

Exploring the role and effectiveness of the Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre within the South African Police Service

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Abstract: The global rise in crime has compelled law-enforcement agencies to move beyond traditional policing methods toward more strategic, technology-driven approaches. While visible policing was once believed to deter crime, research indicates that visibility alone is insufficient. Instead, crime prevention relies on planned police deployment guided by effective crime analysis. Crime analysis supports law enforcement in enhancing public safety, identifying emerging trends, allocating resources efficiently, and designing targeted prevention strategies. Although the concept of crime analysis has been recognised internationally since the 1960s, its integration into police operations in South Africa is relatively recent. The South African Police Service (SAPS) has introduced legislative measures and dedicated personnel to support crime information analysis. At the station level, this function is performed by the Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre (CIMAC), which is the focal point of this study. Using a qualitative case study design, this research explored the role and effectiveness of CIMAC. Data were gathered through an extensive literature review, and in-depth interviews with SAPS officials, CIMAC personnel, and provincial and national Crime Registrar representatives. International perspectives were incorporated through interviews with two overseas experts in crime analysis. The findings revealed that CIMAC provides crucial operational crime information and intelligence products, including street names, addresses, and crime series profiles. These resources aid in identifying crime trends, hotspots, priority areas, and investigative leads that support detection and prevention efforts. However, the study also identified challenges, such as weak communication channels, underutilised analytical outputs, and limited collaboration between CIMAC and other policing units.

To address these gaps, the study proposes a framework to standardise and strengthen the use of CIMAC at the station level. The recommendations focus on clarifying reporting structures, revitalising oversight mechanisms, defining roles and responsibilities, increasing awareness of CIMAC's value, ensuring adequate training and resources, and integrating CIMAC analysts into operational planning. The proposed framework seeks to enhance CIMAC's contribution to crime prevention and reduction by embedding crime analysis into daily policing practices and aligning its operations with global standards. Improved communication and collaboration, and the proactive use of crime data are central to optimising CIMAC's role.

Keywords: Crime Analysis, Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre (CIMAC), Crime Patterns, Crime Prevention, Crime Reduction, Crime Statistics, Crime Trends, South African Police Service.

Introduction

Throughout history, policing has evolved alongside advances in technology. Innovations such as fingerprinting, two-way radios, and patrol vehicles have significantly shaped the structure and operations of law-enforcement agencies (Taylor, Kowalyk & Boba, 2007:154). Recent developments in DNA profiling, forensic science, and digital tools have enhanced policing capabilities, with some of the most impactful innovations being those that aid in achieving core policing objectives, namely the control, reduction, and prevention of crime and disorder (Smith, 2014:1).

Central to this modern policing paradigm is crime analysis, a discipline that supports strategic and operational decision making through the systematic examination of crime data. Crime analysis involves the study of crime reports and other relevant information to assist law enforcement in identifying trends, apprehending offenders, evaluating policies, and preventing future criminal activities (Gallagher, Wartell, Gwinn, Jones & Stewart, 2017:ix; Santos & Taylor, 2013:501). The increasing professionalisation of crime analysts, individuals trained in data analysis and pattern recognition, reflects the growing importance of intelligence-led policing. These specialists convert raw data into actionable intelligence, which is used to forecast and manage crime (Sanders & Condon, 2017:237). The effectiveness of crime analysis lies in its ability to uncover patterns within large volumes of data, using statistical, exploratory, and visualisation techniques. Crime-related data often include not only incident reports but also socioeconomic indicators, demographic profiles, and environmental information (Ribaux, Girod, Walsh, Margot, Mizrahi & Clivaz, 2003:54). These comprehensive datasets enable police agencies to target resources effectively and devise informed strategies.

The roots of crime analysis can be traced back to the mid-19th century, when London's Metropolitan Police introduced a dedicated detective bureau tasked with recognising crime patterns (Bachner, 2013:7). In the early 20th century, the United States federal government began collecting national crime data, laying the groundwork for formal crime statistics. By the 1960s, many large police departments had established crime analysis units with responsibilities that included identifying criminal modus operandi, mapping crime trends, and linking repeat offenders (Gottlieb & Arenberg, 1992:7; Kringen, Sedelmaier & Schuurman-Laura, 2017:156).

Despite its value, crime analysis faces implementation challenges. While the discipline is increasingly recognised by governments, police organisations and academic institutions, its integration into police operations is not always seamless (Santos, 2017:18). Resistance often stems from an entrenched police culture, a lack of resources, insufficient training and the undervaluing of analysts' contributions at the operational level (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769; O'Guinn & Haberman, 2024:2). Analysts have reported that their outputs are frequently overlooked by frontline officers or used only sporadically. Furthermore, expanding the police role to include analytical functions is sometimes questioned in the context of limited personnel and competing priorities (Ribaux et al., 2003:54).

Studying both the successes and failures of crime analysis implementation offers valuable insights and lessons that can drive improvements in practice, despite ongoing challenges. International best practices in crime information management offer useful benchmarks for enhancing crime analysis within different policing contexts, including South Africa (Poblete, 2013:4; Zinn & Van Tonder, 2012:174). In this country, the Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre (CIMAC) represents a strategic initiative aimed at integrating crime analysis into daily policing functions. This study explores the historical context, objectives, and implementation of CIMAC within the South African Police Service (SAPS). It provides a detailed examination of station-level roles and responsibilities, evaluates the use of CIMAC in crime prevention efforts, and analyses the operational challenges hindering its effectiveness.

The researchers adopted a qualitative case study design to develop a comprehensive framework for the successful integration of CIMAC within the SAPS. Key issues identified include a misallocation of duties, frequent staff reassignments, inadequate retention strategies, and a lack of resources and training. These challenges have limited CIMAC's impact on crime management and reduced the effectiveness of its analytical outputs. To address these shortcomings, the study proposes a framework that emphasises inter-departmental collaboration, continuous feedback loops, and a clearer definition of responsibilities. Effective communication between CIMAC units and their stakeholders is essential for ensuring that analytical outputs are integrated into tactical and strategic operations. This research underscores the critical importance of structured crime information management in strengthening police effectiveness. By examining the obstacles to its optimal use and presenting practical solutions, the study adds to the growing body of knowledge on evidence-based policing and the application of intelligence-led strategies in crime prevention. The proposed framework aims not only to enhance the performance of CIMAC but also to serve as a model for similar initiatives within South Africa and in other policing contexts.

Literature review

Historical context and introduction to CIMAC in the SAPS system

Following South Africa's transition to a democratic state in 1994, a major restructuring of the policing system occurred. The apartheid-era SAP, along with the police forces of the former homelands and development regions, were amalgamated into a single national entity, now the SAPS. This unification aligned with the formation of nine provinces, each under the leadership of a national commissioner appointed by the president (SAPS, 2020:1). The establishment and operation of the SAPS are constitutionally mandated under sections 199 and 205 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 (RSA, 1996). Section 205 outlines the SAPS's core functions, which

include preventing, combating, and investigating crime; maintaining public order; and protecting and securing the inhabitants of South Africa and their property.

In line with global trends, the SAPS has increasingly embraced intelligence-led and data-driven policing strategies. A notable development has been the rise of 'pre-emptive policing', which involves identifying potential crime risks, targets, and threats. This approach has given rise to a specialised profession within policing, performed by crime analysts who possess advanced analytical capabilities in converting raw data into actionable intelligence (Sanders & Condon, 2017:237). Crime analysts play a crucial role in visualising, articulating, and interpreting crime patterns and trends to support strategic decision-making. However, as Sanders and Condon (2017:248) point out, while analysts produce essential interpretive products, they do not prescribe specific responses. Instead, the value of their outputs depends on how police managers and officers interpret and act on the information, reaffirming traditional practices while subtly transforming the symbolic nature of policing.

The evolution of crime analysis within the SAPS has mirrored broader institutional transformations. The unit responsible for crime information analysis at the station level has undergone several iterations in both name and structure, reflecting the organisation's ongoing efforts to enhance the strategic use of crime data. Initially referred to as the Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC), this unit operated under the authority of the station commander and was crucial in collating and analysing crime data at the local level (Breetzke & Horn, 2008:126; Govender, 2011:118). CIAC was central to generating crime information across all levels of policing (station, area, provincial, and national), thereby supporting coordinated and evidence-based policing efforts.

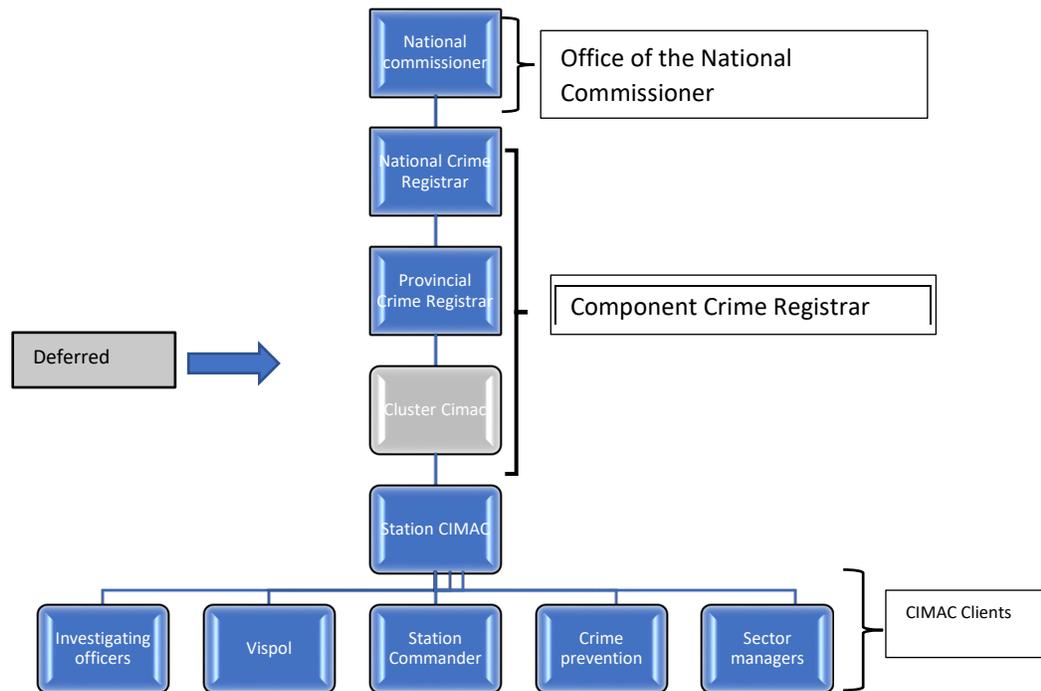
According to Horne (2009:79), CIAC served as the primary unit addressing the SAPS's crime analysis needs. Over time, it underwent several name changes: from Crime Information Management Centre (CIMC) to Crime Information Management Office (CIMO), CIAC, and eventually CIMAC, each reflecting administrative shifts, rather than functional changes. The National Crime Registrar (2017:11) notes that these frequent renamings created confusion about the lines of command and control within the crime analysis environment. Despite the changes in nomenclature, the responsibilities of crime analysts remained consistent, and personnel from CIAC were reassigned to CIMAC without their core functions changing (SAPS, 2015a:4).

CIMAC is currently recognised as a substructure of the Crime Registrar component at the station level, tasked with supporting crime analysis and intelligence functions (SAPS, 2018b:3). The broader Crime Registrar framework includes the National Crime Registrar, Provincial Crime Registrars, and station CIMACs, while the previously envisioned Cluster CIMACs have been deferred. The Crime Registrar is responsible for producing and interpreting the national crime picture, providing analytical insights into the "what, where, when, how and why" of crime incidents (SAPS, 2018b:2).

At the station level, CIMAC personnel are integrated into the station's fixed establishment. Although they report administratively to the station commander, they are functionally accountable to the crime registrar to ensure consistency, compliance with analytical standards and quality assurance in crime statistics (SAPS, 2018c:1). CIMAC's clients at the station include a range of internal stakeholders such as investigating officers, Visible Policing (VISPOL), Crime Prevention, Client Service Centre (CSC) staff and sector managers, who rely on accurate and timely crime information to guide operational planning and interventions.

To support the work of CIMAC, station commanders are expected to provide logistical and administrative support, including office space, vehicles, and personnel management services (SAPS, 2018c:2). This dual-structure administrative oversight at the station level and functional accountability to the Crime Registrar aim to balance local responsiveness with national consistency in crime analysis practices. Figure 1 depicts the reporting lines and placement of CIMAC at the station level.

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Figure 1: Reporting lines and placement of CIMAC at police station level

Source: Researcher's adaptation from SAPS, 2018b:11–12

To strengthen its crime prevention and response strategies, the SAPS has institutionalised the presence of CIMACs at police station level. These centres are responsible for conducting comprehensive crime analysis, aimed at answering the critical “who, what, where, when, and how” dimensions of crime incidents. Their primary function is to support station management by ensuring the availability of accurate, timely, and actionable crime information (SAPS, 2018a:2–3). As part of their operational duties, CIMAC officials perform daily quality assurance of reported crime data, including the verification and rectification of misclassified or incorrectly registered cases. These processes culminate in reports presented at the Station Crime Combating Forum (SCCF), where crime statistics from the previous day are reviewed in collaboration with station management, to inform operational decisions (SAPS, 2019:7).

In terms of the structural reporting framework, the SAPS (2018a:2) delineates a dual reporting relationship for CIMAC personnel. Functionally, they report to the Crime Registrar to ensure analytical integrity and standardisation across the organisation. Administratively, however, they fall under the direct oversight of the station commander, who is responsible for providing day-to-day managerial and logistical support. This administrative support encompasses a wide range of responsibilities, including human resource management (HRM) functions such as monitoring attendance, managing discipline, approving leave requests (including annual, sick, and rest days), and conducting performance evaluations through the Personnel Evaluation Plan (PEP) system. The station commander is expected to ensure that CIMAC staff have access to essential logistical resources such as secure office space, functioning information technology systems, and a dedicated vehicle for conducting fieldwork and site-based crime analysis (SAPS, 2018c:2). Other administrative obligations include the inspection of official registers and inventories, as well as oversight of personnel movements (internal transfers, promotional recommendations). These functions are crucial for maintaining the operational readiness and institutional integrity of CIMAC offices at the local level.

Objectives and implementation of CIMAC within the SAPS

CIMAC, as a station-level crime analysis unit, is embedded within individual police stations to support station commanders, yet the entity remains directly accountable to the Provincial Crime Registrar (SAPS, 2015a:4). CIMAC is critical in the strategic and operational management of crime, analysing daily serious crime reports which are aimed at identifying key variables such as the location, time and distinctive features of incidents, and detecting similarities across cases. This process helps to uncover criminal patterns or the actions of repeat offenders, thereby enhancing the ability of the police to prevent and respond to crime effectively (Grana & Windell, 2017:196).

The core objectives of CIMAC revolve around the systematic gathering, interpretation, and dissemination of crime-related data. At the station level, these objectives include conducting crime mapping and linkage analysis, undertaking fieldwork, and briefing and debriefing operational shifts. CIMAC updates station management and operational members on crime hotspots and the modus operandi of offenders, in addition to conducting detailed statistical analyses of crime trends (De Kock, 2014:5–7). In this regard, CIMAC ensures that crime information is both timely and actionable, allowing station commanders and their teams to make evidence-based decisions in pursuit of crime prevention and investigative effectiveness. CIMAC also plays an integral role in implementing and monitoring compliance with SAPS policies, standards and operational procedures. It performs quality assurance on crime statistics, and ensures that validated, accurate and reliable crime information is made available to the station management. This facilitates targeted responses to emerging threats and supports accountability in crime-combating operations (SAPS, 2015a:3). Furthermore, CIMAC offers strategic direction and guidance not only to station commanders, but also to operational personnel and other stakeholders engaged in localised policing efforts.

The broader mandate of CIMAC extends to reducing crime through the provision of intelligence-driven insights. These include information on reported cases, trends in criminal behaviour, threats in specific areas, and the development of suspect profiles. The unit maintains a real-time crime picture, compiles and presents monthly crime statistics, and contributes to investigative planning by highlighting recurring patterns or anomalies (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:536). To be effective, intelligence shared during CIMAC meetings and (de)briefing sessions must be operationalised through concrete actions and tactical deployments. Oversight and governance of CIMAC operations fall under the authority of the Provincial Crime Registrar. This office is responsible for ensuring adherence to standardised analytical procedures and the production of outputs that support crime prevention and detection objectives (SAPS, 2018c:2). The Provincial Crime Registrar, working in collaboration with the provincial HRM component, oversees the appointment, placement, promotion, and movement of CIMAC personnel.

Station-level duties and responsibilities of CIMAC

Historically, policing strategies employed during the 20th century were predominantly reactive in nature, relying on traditional tactics such as random patrols, rapid responses to service calls, and routine follow-up investigations. These approaches often emphasised operational processes over substantive outcomes and were widely criticised for their limited effectiveness in reducing crime (O’Guinn & Haberman, 2024:2). In response, modern policing increasingly advocates for strategies grounded in systematic analysis and problem solving. Edelstein, Faull, and Arnott (2020:5) argue that policing interventions should be informed by careful and tactful analysis, akin to other forms of strategic problem solving.

In this context, CIMAC plays a vital role at the station level, being tasked with conducting detailed analyses of crime dockets, geographic crime patterns, and statistical data. Its functions include crime mapping, linkage analysis, and the review of reported cases to provide a coherent picture of crime occurrences. A key responsibility involves compiling weekly updates that reflect individual crime categories, identifying patterns, and tracking emerging trends (De Kock, 2014:5–7; Edelstein et al., 2020:5; Govender, 2011:83; SAPS, 2017:9; SAPS, 2019:7; Wywadis, 2012:164). These tasks enable the development of actionable intelligence that informs targeted operational responses.

The primary function of the CIMAC unit is to analyse core elements of criminal incidents, identifying the “who, what, where, when, why and how”, and determining the modus operandi of offenders. This comprehensive analysis aids in constructing a detailed understanding of the crime situation, facilitates the identification of recurring patterns, and supports the study of historical crime data (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:142). By systematically examining past and present crime trends, CIMAC allows police stations to concentrate resources in areas with the highest crime prevalence, thereby enhancing the efficiency of crime reduction and suspect apprehension initiatives (Wywadis, 2012:164).

To ensure the reliability of its outputs, CIMAC evaluates information received from multiple sources, assessing its validity and corroborative strength. This process involves correlating various data points (e.g., suspect descriptions, vehicle and property information, victim demographics, spatial factors). Through the development of general and crime-specific information matrices, CIMAC determines linkages between seemingly isolated cases, thereby uncovering broader patterns of criminal behaviour. The findings from these analyses are then disseminated to operational members, divisional units, and other stakeholders, to inform planning and response strategies (Palmiotto, 2013:16–19).

At the station level, CIMAC’s responsibilities further include ensuring the quality of crime data. This involves analysing case dockets, verifying the completeness of data on the Crime Administration System (CAS), mapping

crime scenes, and updating statistical data streams. Moreover, CIMAC provides a comprehensive picture of the crime situation by conducting geographic analyses (including hotspot identification), statistical trend analysis, and crime pattern profiling. The unit is also involved in the interpretation of crime dynamics through linkage analyses between crimes and offenders, hotspot assessments, and fieldwork (e.g., environmental scanning). Regular briefings and debriefings with operational personnel and station management are conducted to maintain situational awareness and support tactical planning (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:537). CIMAC personnel are expected to manage the daily collection, processing, and interpretation of crime information. Within their area of jurisdiction, they serve as the station's primary crime experts and must demonstrate familiarity with all aspects of priority crimes, including their temporal, spatial, and behavioural dimensions (Sekhukhune, 2017:11).

The use of CIMAC in crime reduction and prevention

Crime reduction remains one of South Africa's most pressing social challenges (Roelofse & Gumbi, 2018:13). Annual crime statistics continue to reveal persistent (and, in many instances, rising) national trends across several crime categories. Specific police stations bear a disproportionate burden, particularly with regard to violent and property-related crimes (Breetzke, 2007:2; Swabe, De Kock & Currin, 2017:8). For instance, the 2018/2019 statistics highlighted exceptionally high murder rates in areas such as the Cape Flats, specifically Nyanga, Delft, and Khayelitsha, as well as in Umlazi and Inanda in KwaZulu-Natal. Similarly, the third-quarter crime statistics for the 2024/2025 period (October to December 2024) revealed that the Western Cape had the highest number of reported murder cases, with Mfuleni Police Station reporting 73 cases and Delft Police Station, 72. Orange Farm Police Station in Gauteng ranked third, having recorded 69 murder cases during the same period (SAPS, 2025:np).

This enduring and deeply troubling pattern raises several critical questions: Why, after years of monitoring, do certain violent crimes continue to rise? Why have tailored interventions not been deployed to effectively address the underlying causes of these crimes? And, where interventions have been implemented, why have they failed to achieve sustainable results? (Kempen, 2019:10). A meaningful response to these questions requires access to detailed, station-level crime data, which is where the role of CIMAC becomes central. Through its systematic analysis of crime statistics, CIMAC facilitates a deeper understanding of crime trends, emerging patterns and contributing factors (Swabe et al., 2017:8). While having access to aggregate crime data is useful in identifying general problem areas within a policing precinct, addressing specific crime types requires more granular information. This includes determining whether particular sectors in a precinct are more vulnerable or whether crime incidents are randomly dispersed (Kempen, 2019:10).

CIMAC's analyses enhance knowledge about crime and, in turn, support a range of investigative and crime-reduction strategies. Law-enforcement agencies increasingly depend on such analyses to improve operational effectiveness and strategic deployment (O'Guinn & Haberman, 2024:2). CIMAC plays a pivotal role by conducting statistical analyses to indicate the direction of crime, as well as pattern analysis to assess frequency, tendencies, and spatial and temporal distributions. These processes identify crime priorities for each station, explore the root causes of crime trends, assist in operational planning, and gather information that is relevant before, during, and after the commission of crimes. The centre also develops the Station Intelligence Profile (SIP), which provides insights into local social challenges and identifies threats, targets, and key offenders for future prevention efforts (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:146).

In fulfilling these functions, CIMAC provides actionable crime intelligence to operational personnel, including detailed information (e.g., specific street names, addresses, locations of concern). This intelligence allows officers to identify ongoing crime series, geographical hotspots and emerging patterns, and to generate investigative leads (Edelstein et al., 2020:5; SAPS, 2017a:8). The statistical analysis of crime over time and space, along with an understanding of shifting crime dynamics across geographic areas, is essential for any meaningful efforts to reduce and investigate crime successfully (Horne, 2009:71).

The value of CIMAC lies in its contribution to evidence-based resource allocation. Accurate crime data enables police commanders to make informed decisions about when, where, and how to deploy resources most effectively (Sekhukhune, 2017:4). This marks a shift from outdated practices of random patrols, which relied on chance to detect or deter crime. Instead, policing has become increasingly reliant on geographically coded crime information to determine areas of high activity, identify suspect movement patterns, and establish strategic patrol zones (Govender, 2011:121). As crime remains a complex and evolving social issue, the availability and use of statistically analysed data from CIMAC is indispensable for both pro- and reactive policing. It allows for the identification of emerging threats, helps pinpoint the modus operandi of offenders, and enhances law enforcement's capacity to respond to crime with precision and foresight (Sekhukhune, 2017:4).

CIMAC challenges/shortcomings within the SAPS

South Africa continues to grapple with persistently high crime rates that threaten public safety, impede socioeconomic development, and obscure the nation's collective aspirations. At the forefront of efforts to address these challenges is the SAPS, a key institution tasked with maintaining law and order under increasingly difficult conditions. However, the service is burdened by a range of institutional and operational challenges that inhibit its performance and effectiveness (Modise, 2024:3543). Among the systemic issues facing the SAPS are critical resource constraints, whereby budgetary limitations undermine its capacity to maintain adequate personnel, conduct thorough investigations, and provide specialised training to officers. Despite efforts to improve professional competencies, significant gaps remain in areas such as community policing, de-escalation tactics, and the handling of sensitive crimes, particularly gender-based violence (Modise, 2024:3544). Additionally, instances of corruption within the organisation continue to erode public trust and compromise the integrity of law-enforcement operations. Compounding these challenges are historically strained relationships with marginalised communities, a consequence of the enduring legacy of apartheid-era policing practices, which continue to affect the perception and legitimacy of the SAPS (Modise, 2024:3544).

At the local police station level, several institutional weaknesses within the SAPS manifest as operational inefficiencies that hamper service delivery. Notable among these are the manipulation of crime statistics, the frequent disappearance of case dockets, chronic under-resourcing, weak management practices, limited internal discipline and the implementation of largely ineffective crime prevention strategies (Faull, 2011:1; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:534; Omar, 2009:1). These systemic failings have a cumulative effect, contributing to the erosion of police effectiveness, and reinforcing public perceptions of insecurity and mistrust. In addition, unprofessional behaviour, instances of corruption, and, in some cases, criminal conduct by police officials, continue to undermine the SAPS's credibility and further alienate the communities it serves (Faull, 2011:1; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:534; Omar, 2009:1).

These ongoing challenges not only impede the SAPS's operational efficiency but also perpetuate an environment in which high crime rates remain inadequately addressed. Despite these deeply embedded obstacles, public expectations for professional and accountable policing persist (Faull, 2011:1). CIMAC, as an integral component of intelligence-led policing at the station level, is not exempt from the broader constraints facing the SAPS. Several key challenges specifically affect CIMAC's functionality: the misallocation or inappropriate assignment of duties and functions to its personnel, the frequent and disruptive relocation of its members, the absence of a coherent and strategic retention plan for skilled analysts, and persistent shortages in both resources and specialised training necessary for effective crime information management and analysis.

(Mis)allocation of duties to CIMAC officials

CIMAC officials at the station level are frequently burdened with duties outside their defined scope of work. According to the National Crime Registrar (2017:21), these non-analytical responsibilities include minute-taking at Station Crime Combatting Forum (SCCF) meetings, crime prevention duties, informer handling, roadblock staffing, attending to public complaints, acting as designated firearm officers or court officials, transporting prisoners, managing domestic violence coordination, updating the Operational Plan and Monitoring (OPAM) system and processing search warrant applications. Such misallocation stems largely from a lack of understanding among station management of analysts' role and of the possible range of analytical outputs (Belur & Johnson, 2018:771).

Further complicating matters is the expectation by many station commanders that CIMAC should produce outputs like the SIP, a function designated to the Management Information Centre (MIC) (National Crime Registrar, 2017:11). Sanders and Condon (2017:243) highlight the precarious status of crime analysts within policing culture, noting they are often perceived merely as clerical workers, resulting in the ad hoc assignment of unrelated information-processing duties. The SAPS has officially advised that CIMAC officials should not be tasked with functions unrelated to their analytical role, as defined in their job descriptions and Performance Enhancement Programme appraisals (SAPS, 2018c:2).

Incorrect placement and movement of CIMAC members

Variability in the establishment and staffing of crime analysis units across the SAPS, ranging from single analysts to teams of over 20, and including both civilian and sworn officers, reflects a lack of national guidelines. Analysts are often appointed without relevant training or experience, sometimes as a result of injury or as a punitive placement (Sanders & Condon, 2017:241–242). CIMAC environments have thus seen the reassignment of underperforming members from unrelated divisions, which undermines both their legitimacy and performance. To address these issues, the SAPS management directed that no personnel be removed from CIMAC without the Crime Registrar's approval,

and that appointments and promotions within CIMAC be similarly overseen (SAPS, 2018c:2; SAPS, 2018b). These protocols aim to ensure that transferred personnel possess the necessary competencies, preventing ineffective placements and avoiding the added costs of retraining replacements.

Incongruent retention strategy in the CIMAC environment

Recruitment and retention remain pressing challenges across policing globally, and the SAPS is no exception (PERF, 2023:1). According to Burger (2015:53), SAPS units such as detectives and CIMAC are not structured to support long-term staff retention. The lack of career progression pathways results in the loss of highly skilled members, while non-performing individuals often remain. This imbalance is exacerbated by members exiting CIMAC roles in pursuit of promotions in unrelated sections of the police service.

As crime and policing strategies become increasingly reliant on intelligence, so the role of the crime analyst must be both professionalised and supported. PERF (2023:62) recommends investing in analysts to improve efficiency, reduce police workload, and deliver data-driven strategies for crime prevention and investigation.

Inadequate resources and training

Effective crime analysis requires a wide array of investigative and analytical competencies to track dynamic crime trends and criminal networks (Karn, 2013:36). However, station-level challenges such as insufficient administrative staff and data typists continue to hinder efficient data entry and information processing (Govender, 2011:127). The National Crime Registrar (2017:28) reports that CIMAC units frequently lack critical resources, including vehicles, office space, computer equipment, cell phones, cameras, and system access – conditions that severely constrain their operational capacity. The SAPS (2017b:15) advocates for additional investment in CIMAC, not only to improve analysts' productivity, but also to raise their profile within the broader organisational structure. Integrating analysts into day-to-day operations and strategic planning enhances resource allocation and crime prevention efforts, generating both cost savings and improved performance (PERF, 2023:63). Leadership gaps impede progress, as Belur and Johnson (2018:769) found, many senior SAPS managers lack sufficient training to interpret analytical products effectively or to understand the strategic role of analysts. This validates the findings of Govender (2011:120, 126), who cites limited training and information technology (IT) support at the station level, and highlights the critical need for ongoing professional development among analysts and detectives.

To fulfil their roles, CIMAC members require extensive training in the Crime Administration System (CAS), Business Intelligence System (BIS), Global Information System (GIS), and Criminal Record Information Management System (CRIM), in addition to becoming proficient in Microsoft Office applications (SAPS, 2017b:16). The SAPS *Policy on Crime Statistics* (2017b:14) underscores the importance of continuous education for all personnel involved in the collection, processing and analysis of crime data. As Karn (2013:6) notes, achieving operational influence in contemporary policing calls for analysts who are not only well trained, but also equipped with advanced tools and organisational support.

Research methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the role and effectiveness of CIMAC within the SAPS, aiming to develop a framework for its improved utilisation. The qualitative research approach was chosen for its alignment with the anti-positivist paradigm, which is well suited to interpreting and understanding the social meanings that individuals or groups assign to human experiences and organisational practices (Berg & Lune, 2012:3; Lune, Pumar & Koppel, 2010:80). This interpretivist perspective enabled an in-depth exploration of complex organisational dynamics and perceptions of CIMAC's implementation, challenges and effectiveness, particularly in areas that have been underexplored in prior research.

Participants were purposively selected based on their direct experience with, or insight into, CIMAC operations. In total, 48 individuals participated in in-depth interviews, representing diverse roles and institutional levels, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The participants included five individuals from the National and Provincial Crime Registrar (Sample A), 12 Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre (CIMAC) members (Sample B), seven station commanders (Sample C), nine Visible Policing (VISPOL) heads (Sample D), 13 detective commanders from the Tshwane policing district in Gauteng (Sample E), and two members of the International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA) (Sample F). This range of perspectives captured operational, managerial, and international viewpoints.

Data collection primarily involved in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule, which allowed for flexible engagement and the probing of participants' experiences, perceptions, and suggestions related to CIMAC's functions and effectiveness. This approach facilitated the gathering of rich, detailed, qualitative data.

The analysis employed a multi-method qualitative strategy. Interview transcripts were supplemented with detailed fieldnotes before initial themes were identified through thematic analysis. Systematic coding and categorisation followed, enabling the recognition of patterns, shared experiences and significant variations within the data. Complementing thematic analysis, content analysis was applied to closely examine and classify the data, extracting and quantifying meaningful characteristics and recurring themes (Anderson, 2014:240; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012:214). These methods enabled the grouping of data into categories that supported comparative analysis and the identification of overarching concepts. To deepen interpretation and enhance reliability, convergent analysis was used to integrate insights across the thematic and content analyses, thus ensuring a robust and triangulated understanding of the findings.

To establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the results, multiple validation strategies were employed. Member validation (member checking) was conducted to confirm the accuracy of data interpretations with selected participants. Cross-verification of explanations across different participant groups facilitated the identification of consistencies and contradictions within the data. Moreover, the triangulation of data-collection methods enhanced the reliability of the findings, by incorporating diverse perspectives and sources. The final presentation of results included direct quotations, summary tables and narrative interpretation, thereby reflecting participants' voices and supporting the analytical conclusions drawn.

Results and discussions

Historical context and introduction to CIMAC

The literature review underscores the importance of conceptual and terminological clarity regarding CIMAC, particularly in light of the SAPS's institutional evolution. The SAPS's transformation from the apartheid-era SAP to a post-democratic policing agency involved multiple structural and functional shifts (Roelofse & Gumbi, 2018:12). The crime analysis function at the station level witnessed several nominal changes, transitioning from the CIMC to the CIMO, to the CIAC, to its current form as CIMAC. Despite name changes, the unit's core responsibilities remained unchanged (NCR, 2017:11; SAPS, 2015a:4).

CIMAC, as the operational arm of the Crime Registrar at the station level, is tasked with addressing the crime analysis needs of individual police stations and supporting the interpretation and dissemination of crime statistics. Its primary responsibilities include answering fundamental investigative questions through systematic crime analysis (Breetzke & Horn, 2008:12; Horne, 2009:79; SAPS, 2018a:3). Organisationally, CIMAC falls under the authority of the station commander for administrative purposes, while functionally it is managed by the Provincial Crime Registrar, who ensures standardised output, quality control, and procedural compliance (Govender, 2011:118). The Provincial Crime Registrar, with the assistance of HRM, also oversees staffing decisions related to the appointment, placement, and development of CIMAC personnel (SAPS, 2018a:2).

The participant responses revealed that CIMAC is widely understood by personnel at the station level, primarily in respect of its functional role. The participants used descriptors such as "provides", "assists", "guides", "gathers information", "keeps records", and "offers services" in their definitions, which indicates a strong association of CIMAC with operational support across multiple policing components. "The heart of the station", "the backbone of the SAPS" and "an engine" for coordinating crime information systems – these expressions highlight the perceived strategic importance of CIMAC within the broader policing framework.

Additionally, the participants recognised CIMAC as the entity responsible for conducting crime analysis at the station level, aligning with the formal designation of this function within the SAPS. Interestingly, while local participants associated CIMAC with a specialised yet integral part of policing operations, the international participants viewed crime analysis units more broadly: they highlighted the importance of having highly educated analysts with a specific skillset, capable of delivering actionable intelligence. For those participants, crime analysis could be undertaken by either civilians (preferably with qualifications in criminology or criminal justice) or sworn officers trained specifically in analytical methodologies.

Objectives of CIMAC

The literature reviewed revealed that CIMAC at the station level is tasked with key functions such as crime mapping, linkage analysis, fieldwork, briefing and debriefing of shifts, and providing continuous updates to station management and operational members on crime hotspots and offenders' modus operandi. CIMAC also analyses crime statistics, ensuring that station management is well informed about emerging crime trends. Importantly, the unit's responsibilities extend to monitoring compliance with relevant policies and operational procedures, ensuring the quality and accuracy of crime statistics, and making reliable crime information available to support effective policing (De Kock, 2014:5–7; Grana & Windell, 2017:196; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:536; SAPS, 2015b:3). The literature further emphasises that crime analysis within CIMAC involves a daily review of serious crime reports to determine patterns based on the location, time and distinguishing characteristics of incidents. These analyses help to identify repeat offenders, establish links between cases, and detect broader criminal patterns. Such insights are critical in planning and guiding policing activities and ensuring informed decision-making at the operational level.

Empirical data collected from the participants corroborate these functions and objectives: as one participant indicated, CIMAC *“provides strategic direction and guidance to the station commander and operational members by supplying accurate and timely crime data”*. Another participant noted that CIMAC *“supports crime reduction efforts and assists in the investigation and prevention of criminal activity through the provision of analysed crime information”*. Another said it *“routinely provides the station with valuable crime-related products, including summaries of reported crimes, offender modus operandi, hotspot analysis, crime threat assessments, [a] 24-hour crime picture, monthly crime statistics and suspect profiles”*.

The participants also revealed that part of CIMAC's mandate involves monitoring for incorrectly registered cases and rectifying these, in order to maintain data integrity. They emphasised that CIMAC's role is not merely administrative – it serves as a critical support structure within the police station. CIMAC facilitates coordination across units by identifying crime trends and producing analytical products that inform operational planning and deployment. Notably, the international perspectives aligned with the local participants' views: it is *“integral in completing the crime analysis cycle and providing essential services that enhance operational effectiveness”*. The findings from both the literature and the empirical data confirm that CIMAC's role is strategic and collaborative, reinforcing its value in supporting evidence-based policing efforts.

Station-level duties and responsibilities of CIMAC

The literature underscores the pivotal role of CIMAC in overseeing the collection, analysis, interpretation, and dissemination of crime-related data at the station level. CIMAC analysts are expected to be crime subject-matter experts within their respective policing precincts, with in-depth knowledge about priority crimes within their jurisdictions (De Kock, 2014:5–7; Edelstein et al., 2020:5; Govender, 2011:83; Maboa & Horne, 2024:537; SAPS, 2017:9; Sekhukhune, 2017:11; Wywadis, 2012:164). Their role is integral to the provision of timely, relevant and reliable crime intelligence to station management and operational members.

CIMAC's core duties include crime data quality assurance, case docket analysis, the verification of completeness and accuracy on the CAS, and the generation of various analytical products. These include geographic crime analysis, crime pattern and trend analysis, and crime mapping and linkage analysis, all of which aim to inform operational deployment and crime-prevention strategies. CIMAC is also tasked with conducting environmental scanning, performing fieldwork, maintaining a crime intelligence profile, and (de)briefing operational teams and station leadership. These duties contribute to the development of a coherent crime picture that guides station-level responses (De Kock, 2014:5–7; Edelstein et al., 2020:5; Govender, 2011:83; Maboa & Horne, 2024:537; SAPS, 2017:9; Sekhukhune, 2017: SAPS, 2017:9;11; Wywadis, 2012:164). The literature also notes that effective policing should be grounded in problem-solving approaches, supported by rigorous crime analysis (Edelstein et al., 2020:5). CIMAC analysts are responsible for reviewing daily reported crimes and generating weekly updates that reflect emerging crime patterns, notable trends, and situational shifts. These tasks are not merely clerical, but form the backbone of data-driven and evidence-informed policing strategies (Govender, 2011:83; Sekhukhune, 2017:11).

Empirical data gathered during the study affirm that the participants across all local samples demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of CIMAC's roles and responsibilities. They consistently concurred with the view of one of the participants, regarding the *“unit's centrality in the station's crime analysis ecosystem”* and acknowledged its function as *“an operational support structure”*. The international participants similarly demonstrated a clear understanding of the crime analysis cycle and the imperative for CIMAC *“to deliver factual and data-driven intelligence to law enforcement”*. While the majority of local participants expressed confidence in CIMAC's current

performance within the SAPS, a notable minority pointed to shortcomings, primarily related to resource constraints, skills deficits, and the limited integration of CIMAC in operational planning. Suggestions for improvement included *“training of CIMAC officials, provision of adequate resources, and greater involvement in operational activities”*. One participant emphasised *“the need for CIMAC information to be actively used during operational briefings and planning sessions”*.

One of the international participants noted that the *“effectiveness of crime analysis units like CIMAC is context-dependent, shaped by departmental culture, resource availability and organisational support”*. As another explained, the *“most effective crime analysis units are those empowered to approach policing challenges creatively and independently, rather than being restricted by rigid hierarchies”*. As one of them emphasised, it is vital to *“involve crime analysts early in investigations, integrate them into briefings, and encourage collaboration through ride-along and hands-on engagement with operational units”*.

The use of CIMAC in crime reduction and prevention

Crime reduction remains a pressing challenge, with national trends showing an increase in several crime categories and certain police stations being disproportionately burdened by violent and property-related crimes (Breetzke, 2007:2; Roelofse & Gumbi, 2018:13; Swabe et al., 2017:8). In this context, CIMAC has emerged as a critical component in the strategic deployment of policing resources and crime prevention initiatives. The literature supports the use of CIMAC to generate operational crime intelligence, including detailed station crime profiles that incorporate street names, addresses, crime hotspots, emerging crime series, and investigative leads. These products assist law enforcement in identifying trends and making informed decisions about the timing, location, and nature of operational interventions (Edelstein et al., 2020:5; Govender, 2011:121; Maboa & Horne, 2024b:146; O’Guinn & Haberman, 2024:2; SAPS, 2017:8; Sekhukhune, 2017:4).

The research findings aligned with the literature, namely that the analytical outputs of CIMAC are indispensable for evidence-based policing. Station-level use of CIMAC information allows for targeted deployment strategies, replacing the outdated practice of random patrols. Effective crime reduction requires accurate data on when and where specific types of crime occur. Participants from all the local samples demonstrated an awareness of CIMAC’s role, with the majority believing CIMAC is effectively used within the SAPS and contributes meaningfully to crime reduction. However, a significant minority expressed concerns about its underutilisation, while a small proportion considered its usage to be only partially effective. A few participants were uncertain about CIMAC’s impact.

Divergent views emerged across different samples. Participants in Sample A perceived CIMAC to be ineffectively used *“due to the assignment of CIMAC members to duties outside their designated responsibilities”*, as one participant noted. Conversely, most Sample B participants considered CIMAC to be *“well-utilised”*, citing its *“responsiveness in providing essential crime information”*. As a Sample C participant noted, *“we rely heavily on CIMAC products for both operational planning and crime prevention strategies”*. Sample D participants echoed this, with one participant expressing *“confidence in the accuracy and utility of the information provided”*. In contrast, a Sample E participant criticised *“the lack of detailed explanations regarding local violent crime trends and the absence of feedback on critical crime developments”*, suggesting that better use of CIMAC could *“position the station ahead of crime”*.

The international participants affirmed the relevance of crime analysis units in policing, with one participant noting that *“their effectiveness is closely tied to how well the unit’s outputs are implemented”*. One participant remarked that even *“the best analytical products become meaningless if not integrated into policing operations”*. *“Strategic and tactical use of CIMAC products”*, along with *“managerial support and trust in the unit”*, were deemed key factors in enhancing its contribution to crime reduction.

All local and international participants agreed on the value of CIMAC in reducing crime. Their insights were reflected in the statement that *“using CIMAC data strategically could save time, money, and resources, while enabling precise problem identification and targeted interventions”*. The findings indicate a strong alignment between the literature and the practical experiences of CIMAC’s crime prevention and crime reduction value, thus reinforcing its critical role within the SAPS’s operational framework.

CIMAC challenges/shortcomings within the SAPS

The findings revealed that, while CIMAC plays a vital role in crime analysis and operational support within the SAPS, several significant challenges hinder it from achieving its full potential. The literature highlights systemic issues such as the manipulation of crime statistics, missing case dockets, a lack of discipline, under-resourcing, and a general decline in professionalism within the SAPS, all of which have eroded public trust (Faull, 2011:1; Maboa & Horne,

2024a:534; Modise, 2024:3544; Omar, 2009:1). The findings of the present study indicate that many of these institutional weaknesses are mirrored within the CIMAC environment at the local police station level.

One of the most prominent challenges is the misallocation of roles and responsibilities. CIMAC officials are frequently tasked with duties outside of their core analytical mandate, including administrative functions such as minute-taking at meetings, handling informants, manning roadblocks, responding to complaints, updating operational systems, and even assuming roles like domestic violence coordinator or SAP 13 clerk. This widespread dilution of duties is attributed to station management's limited understanding of the CIMAC function, as well as a broader misalignment between analytical outputs and operational priorities (Belur & Johnson, 2018:771; National Crime Registrar, 2017:21; Sanders & Condon, 2017:243). Consequently, CIMAC officers are often overburdened and unable to focus on data analysis, which undermines their contribution to crime prevention and strategic deployment.

Another key challenge concerns HRM. The movement of non-performing members into the CIMAC environment has raised concerns, prompting the SAPS to issue directives restricting such placements. Moreover, the absence of a coherent retention strategy and a defined career development path has resulted in high attrition rates amongst skilled personnel. Many competent analysts leave in search of advancement in other units, while underperforming members remain, leading to an erosion of expertise and continuity (Burger, 2015:53; PERF, 2023:1; SAPS, 2018c:2).

Infrastructure and logistical shortcomings further compromise CIMAC's operational efficiency. The participants in Sample B consistently cited a lack of basic resources such as office space, vehicles, computer equipment, cameras, cell phones, and software as significant impediments. In many stations, the inability to access the SAPS mainframe or necessary crime databases reportedly further delayed or obstructed the analytical process. Additionally, "a shortage of administrative support staff such as data typists" exacerbated "delays in capturing and processing information". Many CIMAC members lack formal instruction in essential tools like CAS, BIS, GIS, and CRIM, and basic computer literacy for preparing and presenting analytical products (Govender, 2011:120; Karn, 2013:6; SAPS, 2017b:14).

Participant feedback across all local samples (A to E) pointed overwhelmingly to the lack of physical and human resources as the most serious obstacle facing CIMAC. Challenges related to "communication, management practices, unclear role definitions, and lack of feedback mechanisms". These findings align with international participants' perspectives, where crime analysis units face similar issues: one participant noted "under-resourcing, lack of appropriate software, limited training opportunities, and poor management". The findings of the study revealed that CIMAC's effectiveness is significantly curtailed by structural and operational challenges that require urgent attention at both the station and national levels.

Good practices in crime analysis and functions of CIMAC

The literature underlines that crime analysis is grounded in the understanding that crimes are neither random nor isolated incidents, but are often part of discernible patterns with common characteristics (Ekblom, 1988:3–4; ToppiReddy, Saini & Mahajan, 2018:696). This theoretical foundation was reflected in the findings from both the national and international participants, who provided examples of crime analysis directly contributing to solving cases and reducing crime. Participants from Samples B, C, D, and E mentioned specific analytical products such as hotspot mapping, modus operandi profiling, suspect and victim targeting, and identification of stolen goods. If effectively used, crime data enabled the arrest of suspects, the recovery of property, and measurable decreases in criminal activity (Tshishonga, 2022:285–303).

These practices align with international standards, as similar examples were cited by the international study participants: one reported developing "a geographic profiling capability that provided targeted patrol guidance, enhancing resource deployment". Another international participant emphasised the importance of raising awareness of crime analysis functions within law enforcement agencies, arguing that "a broader understanding leads to increased uptake and effective use of analytical outputs". Both local and international participants' experiences show that "the integration of analysis into policing strategies fosters intelligence-led decision-making and improves crime prevention outcomes", in the words of one participant.

Participants from Sample B observed a progressive enhancement in knowledge, analytical capacity and operational effectiveness within the CIMAC environment. One participant highlighted the "increased utilisation of crime information" and acknowledged that the CIMAC office has had "a tangible impact on local crime trends". An international participant similarly noted "improvements in our units over time", emphasising the importance of "sustained professional development and institutional support for crime analysts".

The participants' responses also highlighted a set of practical recommendations for optimising the use of CIMAC. The participants advocated for proper staffing, sufficient resources, ongoing training, and formalised career paths. Several participants stressed the value of *“fully integrating CIMAC into operational planning structures at station, district, and provincial levels”*, after one participant proposed this. *“Effective collaboration between CIMAC personnel, station commanders, detectives, and other stakeholders”* was recommended for *“informed decision-making and coherent action plans”*. The need to assign oversight responsibilities to district or provincial officials was also emphasised, to ensure the consistency, accuracy, and strategic alignment of CIMAC outputs.

All agreed when one participant suggested that *“communication plays a pivotal role in enhancing the effectiveness of the CIMAC function within police stations”*. A recurring theme in the responses was the need for stronger internal marketing of CIMAC's purpose and value. A participant from Sample A emphasised that *“raising awareness among operational members and station management about the relevance of CIMAC could enhance its integration into daily policing activities”*. To achieve this, one of the participants recommended *“the use of diverse communication platforms such as emails, WhatsApp groups, and internal newsletters to ensure the timely and consistent distribution of intelligence products”*. In addition, a Sample A participant stressed *“the importance of providing crime analysts with dedicated time during briefings and meetings to present their findings”*. In this sample, one participant stated that *“when analysts are afforded the opportunity to explain crime patterns, hotspots, and modus operandi in detail, the information is more likely to inform strategic deployment and operational decisions”*.

The international participants reinforced the need for clear guidelines, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and policies from the onset of crime analysis implementation. One recommended *“collaborating with academic institutions or professional bodies such as IACA for support and benchmarking”*. Importantly, effective information-sharing protocols were highlighted by this cohort as crucial to safeguarding sensitive data, while ensuring timely distribution to relevant operational units.

Framework for the use of CIMAC in the SAPS

The researchers' development of a conceptual framework for use by CIMAC was informed by the corpus of literature and by the experiential insights provided by the study participants. Based on these insights and supported by the broader literature on crime analysis units, this conceptual framework has been developed to guide the effective utilisation of CIMAC in SAPS. The framework offers a systematic approach for integrating CIMAC into the core functions of policing at the station level. While CIMAC is entrusted with the responsibility of supporting police stations through the analysis of crime data, the generation of crime intelligence and the interpretation of crime trends, it is clear that its service is beset by numerous operational and systemic challenges (Faull, 2011:1; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:534; Modise, 2024:3544; Omar, 2009:1). These challenges have significantly undermined its potential to deliver timely and effective services to police stations, thereby affecting broader crime prevention efforts and public trust in policing.

As one participant observed, *“CIMAC cannot be effective in isolation. It must be recognised as an integral part of operational planning and execution”*. Another participant noted that *“there is limited understanding among members of the station on what CIMAC is and how it should be used”*. These sentiments reflect broader structural and communication gaps between CIMAC and its intended users within the SAPS, which ultimately contribute to the underutilisation and inefficiency of this service.

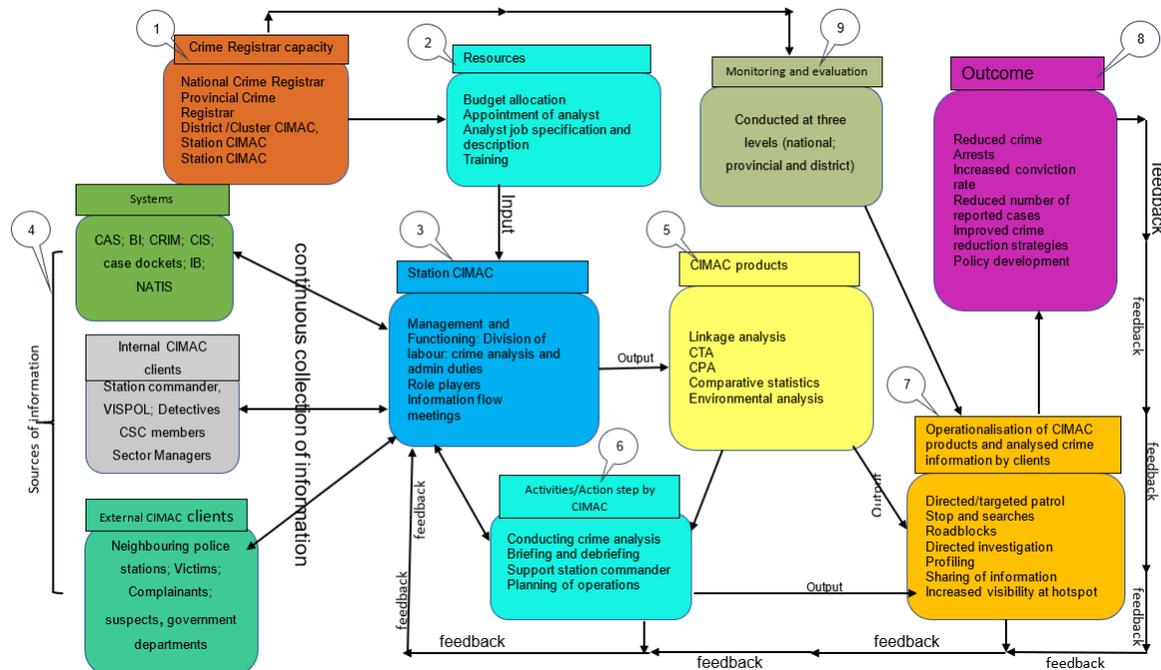
The literature review affirms that the effectiveness of any crime analysis unit is largely dependent on how it is managed and integrated within the policing structure (Bruce, 2017:24). The proposed conceptual framework seeks to address the shortcomings of CIMAC at the station level and offers practical solutions to bridge the gap between CIMAC and operational policing. The developed conceptual framework emphasises that police station sections (detectives, VISPOL, and station management) must not function in silos. Instead, they should actively engage with CIMAC, request crime analysis products, and incorporate them into their daily planning and operations.

One participant highlighted this interdependence, stating, *“We only see the value of CIMAC when we use their analysis to guide our operations. Otherwise, it remains just another office.”* Another added that *“feedback loops are missing. Once CIMAC provides a product, no one reports back on whether it helped or not.”* Such feedback is essential to allow CIMAC to refine its outputs and ensure relevance to operational needs.

The developed conceptual framework illustrates a two-way, dynamic relationship between CIMAC and its clients. It requires that all role-players – including station commanders, operational commanders, and detectives – be thoroughly familiar with CIMAC's processes, roles, and deliverables. As one participant asserted, *“Everyone at the station needs to know what CIMAC does, how it works, and why it matters.”* The proposed conceptual framework further highlights

the importance of structured communication, operational integration, proper resourcing, and accountability. Figure 2 illustrates this developed conceptual framework and the interconnected roles of various stakeholders in promoting a cohesive and intelligence-led policing environment where CIMAC serves as a central node in the crime prevention strategy.

Figure 2: Proposed conceptual framework for the use of CIMAC in the SAPS



Source: Concept developed by the authors

The potential impact of CIMAC at the police station level should not be underestimated, particularly when effectively integrated and supported by station management. The conceptual framework offers a practical and strategic model for using CIMAC within the SAPS. It is proposed for consideration as a tool to enhance crime analysis and operational planning at the station level, ultimately supporting the broader objective of reducing crime within local policing precincts and, by extension, across the country.

Recommendations

To strengthen the operational effectiveness and reporting functions of CIMAC at the police station level, several key actions are recommended. First, the administrative structure of CIMAC must be clarified by formulating comprehensive guidelines to define the reporting lines, roles, and responsibilities of its personnel. Such clarification will enhance accountability and streamline communication within the organisation. Second, oversight mechanisms must be revitalised through the reinstatement of cluster or district-level CIMAC structures. These entities will serve as essential bodies for monitoring, evaluating, and supporting CIMAC operations at the station level, thus ensuring a consistent standard of performance. A critical aspect of this enhancement involves the clear delineation of the respective roles and responsibilities of provincial crime registrars and CIMAC personnel, ensuring that all stakeholders operate with shared understanding and purpose. In addition, it is imperative that the strategic importance of CIMAC be formally acknowledged across the SAPS, as a central resource for providing actionable crime intelligence and supporting frontline operations.

Awareness and understanding of CIMAC's objectives, roles, and analytical outputs must be significantly improved at all levels of the organisation. This should be supported by the provision of adequate resources, including human and technological infrastructure, and the establishment of criteria to guide the selection of personnel with the appropriate skills and attitudes. Targeted training in crime data analysis and crime prevention strategies should be prioritised to enhance the competence and professionalism of CIMAC personnel. Effective internal communication channels should be strengthened to promote the use of CIMAC products. A feedback mechanism must also be institutionalised to enable continuous improvement of the products and services offered. The integration of CIMAC analysts into

operational planning activities is crucial; such involvement should be further enhanced through their participation in ride-alongs and fieldwork to improve their contextual understanding and practical application of crime data.

To ensure ongoing improvement and alignment with global standards, the SAPS should establish formal affiliations with international crime analysis organisations and adopt international best practices. The implementation of the proposed developed conceptual framework is critical for standardising CIMAC functions and ensuring their consistent and effective use across all police stations, in support of strategic crime prevention and reduction initiatives.

Conclusion

Integrating CIMAC into the SAPS represents a significant advance in the adoption of intelligence-led policing practice. This article has highlighted the pivotal role that strategic crime analysis plays in enhancing public safety and strengthening crime prevention mechanisms. While the establishment of crime analysis units within the SAPS remains a relatively recent development, the presence of supportive legislative frameworks and committed personnel marks a positive step towards data-driven policing.

The findings of the study confirm that the information and intelligence products that CIMAC generates are vital for identifying crime patterns, analysing crime hotspots, and facilitating effective crime detection and investigation. However, the study revealed that persistent challenges hinder the optimal use of these analytical outputs. Addressing these will require the implementation of a coherent and integrated framework that promotes interdepartmental collaboration and communication, and the systematic incorporation of CIMAC into operational policing.

The proposed developed framework emphasises that units/divisions within police stations must not operate in isolation, but rather in partnership with CIMAC. This includes actively seeking, applying, and responding to the analysed crime information they provide. Such a collaborative approach is essential for ensuring that crime analysis products are effectively integrated into the strategic and tactical operations of the police. Ultimately, the full potential of CIMAC can only be realised when all SAPS stakeholders engage meaningfully with the crime analysis process, thereby enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of policing efforts across South Africa.

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