

Hindrances to partnership policing: Case study of Gauteng townships, South Africa

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OIDA International Journal of Sustainable Development, Ontario International Development Agency, Canada.

ISSN 1923-6654 (print) ISSN 1923-6662 (online) www.oidaijsd.com

Also available at <https://www.ssm.com/index.cfm/en/oida-intl-journal-sustainable-dev/>

Abstract: Quarterly Crime statistics show rising crime levels, particularly in previously disadvantaged environments such as townships in South Africa. Serious crime has reached unacceptable levels in that community members feel vulnerable in the streets and in their own homes. This paper studied the effects of factors that inhibit partnership policing in the townships North of Pretoria and Gauteng in South Africa. During the summer of 2018, 45 community members and South African Police Services members actively involved in the Community Police Forum in Soshanguve, Pretoria, in Gauteng, South Africa, were randomly selected and participated in focused interviews for a month. The aim was to establish factors that inhibit partnership policing in the area. In-depth interviews with stakeholders, particularly Community Policing Forums (CPF) and law enforcement officers involved in such forums. A qualitative method was adopted in the research. Factors such as lack of trust, lack of resources, insufficient/inadequate resources, lack of training, and corruption were identified as the most pressing ones that hinder effective partnership policing in the area. During the follow-up interviews, it was established that the crime situation continues to worsen as issues established during interviews three years back have not been adequately addressed. Moreover, research found that failing to implement available crime prevention strategies, change, and/or poor leadership at the local level results in rising crime levels, as monthly crime statistics indicate. These findings suggest that leadership, political will, implementation of crime prevention strategies, trust, cooperation, resources, training, and communication, amongst others, will enhance or promote effective partnership policing in the townships in South Africa.

Keywords: Accountability; community policing; crime prevention; community police forum; partnership policing; South Africa

Introduction

Crime is a worldwide problem, and it is an even bigger problem in South Africa. Researchers have and continue to argue that the leadership vacuum is the core of crime problems in South Africa (Bruce, 2011; Burger, 2011; Newburn, 2012). While various crime prevention strategies have been in place over the years since the dawn of democracy in South Africa to deal with crime, crime statistics, which are released quarterly, show an upward trend (Statistics South Africa, 2022). In July 2021, unrest in South Africa demonstrated the South African Police Service's incapability to protect the country's citizens (Africa, 2022). Community Police Forums (CPFs), introduced in the 90s and intended to address crime at the local level, appear to have lost their purpose over the years. However, it is noteworthy to indicate that some CPFs are effective. In contrast, in other areas, such CPFs are either non-existent or ineffective for reasons that this paper sought to explore (Lamb, 2021). In numerous policing areas, after the advent of democracy in 1994, South Africa introduced and implemented one of these solutions: the Community Police Forum (CPF). However, after introducing CPFs, the initiative or design appeared flawed (Burger, 2011: 5). Crime statistics show that crime keeps rising even in areas where CPFs were successfully implemented and were effective over the

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past few years. For this reason, the researcher sought to explore factors that inhibit the effectiveness of partnership policing at the local level in the townships in Gauteng, South Africa.

Research shows that while there are studies worldwide about effective partnership policing (Newburn, 2012; Reisig, 2010; Bayley, 2016; Weisburd, Telep, Hinkle & Eck, 2010; Wood, Taylor, Groff & Ratcliffe, 2015), there are a few South African studies in this regard conducted in the past five years. Most of them were conducted more than ten years ago (in cities), and those in rural areas cannot be trusted because their samples are too small. Therefore, whether CPFs in South African townships are still effective is unclear. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the reasons behind the rising crime levels in South Africa. The police play a fundamental role in responding to and managing societal conflicts and contributing to community well-being daily (Sharp, 2011).

Literature on partnership policing has yielded inconsistent results across the globe. For example, in the United Kingdom study, Wright (2002) finds that partnerships can be effectively implemented when there is mutual trust between communities and the police. Converse to this finding, and based in the UK, Whisenand & Ferguson (2002) find that professionalism, training, and resources play a significant role in crime reduction. Another study by Stone & Ward (2000) finds that leadership and political will are major contributing factors in crime reduction, but that leadership also assists in boosting police morale.

In addition to these findings, many of the studies (Wood, Taylor, Weisburd, Telep, Hinkle & Eck, 2010). investigated the impact of partnership policing, mainly in developed countries. However, the extent to which these findings can be generalized to developing countries is limited for various reasons, such as resource availability. Although South African research exists in the form of a study by Minnaar (2004), the data examined in this paper cover a time period (2021 to 2025). Therefore, the researcher does not know whether recommendations made in previous studies on partnership policing are still relevant.

There is a problem of crime in South Africa, and this problem is unsolved because the current research is inadequate. To address this inadequacy, I will answer the following questions and generate new knowledge that will assist in finding crime problems in South African townships:

- What are the factors that hinder the effectiveness of partnership policing?
- Why are crime levels rising in South Africa?
- What led to the demise of partnership policing in certain areas in South Africa?
- Is there a need to develop an alternative form or model of policing suitable for South African conditions?

Rationale of the study

Crime is reportedly the greatest concern in South African townships and has been the subject of many political controversies. To address the issue, a better understanding of the causes of these crimes is required. Some researchers have suggested that the country's high crime levels are exacerbated by politicians who benefit from the crime situation in the country in one way or another (Faull, 2016). Unemployment is very high in the townships, and it is evident that areas with the highest unemployment rates are highly likely to experience the highest crime problems. So, it might be argued that crime is not 'pushed' by unemployment but rather 'pulled' by opportunity. One could, therefore, argue that policing should be concentrated where the opportunities for crime are the greatest (Groff & Ratcliffe, 2015). The finding should be treated with caution since inconsistent reporting rates between crime areas reduce their reliability. Communities in South African townships live in constant fear as crime levels continue to rise at unacceptably high rates. Addressing the nation in the African National Congress's 2021 January 8th statement, the president said: *"Throughout the country, communities are still confronted by high rates of crime and violence. The lack of safety threatens and undermines their well-being and hampers social and economic development. Other social problems, such as drug and alcohol abuse, contribute to violence and cause many families great misery."* (President Ramaphosa).

During the apartheid era, the police were regarded as enemies of the community, and this view still persists in some quarters of society in the townships. The police culture was brutal in nature and did not provide room for cooperation with communities. While efforts were made in an attempt to transform the police organization in South Africa, some officers were and remained determined to maintain the status quo in terms of how they operate. This has often been met with the same resistance from some community members who would ensure they do not cooperate with the police. The difficulty in this matter is that police officers in the lower ranks appear more resistant to change than those in the upper ranks. There is a strong view in many townships that some police officers are colluding with known criminals, making it difficult for some community members to trust and cooperate with the police for fear of victimization (Singh,

2005). It is evident, however, that among them are individuals who do not understand the functions and operation of the criminal justice system (CJS) – and hence, some tend to take the law into their own hands.

Educating community members about the various functions of the CJS in South Africa is imperative. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa affords every citizen various basic rights, such as the right to life, the right to freedom of movement, and other related rights. Therefore, it is significant for all stakeholders in the partnership to understand that these rights are not just for the privileged few but for every citizen.

This research seeks to answer the following questions: Is there a political will to reduce crime in South Africa? What can be done to ensure that partnership policing in the townships is effectively implemented?

Table 1 shows the pressing crime statistics.

Table 1: Crime statistics in Gauteng province: January 2021 to March 2025

Crime Category	2021/2025	Count Difference	(%) Change
Murder	966/1 439	+473	67.1%
Attempted murder	1 055/1 766	+710	59.7%
Assault GBH	8 323/8 822	+499	39.2%
Common assault	10 706/12 163	+1 457	23.8%
Robbery (WAC)	11 494/11 499	+5	0.98%
Common robbery	3 507/3 331	-176 (reduction)	0.53%
Carjacking	2 328/2 488	+160	0.67%
House Breaking/Theft	8 927/7 434	-1 493 (reduction)	1.83%

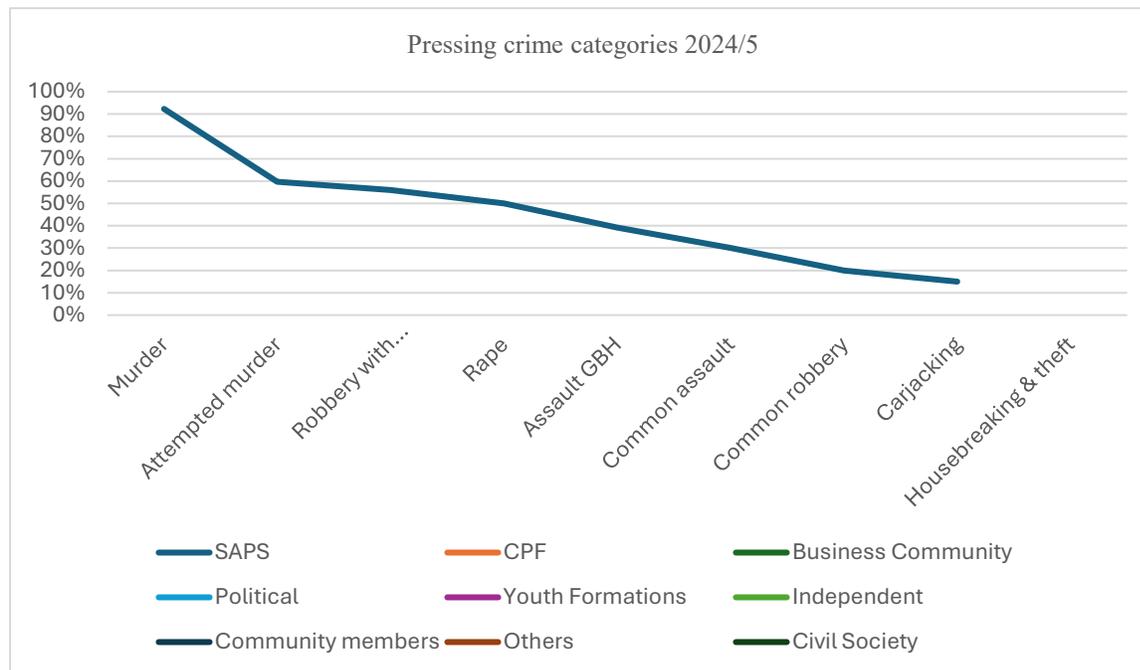
Source: SAPS Quarterly Crime Statistics

Table 1 presents the most pressing crime challenges from January 2021 to March 2025. These responses are perceived to represent the views of the larger community. The responses indicate that murder is the common type of crime that greatly affects the community (67.1%), while attempted murder (59.7%) is second. Other crimes, such as assault with the intention to do grievous bodily harm (GBH), also feature at (39.2%). Data also suggests that, compared with other types of crime, common assault, carjacking, housebreaking, and theft are also reported more frequently. One possible explanation could be the high rate of unemployment and related socio-economic challenges. Perceptions of political interference, leadership, and resource constraints are also pressing challenges. Among the 45 participants interviewed, about 2 in 10 (10%) of the participants indicated that the crime level in the township is out of control. Use of illegal substances is the other highest (16%). A study conducted by Mabunda and van Graan (2021) highlights the nexus between youth unemployment, the use of illegal substances, and the rising crime levels in the townships. The findings show that unemployed youth are disgruntled, and they view the use of illegal substances and involvement in crime as the only viable option for survival. These findings further highlight the urgent need and the significance of effective partnerships that are based on mutual trust, transparent, and responsive to community needs. While there has been a slight decline in certain types of crime (common robbery (-0.53%) and housebreaking and theft (1.83%), there are serious concerns about the rise of other types of crime. The data also show a notable shift due to various crime prevention strategies such as “Operational Shanela.” However, despite such strategies, crime remains high in the country.

Strengthening proactive policing, community partnership, and multi-stakeholder collaboration, as well as intelligence-driven operations, can assist the SAPS in reducing the rising crime levels in Gauteng townships (Meek & Stott, 2016). Visible policing, foot and vehicle patrols in the so-called ‘hotspots’, supported by various technologies and crime mapping, is a starting key point. Regular engagements with Community Police Fora (CPFs) and other relevant stakeholders will assist in terms of trust building (Skogan, 2006). Table 2 below shows pressing crime categories and responses by various respondents during data collection in affected localities and townships in Gauteng province in South Africa. As depicted in Table 2, it was found that murder, attempted murder, rape, assault with the intent to cause grievous bodily harm, and housebreaking and theft feature as the most pressing crimes in the affected townships under this study. This illustrates the violent nature of crime and also the unknown underlying socio-economic conditions in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa. In addition, the prevalence of these crimes undermines economic stability and security as well as economic development in the townships. These crimes underscore the uneven or inadequate distribution of resources for crime prevention and expose inefficient partnerships for sustainable development as envisaged in the National Development Plan (2030) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

(MDGs). These crimes are the only selected pressing crimes, and there are also other crimes that require collaboration to ensure effective partnerships.

Table 2: Pressing crime categories



Source: Researcher

Materials and methods

In this paper, the qualitative research approach was adopted, which enabled the researcher to solicit the views and perspectives of notable researchers (Vass, 2024). Literature study of SAPS quarterly crime statistics, journal articles, and collected data formed the basis of this research. In the research leading up to this article, the researcher conducted four in-depth interviews with role players involved in the CPF at the Soshanguve police station in Pretoria, South Africa. Participants ranged from community and police members to business leaders in the area over a period of six (6) months. Forty-five (45) participants were selected from the area concerned, which is situated about twenty kilometers northwest of Pretoria. Due to the diversity of participants, purposive sampling was used to limit the number of study participants. The researcher conducted all the interviews; notes were taken and, where required, recorded on tape after permission was obtained from the participants concerned. This article also uses data from the researcher's dissertation (Mabunda, 2014). The National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS, 1996), the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa, 1996), the Community Policing Framework (South Africa, 1996), and other related policy documents, among others, contributed immensely to the substance of this article. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the relevant authorities and participants. These interviews provided a multi-dimensional perspective with regard to the objective of the study.

Results and discussion

The findings of this study revealed several significant hindrances to effective partnership policing. Analysis of data collected from participants highlighted recurring challenges that undermine collaborative efforts. Firstly, distrust and poor communication emerged as prominent barriers (Mabunda, 2014). It is common knowledge that poor community-police relations result in ineffective partnership policing. Accountability, or lack thereof, was also flagged as a barrier. According to Palmiotto (2011), the police should not only be accountable for their actions but should also be held accountable for violations or disregard of policies, procedures, or activities that are questionable. Due to the nature of policing in a democratic environment, police accountability is key as it assists in restoring the confidence of citizens towards law enforcement agencies (Leishman, Loveday & Savage, 2000). Community members expressed a lack of confidence in the police due to inconsistent feedback, limited transparency in crime reporting, and perceptions of corruption. One participant said, "...Community members report cases to the police but do not get feedback in the form of progress reports". On the other hand, police officials reported frustration with misinformation circulating

within communities and a perceived unwillingness of residents to share critical intelligence. In this regard, one SAPS participant stated: “...Awareness campaigns can play a major part in improving relationships, and it is a process that will take time to achieve”. This mutual distrust weakened the foundation upon which a sustainable partnership could be built (McKee & Lewis, 2016). Moreover, lack of cooperation was identified as a recurring hindrance (Diphooorn & Berg, 2014). Despite the existence of CPFs and other platforms intended to strengthen collaboration, participants indicated that attendance, active participation, and accountability were inconsistent. Some community members expressed their reluctance to work with the police for fear of victimisation, while police representatives highlighted inadequate support from residents during operations. In this regard, a community participant said: “...You can open a case in the office, but in a period of two or three days the suspect is back while your goods are stolen, so I do not think they are doing their job.” “...the working relationship with the SAPS, Agh, it’s not good”. One participant said, “...The working relationship with the SAPS is not that good because some of the police are not bringing their side to ensure that this relationship works” “...that is the reason why the community ends up taking the law into their own hands since they believe that the justice system is failing the community” This lack of cooperation hindered the implementation of joint crime prevention strategies (Diphooorn & Berg, 2014).

In addition, strained police-community relations were consistently mentioned as a limiting factor (Marks & Shearing, 2009). “...Community members report cases to the police but do not get feedback in the form of progress reports.” These are some of the participants’ responses. Historical tensions, allegations of police misconduct, and perceptions of unfair treatment contribute to the disconnect between law enforcement and the communities they serve (Dlamini, 2021). Strained relations are not only reduced to unwillingness by communities to engage with the police, but also foster an environment where suspicion outweighs mutual commitment to safety. The results revealed overlapping concerns, contested perceptions, and deep-rooted challenges that continue to undermine collaborative efforts between the police and the community. The study found that high crime rates, poverty, and youth unemployment create environments of fear and frustration, making it difficult for residents to see the value of partnering with the police (Kelly, 2021). A dominant theme across all groups was the mutual distrust between the SAPS and the community. Community members and CPF representatives expressed dissatisfaction with the police’s responsiveness, citing instances of police absenteeism, lack of feedback after reporting crimes, and perceived police corruption. In turn, SAPS officers voiced concerns about being unfairly targeted and unsupported by the community, especially when conducting high-risk operations. This lack of trust was exacerbated by poor communication channels, which often led to misunderstandings and a breakdown in cooperation. The study also revealed several critical hindrances to the effective implementation of partnership as presented in the following sections. These factors include the following:

Police Culture, Corruption, and resistance to change

Verma, Das, and Abraham (2013) define culture as the values, norms, perspectives, and craft rules that inform police conduct. In support of the above authors. Purpura (2001) defines culture as the system of values and meanings shared by a group or society. Police subculture can either be positive or negative and significantly influence officer behaviour (Skogan, 2006). Research shows that there is more likely to be an increase in reports of abuse of power, corruption, and other social ills among police members, where management and accountability are lacking (Rauch & Dixon, 2004). Pelsner (2002) argues that the police must develop a “culture of accountability” to gain a level of trust from the public. Moreover, Rauch & Dixon (2004) argue that the public or community is also accountable when they report crime to the police. Participants in this study raised concerns about some police officers who are alleged to be working with criminals. While the police are no longer participants or involved in the systematic use of brutality, torture, or extra-judicial killings that characterized policing during the apartheid era, there are still some reports of such incidents. There are often media reports of police brutality, misconduct, abuse of power, and other matters, all of which are inconsistent with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In the analyses of partnership policing, Skogan (2004) posits that collaboration in partnership policing, mutual trust, and respect play an enormous role. Hills (2011) argues that policing in authoritarian and hybrid regimes has tended to be overly forceful, and the use of militaristic ideologies and traditions tends to influence the institutional cultures and ethos of police organizations. The transformation process in the South African Police Service (SAPS) has posed and continues to pose certain challenges due to elements within the organization who are determined to cling to the past (van Graan, 2008). Historically, the former South African Police (SAP) was notorious for defending the policies of the apartheid regime. As defending the apartheid regime was ‘entrenched,’ the then police ‘force’ treated citizens with disdain and would get away with the most atrocious acts unpunished. Out of 45 participants who were asked their views about resistance to change, the researcher found similar responses to those in similar situations in previous studies (Mawby, 2008). The majority of South Africans (90 percent) in the sample think that the SAPS is resistant to change, as opposed to about 10 percent who believe otherwise. Most township citizens do not believe that the police have transformed enough to understand

their responsibility of serving communities equitably and in a manner different from the past, where citizens were seen as troublemakers.

Communities in some townships are continuously frustrated by the lack of service delivery (Newham, 2005). Furthermore, Lamb (2021) found that, in some instances, police stations are located far away from the communities they serve, meaning that, by the time police respond to reported crime, evidence has been tampered with, or there is no remaining evidence at all. This results in more cases being thrown out of court due to a lack of evidence. Nevertheless, the ten percent who indicated that some form of transformation had taken place were hopeful that, with cooperation among role players in the CPF, improvement in service delivery could be realized. In an attempt to get past this, members of the organization have sometimes had to embark on various forms of protest to force management to fast-track transformation. In certain instances, it was established that resistance resulted in low morale, particularly among low-ranking officers at the coal face of crime. Such officers are often tempted to accept bribes (Makaudi, 2001). When the community policing phenomenon was introduced in South Africa in the 1990s, there was a degree of scepticism, with some officers having anxiety about their careers and others being determined to protect or defend their territory (Rauch & Dixon, 2004). It was common to see officers openly raising their concerns when the restructuring of these specialized units was introduced, with some cases being closed as 'undetected' due to the officers involved deliberately conducting their investigations poorly (Steinberg, 2008). Research shows that there is a requirement for a paradigm shift among the rank and file, as indicated by van Graan (2008), who studied the roles and responsibilities of police officers during transition. Transformation in organizations involves various aspects such as culture, technological, and operational policies, all of which may have the potential to overwhelm those who display some form of resistance (van Graan, 2008). Jones (2020) indicates that change is stimulated by rapid environmental aspects as well as uncertainty, which may result in some form of resistance. According to these authors, pressure on organizations to adapt and change structures and culture poses various challenges. During this research, it was established that, in some instances, induction programs were not taken seriously, resulting in a proportion of officers being placed in positions without the proper training (Marks, Shearing & Wood, 2009). Some community members still consider the police as "the enemy of the people", while on the other hand, some police members continue to use old apartheid tactics when they deal with members of the community. There is a requirement for a paradigm shift on both sides to ensure an environment that is conducive to effective partnership policing. In this study, it was found that the literacy levels among some of the role players in community policing in affected areas are a cause for concern, as only some were not able to read and write. It is important to note that some police officers still perceive training on human rights as a "paper pushing" exercise to get as many police on the street as quickly as possible, with a focus on numbers rather than quality (Bruce, 2011).

The hindrances to partnership policing in Gauteng townships reflect a complex interplay of historical, institutional, and socio-political factors that continue to erode trust between communities and the police (Berg & Diphooorn, 2014). One of the primary challenges identified is the deep-seated mistrust rooted in the legacy of apartheid-era policing, which remains unresolved despite democratic reforms. This mistrust is compounded by perceived and actual police corruption, abuse of power, and a lack of transparency, which discourage community members from actively participating in policing initiatives. While progress has been made at various levels of the police service, there is still a need for a paradigm shift (Independent Police Investigative Directorate - IPID). The police provide better service to communities in white areas than in black communities (South Africa, 2011).

Leadership and political interference

Leadership is defined as the process of influencing and directing the actions of others (Stevens, 2003). Peak, Gaines, and Glensor (2004) define leadership as a process of directing and influencing the behavior of others to accomplish specific organizational objectives. Some key participants viewed poor leadership, or a lack of leadership, as a major contributing factor in ineffective partnership policing. This view is shared by participants who responded to the interview question as follows: *"This place was supposed to be led by competent and experienced leaders, but when one looks around here, most of these officers are corrupt, and some are in the criminals' chequebooks. Another participant said: "As community members, we do not feel comfortable providing information to corrupt police officers at this level because of the fear of victimization. The same police officers who provide information to sell us to these criminals, so we just keep silent."* In this study, it was found that leadership at the local level is constantly replaced as a result of the ongoing transformation in the South African Police Service (Jones, 2020). As a result, new leaders come with their own strategies and plans for crime prevention, which may not necessarily be aligned with the progress already made by previous leaders who have been deployed elsewhere. It was also found that community members would attempt to stop certain trusted officers from being transferred or deployed, arguing that new leaders would take time to acknowledge or support already achieved projects.

Accountability

Minnaar (2004) and Burger (2011) argue that relationships based on mutual trust would ensure community safety. Furthermore, Bruce (2011) argues that partnership policing will be effective when there is accountable leadership and does not cover the situation where leadership neglects their core functions and actions required to ensure the sustainability of partnership policing. Accountability is a key driver of effective partnership policing in a democratic policing environment (Palmiotto, 2011). In simple terms, police accountability refers to a situation where community members trust the police even if some of their rights and freedoms are curtailed or limited to some extent (Jones, 2020). (Stone & Travis, 2013) argue that the police are required to be accountable to the communities they serve. Moreover, the police should act in an impartial, appropriate, and consistent manner within the confines of the law (Tyler, 2004). Research shows that public trust in the police can be influenced by various police actions, such as incompetence, a lack of professionalism, corruption, discrimination, intimidation, and excessive use of force (Goldsmith, 2005). To this end, some participants expressed their views as follows: “...*some police officials are not accountable because they confiscate our goods without valid reasons*” “...*By law, we are obliged to account for our actions*” “...*some police officials are not accountable because they confiscate our goods without valid reasons*” “...*By law, we are obliged to account for our actions*”

Resources constraints

This research found that the effectiveness of partnership policing was undermined by scant community involvement and inadequate resources (Buthelezi, 2014). While the availability of resources does not necessarily result in successful partnership policing, their availability may enhance the effectiveness of partnership policing if wisely utilized (Thurman & Zhao, 2004). A successful partnership depends on the investment in people, leadership, resources, infrastructure, and continuous training and development (Homel, 2004). SAPS and CPFs participants pointed to the lack of resources, ranging from patrol vehicles and fuel to communication tools, as a major barrier to effective partnership policing. Business owners also raised concerns about inadequate police visibility, particularly at night, which contributes to rising crimes such as burglaries and armed robberies. These resource deficits not only limit proactive policing but also reduce community confidence in the SAPS’s ability to protect residents.

Training

Evidence shows that inadequate training – or a complete lack thereof – has negative implications for partnership (Bruce, 2011). This study revealed that some role players in CPFs in the townships are undermined by SAPS’s unwillingness to provide the required training for role players. However, there are certain areas where training was provided, only for role players to experience other challenges, such as a lack of resources. Paoline, Myers, and Worden (2000) noted that training has a way of enhancing the capacity of the police. In addition, where training has been provided, the police will be able to analyze situations and become accountable in a given situation, solve community problems without necessarily having to use force or make an arrest, which eventually leads to litigation. According to Rauch (2002), recruiting and selecting new police officers is critical in ensuring that police officers appointed for a particular community have been selected based on consultation with relevant stakeholders. Police units must be properly capacitated and equipped, and their methods and training should be revised to deal with large-scale operations (Miller & Hess, 2005).

Vigilantism

The literature on vigilantism in Africa emphasizes that vigilantism tends to emerge in contexts where the police cannot unilaterally maintain order and apprehend alleged offenders, particularly in areas affected by high crime levels. Research by Kantor and Persson (2010) shows that vigilantism is particularly prevalent in contexts where the means of punishment adopted by the criminal justice system of the state are at significant odds with community notions of how justice should be pursued and punishment meted out (Buur, 2006). This has also been found particularly prominent in poor urban communities in South Africa, where policing is almost non-existent. Under apartheid, many poor black urban and rural communities affected by high levels of crime constructed indigenous systems and methods of policing and punishment, which were swift and often violent (Schubert, 2018). Many of these systems of non-state policing and violent punishment endured after 1994 despite the South African government having adopted a human rights-centered approach to justice and policing. Similarly, in Cape Town (South Africa), the legitimacy of a prominent anti-crime group, People Against Gangsterism and Drugs (PAGAD), was undermined in the communities in which it operated after PAGAD members were implicated in organized crime syndicates and acts of terror (Gottschalk, 2005). There is, nonetheless, growing recognition amongst scholars that subtle and intricate relations between the police and vigilante groups frequently exist (Steinberg, 2008).

Studies have shown that such vigilantism is often driven by the concerns of residents that criminals or insurgent groups are threatening community cohesion, values, and safety (Baker, 2008). In Liberia, for example, field research with militia groups elicited the following response: “The state has failed us; therefore, we’ve taken on the task of defending our community ourselves” (Kantor & Persson, 2010). In addition, in Nigeria, the notorious *Bakassi Boys* vigilante organization reportedly emerged in the context of a predatory state, which is characterized by rampant police corruption and extortion by criminal groups and had the objective of protecting property rights and restoring public safety (Meagher, 2007; Pratten, 2008). Many township communities have lost trust in the criminal justice system, particularly the police and courts. As a result of this, some communities resort to taking the law into their own hand when suspected criminals are apprehended, which often results in the death of such suspects. The following are some of the participants’ responses when asked why some communities are involved in acts of vigilantism: “...As part of our roles, depending on the severity of crime, the community apprehends criminals caught in the act, but if it is a serious one, the police are called to the scene. The challenge is that witnesses are not willing to testify in court for fear of victimisation.” “...that is the reason why the community ends up taking the law into their own hands. “...this leads others to take the law into their own hands [since] they believe that the justice system is failing the community

Community members are more likely to take the law into their own hands when they do not trust the police (Mabasa, 2012). In basic terms, police legitimacy encompasses a state of affairs where residents trust the police and generally consent to the various actions undertaken by policing bodies, even if such actions may curtail specific freedoms and rights to promote public order and peace (Jones, 2020). Equal distribution of policing resources towards poorer communities has the potential to reduce social disorder, increase the adoption of non-violent crime prevention norms, and promote social cohesion in lower socioeconomic areas (Braga, Welsh & Schnell, 2015).

Implementation of partnership policing

Implementation of effective partnership policing requires good leadership, proper planning, resources, and political will to implement existing policies and guidelines (Leishman, Loveday & Savage, 2000). Inefficient partnership caused by hindrances identified in this paper has been found to be a major contributing factor in the rising crime levels in Gauteng townships, in South Africa (Hills, 2011; Faull, 2016). The major concern is political interference in policing matters. This included the politicization of CPF appointments, delays in implementing community safety strategies, and undue influence over policing priorities. Political interference and the marginalization of local voices in decision-making processes further weaken these forums, creating a disconnect between law enforcement strategies and community safety needs. Policy Framework and Guidelines for Community Policing and other policies are good tools to assist partnership policing role players in South Africa to ensure the successful implementation of partnership policing. Greene (2004) argues that effective partnership policing implementation is an answer to today’s challenges of high crime rates and can also assist in regaining public confidence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The focus group interviews reflect that while the idea of partnership policing is widely supported in principle, its practical implementation in Gauteng townships is constrained by deep-seated distrust, lack of coordination, and systemic inefficiencies. Overcoming these hindrances requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders, guided by transparent communication, equitable resource allocation, and genuine community participation. Based on the findings in this research, a paradigm shift and culture change are required. This will create a conducive environment for effective partnership policing at the local level. In addition, a working relationship between role players should be fostered. As indicated in this research, communities are the ‘eyes and ears’ of the police, as they often know who the perpetrators of crime in the community are. However, these communities do not offer information to the police due to safety concerns and fear of victimization. Previously disadvantaged communities should be provided with adequate resources to equip the police to do their work. Currently, it is common in most townships for victims of crime to be turned away and told that the police are unable to assist these victims because there are no vehicles or manpower to attend to these reported crimes. This leads to some communities resorting to taking the law into their own hands, resulting in unnecessary loss of lives. All role players' training for partnership policing should be prioritized. This will only be realized when the government has the political will to ensure that the right, well-resourced personnel are dispatched to these areas with high crime rates. Proper audits should be conducted in all policing areas to ensure accountability from all role players, as poorly resourced stations cannot address community needs.

The building of robust and mutually beneficial working relationships and partnerships between the police and other relevant groups at the community or neighbourhood level to “bolster local community social processes that mediate the adverse effects of structural constraints (e.g., poverty) on crime, disorder, and analogous outcomes” is required (Reisig, 2010). This will potentially result in effective partnership policing at the local level. Studies have shown that

COP can contribute to increased police legitimacy, reduced fear of crime amongst the public, and improved adherence to the law in targeted areas (Gill, Weisburd, Telep, Vitter & Bennett, 2014). A multi-stakeholder approach or collaboration has proven to be an effective way of addressing community concerns with regard to crime. Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach that includes trust-building, sustained community engagement, institutional reform, and the depoliticization of safety structures to foster an inclusive and effective partnership policing framework. The spectre of crime and the associated socioeconomic effects it has on communities continues to be a major challenge in South Africa. There is a need to find the hard truths about the high crime rates, especially in the townships. Quarterly reports by Stats SA show a continuous upward trend. This ever-increasing number of crimes is a huge concern, especially as it can spiral out of control, where communities will have no option but to devise means to protect themselves and their livelihoods. We continuously see on social media where communities take the law into their hands in instances where suspected criminals are apprehended, assaulted, and often brutally murdered. Communities often bemoan the fact that police are not responsive to reports of crime and are not visible, resulting in communities policing themselves. This begs the question of whether the police can provide services to communities in South Africa. In this research, I argue that there should be greater collaboration between communities and law enforcement officers at the local level, where the current crime situation and possible solutions are jointly addressed.

This paper attained its objective of answering the questions indicated in the introduction. Further research is necessary to identify other factors contributing to rising crime levels, particularly in South African townships. I conclude that a radical program of action that will bring change and public confidence to the criminal justice system is a priority. Transformation is not only a fundamental obligation enshrined in our country's Constitution but also an imperative to ensure all citizens' safety and security. The inability of law-enforcement agencies to ensure public safety and security has potentially resulted in citizens taking the law into their own hands, resulting in anarchy and unnecessary loss of lives in most instances. There is a constitutional obligation for the criminal justice system to be held accountable for the safety and security of all its citizens (South Africa, 1996). Moreover, Chapter 12 of the National Development Plan 2030 comprehensively outlines measures to ensure all citizens' safety. Therefore, there is a need to revisit the NDP and develop measures to correct what went wrong. The police dare not fail the country's citizens by neglecting the fundamental human right to life enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

Conflict of interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgement

This research was supported by the Unisa Research Ethics Committee.

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