an hour and the whole MO is repeated.)

This author during evidence to the Khayelitsha Commission referred to the fact that policing in Khayelitsha is not intelligence driven, but policing by chance. The question can be asked if this is not the situation everywhere in South Africa. The question can even be asked if the SAPS in Greater Khayelitsha had learned anything from the 540 page report, “Towards a Safer Khayelitsha” compiled by the commission chairperson Justice Catherine O’ Regan and Advocate Vusumzi Pikoli because every now and a then another vigilante killing still occur in Greater Khayelitsha and the stone/brick throwing and robbery on the N2 which fall within the precinct continue unabated. But then Booysens and Pinetown which is very far from Khayelitsha, is in the top half of the top ten stations when it comes to carjacking for the past decade, so it seems that the policing by chance and not by intelligence doctrine is quite widespread in the RSA.

**3) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**.

Given the facts that:

a) The people of South Africa are the providers and thus owners of the national crime statistics, while the SAPS is the keeper, analyst and primary user of the crime statistics. But there are many other users of the analysed crime information which should be provided with it, with the provisions that no personal information of the victims and or sources/witnesses become public and that the statistics would not be provided in such a manner that it can assist criminals. The people should also be informed regularly on the levels of crime in the precinct/s where they live, work and socialize so that they can compare with the larger environment (the province and country). Furthermore they should be warned about crime hotspots, peak times and modus operandi’s so that they can try to avoid becoming victims.

b) South Africa is currently in a crime crisis, where other government departments, local authorities, and parastatals, the communities and NGO’s should all be mobilised in partnership with the police on the basis of crime information. Nobody can be a partner in a business if you are not at least aware of how well or bad the business is doing and are provided with information to understand and play your particular role.

c) The police should constantly be kept accountable so that the current crisis does not deepened to the point that all the gains of the last decade are lost. This can’t be done on the basis of crime statistics which is at least six to eighteen months outdated.

d) Crime statistics was released quarterly for quite a few years during the time of Minister Sydney Mufamadi. The contextualised quarterly reports which was even provided to independent crime analysts a few days before release were widely accepted and play an important role in the understanding of crime in South Africa which alleviate fear locally and internationally and had many crime prevention spin-offs. Of all the different formats of the release of crime statistics followed by different Ministers of Safety and Security/Police this was the one which was the most accepted by all interest groups.

The quarterly reports were replaced with annual releases of crime statistics together with the annual report but towards the end of the term of Minister Nqakula semester reports were implemented again and in all probability quarterly reports would have followed soon was it not for the political events of 2008.

Against these facts the Minister of Police should seriously consider to move back to quarterly reports/releases as soon as possible. Quarterly reports where the crime counts and ratios are contextualized by crime analysis (e.g. docket analysis, GIS-analysis and qualitative studies) can provide a solid foundation for a constructive debate on crime in South Africa. Together with these quarterly reports crime statistics for stations, provinces and the country should also be placed on the SAPS website. At station level the time had now for once and all arrived that the station commander should very regularly (at least once a month update the community) on crime hotspots, peak times, and modus operandi and prevention tips. To do this all channels of communication should be used (local /community radio and newspapers, notice boards at police stations and shopping centres, leaflets, community structures etc.). A website for each police station (at least the bigger stations) can perhaps be considered.