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Reimagining Evidence-based Policing through CIMAC as a Knowledge System in the South African Police Service

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Abstract: Evidence-based policing (EBP) is increasingly promoted as a means of improving police effectiveness through the systematic use of research, data and analysis. Limited attention has, however, been paid to the institutional and epistemic processes through which policing knowledge is produced, interpreted and operationalised. This article examines the Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre (CIMAC) of the South African Police Service (SAPS) as a station-level policing knowledge system underpinning evidence-based policing. Using a qualitative interpretive research design, the study draws on in-depth interviews with SAPS officials, crime analysts, investigators and managers at the station, provincial and national levels, supplemented by documentary analysis and international comparative perspectives. The findings indicate that CIMAC plays a critical epistemic role in crime pattern identification, analytical sense-making, decision support and organisational learning. Its contribution is significantly constrained, however, by the institutional marginalisation of analytical roles, role dilution, weak professionalisation, inadequate resources and the inconsistent utilisation of analytical outputs. The argument put forward, is that evidence-based policing should be understood not merely as a technical intervention, but also as an institutionally embedded knowledge practice shaped by governance arrangements, organisational culture and epistemic authority. Reimagining CIMAC as a protected, professionalised and integrated knowledge system is essential for strengthening policing effectiveness, accountability and shared development in South Africa.

Keywords: CIMAC; Crime analysis; Evidence-based policing; Governance; Policing knowledge; South Africa

Introduction

South Africa continues to experience exceptionally high levels of crime, exceeding international averages and yielding profound social and economic consequences. The National Development Plan (NDP) explicitly acknowledges that persistent contact and property crime undermine social cohesion, restrict economic participation and compromise citizens' ability to pursue both personal and collective development goals (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2012:355-356). High crime levels have also been identified as a major impediment to national development, contributing to fear, trauma, financial loss, and long-term psychological and physical harm among individuals and communities alike (Kruger, Lancaster, Landman, Liebermann, Louw & Robertshaw, 2016:6). Addressing such complex and persistent crime patterns requires integrated, analytically informed policing strategies. Effective responses to violent and serious crime must account for both structural sources of criminality, and specific situational and contextual factors (Adams, Caddell & Krutsinger, 2012:2; Weisburd, Telep & Braga, 2015a:3–5). Within policing organisations, this necessitates coordinated leadership, the systematic identification of crime patterns, trend analysis, and the strategic use of crime intelligence to guide operational and strategic decision making (Taylor, Kowalyk & Boba, 2016:154). Crime control is most effective when preceded by structured, systematic and analytical processes capable of producing timely, relevant and actionable information about crime patterns, trends and relationships (Hill & Paynich, 2012:8; Lum, Koper & Telep, 2011:6-8). Crime analysis plays a critical role in

supporting operational planning, resource deployment, investigative prioritisation and preventive strategies, by transforming raw crime data into meaningful insights for police practitioners (Brown, 2012:44; Piza & Welsh, 2022:1-3; Santos, 2014:147).

Research underscores the importance of integrating analytical outputs into policing decision making, showing that evidence-based policing (EBP) is more effective when research, data and operational practice are systematically aligned (Lum, Telep, Koper & Grieco, 2012:2-5; Piza & Welsh, 2022:1-3). Some categories of policing information require only storage and retrieval, whereas others demand sophisticated processes of aggregation, correlation, interpretation and contextualisation, before they can inform effective decision making (Cordner & Scarborough, 2010:329; Sheptycki, 2017:25-27). Crime analysis therefore constitutes a central knowledge-producing activity within contemporary policing institutions. Historically, crime analysis units were established within the former South African Police as early as the 1960s, primarily to identify offenders' modus operandi and uncover recurring patterns of criminal behaviour (Adams et al., 2012:2). Understanding modus operandi remains a critical analytical tool for identifying crime concentrations and offender–crime relationships within specific geographic contexts (Fisher & Fisher, 2012:7-28; Gilbert, 2010:23-36). In the contemporary South African Police Service (SAPS) environment, this analytical function is institutionally located within the Crime Information Management and Analysis Centre (CIMAC), particularly at the station level.

Although crime analysis does not replace investigative skills or fieldwork, it functions as a fundamental support mechanism for crime suppression, prevention, suspect apprehension and property recovery (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769; Hill & Paynich, 2012:8). Despite the formal institutionalisation of CIMAC, public perceptions persist that the SAPS has struggled to fulfil its constitutional mandate to prevent, combat and investigate crime effectively, in addition to protecting citizens and their property. Internally, challenges related to analytical and role clarity, governance and the use of crime analysis products continue to undermine the realisation of EBP in practice (Buthelezi, 2024:365-368; Faull, 2012:1-2; Marks & Wood, 2010:312-313; Newham & Faull, 2012:8-9; Newham & Rappert, 2018:4-6; SAPS, 2017:6-8; Tankebe, 2010:297-299; Tshishonga, 2022:120-125). This aligns with global evidence indicating that organisational, cultural and structural constraints frequently limit the effective implementation of EBP within police institutions (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4).

This article investigates CIMAC not merely as an operational or administrative support structure, but as a policing knowledge system – a site where crime data are transformed into organisational knowledge that shapes policing priorities, strategies and actions. In doing so, the article contributes to criminological and policing scholarship by reframing EBP as a form of institutional knowledge governance, rather than a technical toolkit. By examining how CIMAC produces, mediates and applies policing knowledge, and identifying the institutional conditions that enable or constrain its effectiveness, the article contributes to a reimagining of EBP as an epistemic and governance project which is essential for accountable policing and mutual development in South Africa. Beyond the persistence of high crime rates, a central challenge lies in the complexity of contemporary crime patterns which are shaped by structural, situational and contextual dynamics. In the absence of systematic analytical processes, policing responses tend to default to reactive, intuition-driven approaches, thereby limiting their efficacy.

The research further shows that reactive policing approaches are generally less effective than proactive, data-driven strategies grounded in systematic analysis and evaluation (Weisburd et al., 2015:3-5). EBP therefore emerges not merely as a technical enhancement, but as a necessary epistemic shift towards analytically informed decision making, capable of addressing complex crime environments. To advance this argument, the researchers have developed a conceptual framework that contrasts the current marginal positioning of crime analysis within the SAPS with a reimagined model, in which CIMAC functions as a foundational knowledge system. The framework illustrates a shift from an inverted organisational configuration (where analytical knowledge is institutionally constrained) to an integrated model (in which knowledge governance underpins policing effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy). This framework guides both the analysis and interpretation of the empirical findings presented in the current study.

Literature Review

This section reviews the theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to crime analysis, EBP and knowledge governance. It situates the study within broader criminological and organisational debates, with particular attention to how knowledge is produced, interpreted and utilised within policing institutions. The review begins with an examination of EBP and its evolution toward a knowledge governance perspective, before considering the criminological, organisational and epistemic foundations of analytical policing.

From Evidence-based Policing to Knowledge Governance

EBP has emerged as a dominant paradigm within contemporary policing, advocating the systematic use of research evidence, data and analysis to inform policing practices and strategies (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Sherman, 1998:1-3; Weisburd et al., 2015:3-5). At its core, EBP is premised on the principle that policing interventions should be guided by the best available scientific knowledge regarding "what works" in reducing crime and enhancing public safety (Sherman, 1998:2). Emerging research highlights that evidence is socially constructed, organisationally mediated and often contested, rather than automatically translated into practice (Betts, 2021:120-123; Boulton, Phythian, Kirby & Dawson, 2021:1292-1294; Fielding, Bullock & Holdaway, 2020:5-8). Emerging perspectives further suggest that evidence does not automatically translate into practice, but must be actively produced, interpreted and operationalised within organisational contexts (Nutley, Walter & Davies, 2007:40-45; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). The integration of research into policing requires institutional mechanisms that facilitate the transfer of knowledge, align research with operational needs and embed analytical practices within routine policing functions (Lum et al., 2012:2-5). These processes highlight that EBP is not merely a technical approach but a form of knowledge governance, in which organisational structures, authority relations and professional norms determine how evidence is both valued and applied. Conceptualising EBP as knowledge governance aligns with broader governance and institutional theory, which emphasises that knowledge utilisation is shaped by organisational power, culture and decision-making structures, rather than purely technical considerations (Best & Holmes, 2010:145-147; Head, 2010:79-81; Sanderson, 2009:700-702). Understanding EBP as knowledge governance allows for a more nuanced analysis of its uneven implementation across policing contexts. It shifts attention away from data availability and analytical tools toward the institutional conditions that enable or constrain the effective use of knowledge. From this perspective, crime analysis units emerge as critical organisational sites where data are transformed into actionable knowledge, and where the broader aspirations of EBP are either realised or undermined (Ratcliffe, 2008:85-87; Ratcliffe, 2016:1518; Santos, 2014:147).

Criminological Foundations of Analytical Policing

The importance of crime analysis within policing is grounded in foundational criminological theories that conceptualise crime as patterned, situational and responsive to intervention. Routine activity theory, for instance, posits that crime occurs when three elements converge in space and time: a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of capable guardianship (Cohen & Felson, 1979:588-590). This perspective has been consistently supported in contemporary criminological research, which demonstrates that crime is shaped by routine activity patterns and environmental opportunities, reinforcing its applicability to crime analysis and prevention (Johnson & Nikolovska, 2022:5-7).

Crime is spatially and temporally concentrated, and is strongly shaped by routine activities and environmental opportunities, rendering crime patterns both predictable and responsive to analytical intervention (Jones & Pridemore, 2018:3-5; Thomas, Jeong & Wolff, 2025:860-862). Andresen and Hodgkinson (2018:12-15) provide empirical support for routine activity theory, demonstrating its continued relevance in explaining spatial and temporal variations in crime within contemporary policing contexts. This perspective redirects analytical attention toward the spatial and temporal dynamics of crime, highlighting the importance of identifying concentrations and recurring patterns of offending.

Similarly, rational choice theory conceptualises criminal behaviour as a purposive decision-making process in which offenders weigh risks, rewards and opportunities (Andresen & Hodgkinson, 2018:12-15; Cornish & Clarke, 1986:1-5). From this standpoint, crime prevention can be achieved through interventions that modify situational conditions and elevate perceived risks for potential perpetrators. Crime analysis plays a central role in informing such strategies by identifying high-risk locations, temporal patterns and behavioural trends (Clarke & Eck, 2005:15-18). Rational choice perspectives remain influential in contemporary crime prevention, particularly in understanding offender responses to situational interventions (Piquero, Welsh & Farrington, 2019:52-55).

Situational crime prevention reinforces the enduring relevance of these theoretical approaches by emphasising the role of environmental and opportunity-reducing measures in mitigating crime (Clarke, 2012:12-16; Wortley & Mazerolle, 2013:3-6). In parallel, problem-oriented policing (POP) underscores the centrality of systematic analysis by advocating thorough problem diagnosis as a prerequisite for effective intervention (Braga & Weisburd, 2010:140-142; Goldstein, 1979:236-238). Rather than focusing on isolated incidents, POP prioritises the identification of underlying crime patterns and the development of tailored, context-specific responses. Evaluations of POP consistently demonstrate its effectiveness when grounded in rigorous analysis and targeted interventions (Braga & Weisburd, 2015:134-137; Weisburd, Telep & Braga, 2025b:152-155).

Within this framework, crime analysis serves as a critical diagnostic mechanism, enabling policing organisations to transition from reactive responses to proactive, problem-focused strategies (Eck & Spelman, 1987:15-20; Santos, 2014:149). As empirical evidence highlights, systematic problem diagnosis is fundamental to effective policing and sustainable crime reduction (Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18). These perspectives are complemented by environmental criminology, which emphasises the importance of spatial analysis, crime mapping and hotspot identification in understanding and preventing crime (Boba, 2009:120-124; Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995:7-10). Consistent empirical findings indicate that hotspot policing and spatial analysis are among the most effective strategies for reducing crime in highly concentrated areas (Braga, Papachristos & Hureau, 2014:651-653; Weisburd, 2015:133-136). Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that effective policing depends not only on enforcement capacity, but also on the systematic production, interpretation and application of knowledge concerning crime patterns and dynamics, thereby positioning crime analysis as both a theoretical and an operational imperative in contemporary policing, rather than merely a technical support function.

Policing as a Knowledge System

Contemporary policing can increasingly be conceptualised as a knowledge-intensive institutional system in which information processing, analysis and interpretation play a central role in terms of organisational effectiveness (Afzal & Panagiotopoulos, 2025:412-415; Manning, 2008:23-25; Ratcliffe, 2008:85-87). Policing knowledge systems encompass the structures, processes and actors that transform raw data into actionable insights, to guide decision making. In this framework, knowledge is not simply accumulated but actively constructed, mediated and governed through organisational processes, technological systems and professional practices (Adams, Clough & FitzGerald, 2018:10-12; Ericson & Haggerty, 1997:83-85; Sheptycki, 2017:25-27). Within such systems, crime analysis plays a pivotal role, serving as the mechanism by which crime data are organised, interpreted and translated into operational strategies. Crime analysis provides a structured process for identifying patterns, trends and relationships in crime data, enabling police organisations to allocate resources more effectively, prioritise interventions and evaluate outcomes (Ratcliffe, 2008:86-88; Santos, 2014:147). As Santos (2014:149) argues, crime analysis is not a crime reduction strategy but a critical component of effective policing approaches, providing the diagnostic foundation for targeted interventions. This diagnostic function aligns with broader EBP literature, which emphasises that analytical capacity is essential for translating data into actionable knowledge, and informing strategic and operational policing decisions (Lum et al., 2012:2-5; Weisburd et al., 2015:3-5).

Conceptualising policing as a knowledge system highlights the importance of information flows, organisational learning and institutional memory, in shaping decision making and sustaining effective policing practice (Afzal & Panagiotopoulos, 2025:412415; Argyris & Schön, 1996:16-18; Nonaka, 1994:20-22). Knowledge must not only be produced but also circulated, validated and embedded in decision-making processes. Where these processes are weak or fragmented, policing organisations risk reverting to reactive and intuition-based practices that undermine evidence-based approaches (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). Such conditions often reflect organisational barriers, including the weak integration of analytical units, limited institutional support and inadequate knowledge transfer mechanisms, all of which constrain the effectiveness of crime analysis within policing systems (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Ratcliffe, 2008:90-92).

Epistemic Authority and Analytical Marginalisation

A central challenge in the institutionalisation of crime analysis lies in the question of epistemic authority, that is, to what extent knowledge producers are recognised as credible and legitimate sources of expertise (Foucault, 1980:131-133; Fricker, 2007:1-3). Epistemic authority refers to the capacity of individuals or units to have their knowledge accepted as valid, and to influence decisions based on that knowledge (Fricker, 2007:1-3). In organisational contexts, epistemic authority is closely tied to power, professional legitimacy and institutional recognition, which together shape whose knowledge counts and how it is utilised (Abbott, 1988:59-62; Fricker, 2007:1-3).

In policing organisations, crime analysts often occupy ambiguous positions in which their outputs are relied on, yet their professional status is uncertain (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Ratcliffe, 2008:90-92). This ambiguity undermines the translation of analytical knowledge into operational action. When analysts lack formal authority or are excluded from decision making their contributions may be undervalued or ignored, thus limiting the effectiveness of EBP. Empirical research consistently shows that analysts are frequently marginalised in organisational hierarchies and often excluded from strategic decision-making forums, despite producing critical knowledge products (Lum at al., 2012:3-5; Taylor, Kowalyk & Boba, 2007:156-158). Policing and intelligence institutions face challenges in

maintaining their credibility as authoritative sources of knowledge, especially when trust, legitimacy and organisational stability are under strain (Innes, 2003:12-15; Sheptycki, 2017:27-29). Strengthening epistemic authority therefore requires more than technical capacity – it demands institutional recognition, professionalisation and the integration of analytical expertise into governance structures (Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). From a knowledge governance perspective, enhancing epistemic authority also entails embedding analysts within organisational decision-making processes, formalising their roles, and ensuring that analytical outputs are systematically incorporated into operational and strategic planning (Boba, 2009:198-201; Lum et al., 2011:6-8).

Organisational Conditions and Knowledge Utilisation

The use of analytical knowledge within policing organisations is shaped by organisational culture, leadership practices and broader institutional dynamics (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). Resistance to EBP is frequently rooted not in deficiencies in the quality of evidence, but in organisational factors such as cynicism toward change, limited supervisory support and perceptions of weak organisational justice (Rosenbaum, 2010:139-141; Telep & Lum, 2014:15-18). Implementation-related research consistently highlights these barriers, emphasising that the successful adoption of evidence-based practices depends on leadership commitment, organisational readiness and supportive institutional climates (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005:6-8; Nutley et al., 2007:40-45).

Several empirical studies further underscore the importance of integrating analytical outputs into policing decision-making processes, demonstrating that EBP enhances effectiveness when research, data and operational practice are systematically aligned (Fixsen et al., 2005:6-8; Lum et al., 2012:2-5; Piza & Welsh, 2022:1-3). Policing organisations are, however, often characterised by hierarchical structures and operational cultures that privilege experiential knowledge and intuition (Manning, 2008:23-25; Reiner, 2010:115-118). Such characteristics can constrain the adoption of analytical approaches, particularly where they challenge entrenched practices or existing power relations.

Organisational inertia further reinforces resistance to innovation, as established routines and practices tend to persist and reproduce over time (Dong, 2023:4-6; March & Olsen, 1989:34-36). This inertia limits organisational adaptability by embedding patterns of behaviour that are resistant to change. Additionally, police occupational culture and informal practices frequently prioritise experiential over analytical or research-based knowledge, thereby restricting the uptake of crime analysis and evidence-based approaches in decision-making processes (Kalyal, 2020:1153-1155; Kuen, Lum & Kim, 2023:2-3).

These dynamics indicate that the effectiveness of crime analysis is contingent not only upon analytical capacity but also the organisational context in which it is embedded. In the absence of supportive leadership, clear governance structures and a culture that values evidence, analytical knowledge is unlikely to be systematically integrated into policing practice (Ratcliffe, 2008:90-92; Santos, 2014:147). Moreover, effective integration requires formalised mechanisms for knowledge sharing, feedback and evaluation, to ensure that analytical outputs are embedded in both operational and strategic decision-making cycles (Boba, 2009:198-201; Lum et al., 2012:3-5).

CIMAC as a Knowledge System: Institutional Mandates, Operational Practice and Knowledge Production

EBP is increasingly understood as a form of institutional knowledge governance, rather than a simple technical exercise of applying research findings to practice (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). Evidence does not circulate automatically within police organisations; rather, it must be produced, validated, interpreted and legitimised within their specific contexts (Bueermann, 2012:15-18; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:530-533; 2024b:138-140; Piza & Welsh, 2022:1-3). This perspective aligns with broader knowledge governance frameworks, which emphasise that the movement of knowledge inside organisations is mediated by institutional structures, power relations and decision-making processes, rather than purely technical systems (Head, 2010:79-81; Sanderson, 2009:700-702).

Crime analysis units thus function as epistemic infrastructures that mediate between raw data and policing action, transforming crime information into analytical products that support organisational decision making (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:138-141; Ratcliffe, 2008:85-87; Sheptycki, 2017:25-27). As Cordner and Scarborough (2010:329) emphasise, crime data only become meaningful once analysed and translated into explanatory and predictive knowledge, positioning crime analysis as a central organisational practice, rather than a peripheral support function. This analytical role lays the foundation for operational and strategic policing decisions, by producing actionable knowledge (Boba, 2009:198-201; Santos, 2014:147).

Within the SAPS, CIMAC performs this function at the station level by converting crime information into insights that shape operational planning, deployment strategies and investigative priorities (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:535; 2024b:141-143; Ratcliffe, 2008:86-88; Santos, 2014:147). Formal SAPS policy frameworks define CIMAC's

objectives in terms of analytical support, quality assurance and decision support, rather than enforcement (SAPS, 2015:5-7; 2018:2-3), reinforcing its role as an enabling structure within EBP. Notably, when these objectives are poorly communicated or misunderstood, crime analysis units are often burdened with unrealistic expectations, including responsibility for crime reduction outcomes (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771). This creates epistemic slippage, where knowledge production is conflated with enforcement performance (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540; 2024b:143-145). Such misalignment between formal mandates and organisational expectations is widely observed in policing contexts, where analytical units are expected to deliver outcomes beyond their epistemic and functional scope (Lum et al., 2012:3-5; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:540–542; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). Understanding CIMAC's role as epistemic rather than operational is therefore crucial for evaluating its effectiveness in a realistic manner. Its contribution lies not in direct crime control, but in its capacity to generate, validate and disseminate knowledge that informs EBP decisions (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:541-543; 2024b:145-147; Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18; Sherman, 1998:1-3).

At the station level, these institutional roles are operationalised through specific analytical practices. Crime analysis as a problem-solving knowledge practice requires systematic data collection, pattern recognition, spatial analysis and interpretive reasoning (Edelstein, Reuland & Strong, 2020:5-7). Analysts function as local crime experts with contextual knowledge of crime dynamics within their jurisdictions (De Kock, 2014:28-32; Maboa & Horne, 2024b:145-147), and perform duties such as ensuring data integrity, conducting hotspot and linkage analyses, producing crime profiles and briefing operational members (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-143). Through these practices, crime analysis units generate actionable policing knowledge that supports both proactive and reactive strategies (Palmiotto, 2013:16-18). In the absence of such analytical mediation, policing organisations tend to revert to reactive and intuition-based approaches which undermine the principles of evidence-based practice (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:530–533; Sekhukhune, 2017:4-6). Consistent with broader crime-analysis scholarship, analysts have been found to play a central role in structuring and interpreting data to inform decision-making, resource-allocation and crime-prevention strategies (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-143; Ratcliffe, 2008:86-88; Santos, 2014:147-149).

The knowledge which CIMAC produces can be analytically categorised into four interrelated dimensions, namely temporal (patterns over time), spatial (geographic concentration), behavioural (modus operandi) and relational (links between offenders, victims and events). Together, these constitute actionable knowledge that enables structured and targeted intervention (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:535-538). These analytical dimensions are well established in crime analysis and environmental criminology literature, which emphasises the integration of temporal, spatial and behavioural data to generate comprehensive intelligence (Boba, 2009:120-124; Brantingham & Brantingham, 1995:7-10). Furthermore, the relational dimension reflects the growing importance of network-based approaches in policing, where connections between offenders, victims and locations are analysed, to identify underlying crime structures and support targeted interventions (Clarke & Eck, 2005:15-18; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540; Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18).

CIMAC, Crime Analysis and Crime Reduction

The relationship between crime analysis and crime reduction is indirect yet fundamentally significant. Crime analysis does not, in itself, produce reductions in crime – rather, it informs and supports the development of strategies that do. As the literature indicates, the effectiveness of crime analysis depends on its integration into policing practices and decision-making processes (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-143; Ratcliffe, 2008:86-88; Santos, 2014:147). This distinction is well established in the EBP literature, which underscores that analytical outputs must be translated into operational strategies to achieve measurable crime-reduction outcomes (Lum et al., 2012:3-5; Maboa & Horne, 2024b:145-147; Weisburd et al., 2015:3-5).

Achieving sustainable reductions in crime is dependent on the targeted application of analysed crime data, rather than on indiscriminate patrols or ad-hoc interventions (Govender, 2011:120-121; Horne, 2009:70-71). Crime analysis facilitates intelligence-led policing by identifying crime concentrations, temporal trends and patterns in offender behaviour (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:142-144; Ratcliffe, 2008:85-87; Taylor, Boba & Egge, 2013:6). In the SAPS, CIMAC is mandated to produce this form of actionable intelligence, including the identification of crime patterns, hotspots and emerging threats that inform proactive policing interventions (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:535-538; 2024b:141-143).

The effectiveness of CIMAC is therefore determined not by the mere production of analytical reports or statistical outputs, but by the extent to which these are integrated into operational decision-making endeavours (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540; Santos, 2014:147). The impact of crime analysis is further enhanced through active collaboration between analysts and operational personnel, enabling analytical insights to shape both daily policing activities and longer-term strategic planning (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145). Where such integration

occurs, empirical studies demonstrate significant improvements in targeted policing interventions, including hotspot policing, problem-oriented policing and focused deterrence strategies (Braga et al., 2014:651-653; Weisburd & Telep, 2014:10-12).

In the context of the SAPS, CIMAC contributes to crime reduction by informing targeted patrol deployment, identifying high-risk locations, supporting investigative processes, enhancing situational awareness, improving resource allocation based on crime patterns, and guiding proactive and intelligence-driven operations (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-147). When these analytical outputs are effectively employed, policing strategies become more coordinated, focused and strategic; conversely, when they are underutilised or disregarded, the impact of crime analysis remains limited. This reinforces the broader argument that the value of crime analysis lies not solely in the generation of knowledge, but also in its institutional uptake, practical application and integration into policing decision making (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:540-542; 2024b:143-145; Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18).

Institutional and Epistemic Constraints on Crime Analysis

Despite their strategic significance, crime analysis units are frequently marginalised within policing organisations. The literature consistently identifies recurring challenges such as role dilution, insufficient resourcing, weak professionalisation and a lack of epistemic authority (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Karn, 2013:12-14; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540). These challenges are not confined to specific institutions, but instead reflect broader organisational and structural limitations which affect the integration of analytical functions within policing systems (Lum et al., 2012:3-5; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:540-542; Ratcliffe, 2008:90-92).

Such constraints are particularly pronounced in Global South policing contexts, where organisational instability, resource limitations and capacity pressures significantly influence both the production and utilisation of knowledge (Faull, 2012:7-9; Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145). Research on policing in these contexts further reveals that institutional fragility, uneven professionalisation and competing operational priorities tend to undermine the development and sustained use of analytical capabilities (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540; Marks & Wood, 2010:312-314; Tankebe, 2010:300-302). In such environments, crime analysis is frequently deprioritised in favour of immediate operational responses, thereby reinforcing reactive policing approaches and constraining the institutionalisation of evidence-based practices (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Maboa & Horne, 2024b:145-147; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:24).

Limited communication between analysts and operational units, coupled with the underutilisation of analytical outputs, contributes significantly to the marginalisation of crime analysis within policing organisations (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145). Understanding these constraints is critical for evaluating CIMAC beyond narrow technical performance indicators. Rather than indicating deficiencies in analytical capacity, these challenges point to deeper issues related to knowledge governance, organisational design and the epistemic status afforded to analytical work within policing institutions (Head, 2010:79-81; Maboa & Horne, 2024a:540-543; Sanderson, 2009:700-702).

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research design, which was deemed appropriate for exploring the institutional meanings, practices and power relations surrounding knowledge production in policing (Creswell, 2013:44-47; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018:10-12). Qualitative approaches are particularly suited to examining complex organisational processes and understanding how knowledge is constructed, interpreted and applied within real-world contexts. The research sought to examine CIMAC not as an abstract structure, but as a lived organisational practice. In the context of this article, the specific objective was to explore how CIMAC functions as a policing knowledge system, with particular emphasis on understanding how analytical knowledge is produced, mediated and utilised within the SAPS, and how institutional conditions shape CIMAC's effectiveness. This focus aligns with the broader aim of contributing to EBP by reframing CIMAC within a knowledge governance perspective.

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with SAPS officials, including CIMAC members, detectives, visible policing commanders, station commanders, provincial officials and national Crime Registrar representatives. Semi-structured interviews are widely recognised as effective in eliciting detailed insights into study participants' experiences and perspectives within organisational settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018:164-166; Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson & Kangasniemi, 2016:2955-2957). In total, 48 participants were interviewed across the station, provincial and national levels. Purposive sampling ensured that those participating possessed relevant experience with crime analysis and EBP (Patton, 2015:264-267). Snowball sampling facilitated access to additional knowledgeable participants, particularly within specialised policing environments where access tends to be restricted (Noy, 2008:330332).

Two international crime analysis practitioners were interviewed to provide comparative insight and assist with analytical triangulation. Documentary sources, including SAPS policies, crime analysis guidelines and strategic directives, supplemented the interview data to allow for methodological triangulation, while enhancing the depth and credibility of the study (Yin, 2018:115-117). The data analysis followed Creswell's spiral, which involves iterative coding, categorisation and interpretation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:150-152). The analysis process also drew on principles of thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, meanings and relationships across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006:79-81; Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:2-4). Trustworthiness was ensured through adherence to credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability strategies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018:121-124), which included prolonged engagement with participants, the triangulation of data sources, and the maintenance of an audit trail of analytical decisions. These criteria align with established qualitative research standards which emphasise transparency, reflexivity and rigour in the interpretation of qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:289-291; Tracy, 2010:839-840). Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the University of South Africa's Ethics Committee (ST159 of 2019), prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity included the removal of identifiable information from the transcripts. Given the sensitive nature of policing environments, particular care was taken to ensure that participation did not expose respondents to organisational or professional risk (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001:93-95).

Results and Discussion

From Evidence-based Policing to Knowledge Governance

Consistent with the literature which conceives of evidence-based policing as a form of knowledge governance (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4), the findings showed strong alignment between CIMAC's formal policy objectives and practitioners' conceptual understandings of its mandate. The participants consistently identified CIMAC's role as providing analytical guidance to management, supplying reliable crime information, supporting investigations, ensuring data quality and informing operational planning. As one participant remarked: "*CIMAC is there to guide management with analysis, to give them reliable information so they can make the right decisions*" (Sample B). Another participant (Sample B) noted: "*Our role is not to fight crime directly, but to give information that helps others to fight crime*". These accounts indicate that, at a formal level, CIMAC is widely understood to be a knowledge-producing and decision-support structure. This reflects institutional alignment with policy frameworks that position CIMAC within an analytical rather than an enforcement role, and confirms findings to the effect that CIMAC produces actionable insights to support decision making and operational planning (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-143). Admittedly, the findings also reveal subtle yet important epistemic tensions. This is reflected in several participants describing crime reduction as a direct objective of CIMAC: "*At the end of the day, CIMAC must reduce crime because that's what we are measured on*" (Sample C). This statement illustrates a conceptual conflation between knowledge production and enforcement outcomes. While such perceptions reflect an outcome-oriented policing culture, they also reveal a misalignment between CIMAC's epistemic function and organisational expectations. Similar tendencies have been identified in which analytical units are evaluated using outcome-driven metrics, leading to misunderstandings of their role(s) (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540).

Criminological Underpinnings of Analytical Policing

Consistent with criminological theories that conceptualise crime as patterned, situational and responsive to intervention (Clarke, 2012:12-16; Cohen & Felson, 1979:588-590), the findings reveal that CIMAC supports a shift from reactive to analytically informed policing. The participants consistently emphasised that, in the absence of analytical input, policing would become reactive, fragmented and poorly targeted. As one participant noted: "*Without CIMAC, policing becomes reactive because you don't have a clear picture of what is happening*" (Sample D). Another participant (Sample C) noted that "*CIMAC gives us the full crime picture, where it is happening, when it is happening, and who is involved*". These accounts illustrate that CIMAC provides a structured understanding of crime dynamics, enabling more focused and strategic policing interventions.

In this sense, CIMAC supports the identification of crime patterns, hotspots and trends, reinforcing the importance of systematic analysis in guiding proactive policing approaches (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-143). The participants' accounts demonstrate that analytical insight is essential for moving beyond reactive responses toward structured POP. One participant offered the following insight: "*If CIMAC identifies a hotspot, we can deploy resources properly instead of just patrolling randomly*" (Sample D). These findings align with criminological perspectives that emphasise

the role of analysis in identifying spatial, temporal and behavioural patterns of crime, thereby supporting targeted and intelligence-led interventions. Crime analysis therefore functions as a diagnostic mechanism that enables policing entities to anticipate and respond strategically to crime dynamics, rather than reacting to isolated incidents.

Policing as Knowledge System Praxis

Consistent with the literature that conceptualises policing as a knowledge-intensive system (Manning, 2008:23-25; Ratcliffe, 2008:85-87), the findings indicate that SAPS personnel widely recognise CIMAC as a central institutional mechanism for producing and circulating crime-related knowledge at the station level. Across all participant groups, CIMAC was understood primarily in terms of its epistemic functions: analysing crime, interpreting patterns, generating insights and guiding policing decisions. The participants consistently described CIMAC in terms that emphasise its integrative and analytical role. One participant explained: "*CIMAC is the place where all the information comes together and is analysed so that we can understand what is really happening with crime, at the station*" (Sample C). Another participant stated: "*Without direction from CIMAC, you w[ould] be working in darkness*" (Sample D). These accounts illustrate that CIMAC functions as an organisational mechanism for transforming fragmented crime data into structured, actionable knowledge. Such descriptions align with the conceptualisation of CIMAC as a policing knowledge system, whose primary value lies in making crime related information intelligible for operational use. Some participants employed metaphors by naming CIMAC the "*heart*", "*engine*" and "*backbone*" of the station: "*CIMAC is the engine of the station, everything depends on the analysis that comes from there*" (Sample B). These metaphors reflect an intuitive organisational recognition of CIMAC's epistemic centrality. They suggest that CIMAC structures information flows, coordinates analytical processes, and anchors collective sense-making around crime dynamics. This finding supports the argument that CIMAC operates as a knowledge infrastructure base within policing practice. Similar tensions specific to South Africa between analytical centrality and institutional marginalisation have been observed in other Global South policing contexts, where resource constraints, organisational instability and competing operational priorities undermine the institutionalisation of knowledge (Faull, 2012:7-9; Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145).

Epistemic Authority in Relation to Analytical Marginalisation

Consistent with the literature on epistemic authority (Foucault, 1980:131-133; Fricker, 2007:1-3), the findings revealed that crime analysts within CIMAC occupy a marginal position in relation to organisational decision-making structures. This marginalisation reflects the broader dynamics of epistemic authority, where the credibility and influence of knowledge producers are shaped by organisational power relations, rather than by the intrinsic value of their outputs. From a conceptual perspective, these findings illustrate a condition of epistemic marginalisation, in which analytical knowledge is structurally constrained and insufficiently recognised in organisational hierarchies. Weak professionalisation, role dilution, inadequate training and poor recognition collectively undermine analytical authority, along with CIMAC's capacity to function as a stable knowledge system. These constraints also reflect the deeper issue of epistemic injustice in policing institutions. Analytical expertise is not accorded the same legitimacy or authority as operational experience, resulting in a systematic undervaluation of knowledge production. As one participant observed: "*Analysis is important, but it is not always taken seriously when decisions are made*" (Sample B). This statement captures the structural imbalance between knowledge and power in policing organisations. The empirical findings further show that analysts are often excluded from key decision-making forums, which limits their influence despite there being an operational reliance on their outputs (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145).

Knowledge Utilisation within Organisational Contexts

Consistent with literature emphasising the role of organisational conditions in shaping knowledge utilisation (Fixsen et al., 2005:6-8; Lum et al., 2011:6-8), the findings indicate that the effectiveness of CIMAC's analytical outputs depends heavily on institutional support, organisational design and leadership practices. The participants in this study demonstrated a detailed and consistent understanding of CIMAC's station-level duties, which include ensuring data integrity, performing crime pattern and hotspot analyses, conducting linkage and modus operandi analyses, analysing dockets, performing environmental scanning, and briefing operational members and station management (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:141-143). As one participant noted: "*Our job is to analyse everything – the dockets, the patterns, the hotspots – and then brief the members so they know what is happening*" (Sample B). Another emphasised the analytical nature of the role, stating: "*We don't just collect data; we interpret it and try to make sense of what is happening in the station area*" (Sample B).

These accounts illustrate that CIMAC functions as a localised epistemic hub, where analysts transform raw data into situated, context-specific knowledge. The findings confirm that this knowledge operates across multiple dimensions: temporal (when crimes occur), spatial (where crimes are concentrated), behavioural (how crimes are committed) and relational (who is involved). These dimensions constitute actionable policing knowledge that enables structured problem solving, rather than policing which is reactive in nature (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:535-538). The participants consistently acknowledged the importance of these duties: "*Without proper analysis, we cannot plan effectively; everything depends on understanding the patterns*" (Sample C).

Notably, the findings also reveal that the effective execution of analytical functions is highly contingent upon organisational conditions. Analysts frequently reported being diverted from their core roles, as reported by one participant: "*You find that instead of analysing, you are pulled into administrative work or other duties*" (Sample B). Another noted: "*There is not always enough time or resources to do proper analysis, especially with all the extra responsibilities*" (Sample B). These constraints illustrate that while analytical functions are understood, they are not always fully supported institutionally. This reflects a broader condition of organisational misalignment, where the importance of knowledge production is acknowledged, but the conditions required for its effective execution are not consistently provided (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540). An international participant offered a contrasting perspective, emphasising the importance of analysts' proximity to operational environments by stating: "*Analysts need to be close to operations, attending briefings, going out [in]to the field; that's how they understand the reality behind the data*" (Sample F). This highlights that knowledge production is not purely technical but also relational, and embedded in organisational practice. Analytical effectiveness depends on interaction, trust and contextual understanding (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145).

From a conceptual perspective, these findings reinforce the argument that CIMAC operates as a knowledge-producing system, but that its effectiveness depends on institutional conditions. The presence of analytical capability does not automatically translate into effective knowledge utilisation. As one participant observed: "*We can produce good analysis, but if it is not used, then it doesn't make a difference*" (Sample B). This statement captures a key dimension of the study's contribution: the distinction between knowledge production and its utilisation. As the empirical findings show, the limited integration of analytical outputs into decision-making processes contributes to this disconnect (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145). The findings also demonstrate that knowledge production does not automatically translate into practice. Analytical outputs require organisational pathways through which they can be interpreted, verified and acted upon. Where CIMAC products were embedded in planning and briefings, knowledge-informed action was more likely to occur.

From the perspective of the developed conceptual framework, this reinforces the "current state" of an inverted epistemic hierarchy, where knowledge is produced but not fully institutionalised as a governing force. Movement toward the "reimagined state" is observed in contexts where analytical outputs are integrated into planning processes and decision-making structures. These findings confirm that the effectiveness of EBP is not determined solely by analytical capacity, but by organisational design, leadership practices and knowledge governance. Without these supporting conditions, analytical knowledge remains underutilised, thus limiting its potential to shape policing outcomes (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:541-543).

The Relationship between CIMAC, Crime Analysis and Crime Reduction

Consistent with the literature demonstrating that crime analysis indirectly contributes to crime reduction through its integration into decision-making processes (Ratcliffe, 2008:86-88; Santos, 2014:147), the findings indicate that CIMAC plays a critical yet mediated role in influencing policing outcomes. The results show that this contribution is realised through a range of interconnected functions within operational practice, including informing the targeted placement of patrols, identifying high-risk areas, supporting suspect profiling and links between criminal groups, and guiding the prioritisation of investigative resources. In addition, CIMAC enables the evaluation of operational impact and facilitates more effective resource allocation based on analysed crime patterns. Collectively, these functions demonstrate that the value of CIMAC lies not in direct crime reduction, but in its capacity to shape the strategic and operational decisions through which crime reduction is ultimately pursued.

The findings further underscore that the effectiveness of these contributions is not inherent; rather, it depends critically on the extent to which they are actively utilised. Where CIMAC products are operationalised, participants reported more coordinated and strategic policing. As one of them explained: "*When management uses CIMAC reports, operations become focused and we see better coordination*" (Sample C). Conversely, another participant offered a contrasting insight, emphasising that the impact of analytical outputs diminishes when they are ignored or undervalued: "*You can have the best analysis, but if it is not used, it makes no difference*" (Sample B). This highlights

a critical distinction between knowledge production and knowledge utilisation. The presence of analytical capability does not guarantee impact; rather, impact depends on whether analytical outputs are integrated into decision-making processes. The empirical findings further show that limited use of analytical products remains a key constraint within the SAPS, reducing the potential impact of crime analysis on operational outcomes (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145).

An international participant reinforced this insight: "*Even the most advanced analysis is useless if it is not applied in practice*" (Sample F). From a conceptual perspective, these findings illustrate a clear causal chain: analytical knowledge informs decisions; decisions shape actions; actions influence crime outcomes. Crime reduction is thus not a direct product of crime analysis, but an outcome mediated through institutional processes. The following comment demonstrates this: "*CIMAC helps us make better decisions, but the results depend on how those decisions are implemented*" (Sample C). This causal chain underscores the central role of knowledge governance in shaping the translation of analytical insights into operational outcomes. Evaluating CIMAC solely on crime rates effectively collapses the chain between analysis, decision making and action, thereby obscuring its distinct epistemic contribution.

Institutional and Epistemic Constraints Shaping CIMAC Functionality

Despite the widespread recognition of CIMAC's importance, the findings revealed that persistent institutional and epistemic constraints undermine its analytical capacity. The empirical evidence identifies a range of structural and organisational challenges that limit the effective functioning of crime analysis within station environments, including the misallocation of analysts to non-analytical duties; inappropriate personnel placement and transfers; the absence of structured career pathways and retention strategies; inadequate training and professional development; shortages of physical, technological and human resources; and weak managerial understanding of analytical functions (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540). Importantly, these challenges are not experienced as discrete issues, but as interconnected and cumulative conditions that collectively erode analytical effectiveness.

This cumulative effect is reflected in participant accounts that emphasise the instability and misalignment of analytical roles. As one participant noted: "*You cannot expect proper analysis when analysts are doing admin work or are constantly moved around*" (Sample B). Another participant raised a similar concern: "*People are placed in CIMAC without proper training, and then they are expected to produce high-level analysis*" (Sample C). These perspectives highlight that the erosion of analytical capacity extends beyond resource constraints and points to deeper organisational misalignment in how analytical functions are structured and supported. Analysts are frequently positioned in ways that undermine their ability to perform specialist knowledge roles, reinforcing the finding that institutional practices can weaken the integration and effectiveness of analytical work (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:540-542).

The study participants further underscored the absence of professionalisation within the analytical domain. As reflected in one account: "*There is no clear career path for analysts, so people don't stay or develop in this field*" (Sample B). This observation points to a broader institutional failure to recognise, stabilise and invest in analytical expertise within policing structures. The absence of structured career pathways and retention strategies compromises both the continuity and quality of knowledge production, while the empirical findings indicate that weak recognition of analytical expertise contributes to low retention and a diminished professional identity among analysts (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:538-540). Significantly, the participants did not primarily attribute these limitations to technical shortcomings – rather, they consistently framed them as organisational and governance-related challenges, with one participant stating: "*The problem is not the tools or the systems; it is how things are managed and understood*" (Sample B).

This interpretation is supported by international participant perspectives, which situate these challenges within a broader institutional context. As one participant observed: "*Even in resource-constrained environments, crime analysis can work if leadership recognises its value and integrates it properly*" (Sample F). This view highlights that analytical effectiveness is contingent not only on the availability of resources but also on leadership commitment, organisational design, and the recognition of analytical knowledge as a legitimate and integral component of policing practice. Supporting this, the evidence indicates that the limited integration of analytical units into decision-making structures constrains the impact of crime analysis, regardless of technical capability (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145). Collectively, these findings underscore that the challenges facing CIMAC are fundamentally rooted in institutional and epistemic conditions that shape how analytical knowledge is produced, positioned and utilised within policing systems.

Conceptual Contribution: CIMAC Knowledge Governance Conceptual Framework

This study advances the CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework, developed by the researchers, that underpins this study. Drawing on the preceding literature study as above, the developed conceptual framework synthesises insights from EBP, criminological theory, organisational analysis and epistemic perspectives, to arrive at an integrated understanding of crime analysis within policing institutions. The concept of *epistemic slippage* is introduced here, to describe the misalignment between the intended knowledge-producing role of crime analysis units, and organisational expectations that position them as directly responsible for crime-reduction outcomes. *Epistemic slippage* conflates knowledge production with enforcement performance, leading to unrealistic expectations, distorted evaluation metrics and weakened analytical legitimacy within policing. *Epistemic slippage* reflects broader organisational processes in which the boundaries between knowledge production and operational responsibility become blurred, often resulting in the misattribution of outcomes and the erosion of analytical credibility (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Lum et al., 2011:6-8). This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in resource-constrained and institutionally complex policing environments, where pressure for immediate results might override the proper utilisation of analytical processes and evidence-based approaches (Faull, 2012:7-9; Tankebe, 2010:300-302). Understanding *epistemic slippage* is therefore critical for distinguishing between the knowledge-producing function of CIMAC and the operational functions of policing units, ensuring that analytical outputs are evaluated in relation to their intended epistemic role, rather than misaligned performance expectations (Ratcliffe, 2008:90-92; Santos, 2014:147-149).

Towards a Conceptual Framework for CIMAC

The literature demonstrates that crime analysis is theoretically grounded, operationally necessary and institutionally mediated (Head, 2010:79-81; Sanderson, 2009:700-702). Existing scholarship has, however, not sufficiently conceptualised how these dimensions interact within station-level policing environments, particularly in Global South contexts. While criminological theory explains the dynamics of crime and organisational research highlights institutional constraints, a gap remains in our understanding of how knowledge production, governance structures and operational decision making intersect within everyday policing practice (Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4). To address this gap, the current article proposes a conceptual framework that reconceptualises CIMAC as a foundational policing knowledge system. The framework integrates criminological theory, organisational analysis and the concept of epistemic authority, to explain how knowledge production, institutional conditions and policing outcomes are interconnected (Head, 2010:79-81; Lum et al., 2012:3-5). The developed conceptual framework provides a structured lens through which the institutional positioning of CIMAC, the production and utilisation of analytical knowledge, and the relationship between evidence and policing outcomes can be systematically understood and evaluated. By framing CIMAC within a knowledge governance perspective, the framework shifts the analytical focus from technical capacity to institutional conditions, highlighting how organisational structures, leadership practices and epistemic recognition shape the effectiveness of crime analysis (Sanderson, 2009:700-702; Weisburd et al., 2015:3-5). The CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework framework (Figure 1), designed to bridge the gap between theoretical foundations and empirical realities, offers a structured approach to examining the role, positioning and impact of CIMAC. The framework was developed in response to identified limitations in existing scholarship, particularly the insufficient integration of knowledge production, institutional conditions and policing outcomes within a unified analytical model.

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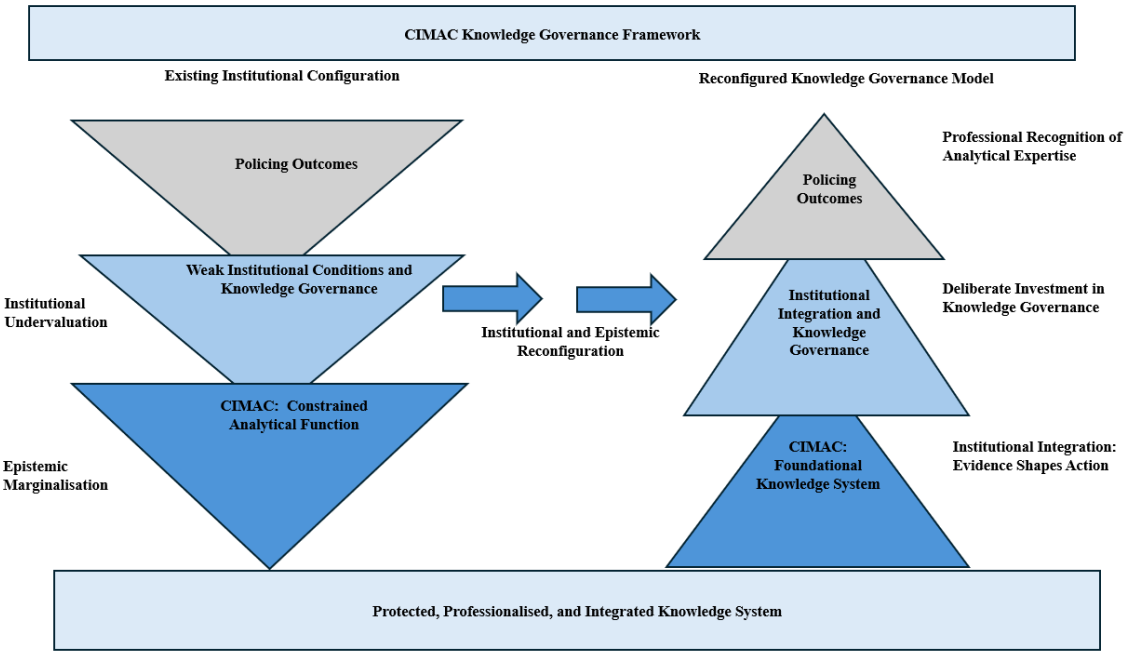


Figure 1: CIMAC Knowledge Governance Conceptual Framework
(Source: Developed by the researchers)

The CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework reinterprets CIMAC's institutional positioning within the SAPS as a function of knowledge governance. The framework contrasts two distinct organisational configurations: a current state (characterised by epistemic marginalisation) and a reimagined future state (in which CIMAC operates as a foundational knowledge system underpinning policing effectiveness) (Head, 2010:79-81; Weisburd & Majmundar, 2018:2-4).

The Current State: An Inverted Epistemic Hierarchy

The first dimension of the framework represents the current institutional configuration, conceptualised as an inverted epistemic hierarchy. In this model, CIMAC, as the locus of crime analysis, is positioned at the base of the organisational structure, reflecting its marginalised status within formal decision-making processes. While crime analysis is operationally relied on, it remains institutionally undervalued, constrained by limited professional recognition, role dilution and inadequate integration into governance structures (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Ratcliffe, 2008:90–92). Within this configuration, analytical knowledge is produced but not consistently legitimised or systematically applied. The absence of structured pathways through which crime analysis informs decision making, results in a disconnect between knowledge and action. Consequently, policing outcomes such as effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy are weakened – not due to a lack of information, but the insufficient institutionalisation of knowledge (Lum et al., 2012:3-5). This inverted arrangement reflects broader epistemic and organisational constraints identified in the literature, particularly within Global South policing contexts where resource limitations, organisational instability and weak professionalisation undermine the authority and utilisation of analytical expertise (Faull, 2012:7-9; Marks & Wood, 2010:312-314). CIMAC thus occupies a paradoxical position: epistemically central in practice, yet institutionally peripheral in structure.

The Reimagined Future State: CIMAC as a Foundational Knowledge System

The second dimension of the framework presents a reimagined institutional configuration in which CIMAC is repositioned as the foundation of policing practice. In contrast to the inverted model, this configuration reflects a vertical epistemic hierarchy, in which crime analysis forms the basis on which organisational processes and operational decisions are constructed. In this framework, the effectiveness of policing is explicitly linked to the quality, integration and utilisation of analytical knowledge. CIMAC is not treated as a support function, but as a core knowledge system embedded in organisational governance structures. This requires three interrelated institutional

shifts. First, the professional recognition of analytical expertise ensures that crime analysts are acknowledged as specialists with distinct epistemic authority. This includes the development of structured career paths, training systems and role protections that safeguard analytical functions (Abbott, 1988:59-62). Second, deliberate investment in knowledge governance establishes the institutional mechanisms through which knowledge is produced, validated, disseminated and applied. This includes the formal integration of CIMAC outputs into planning processes, performance management systems and decision-making forums (Lum et al., 2011:6-8; Sanderson, 2009:700-702). Third, institutional integration ensures that analytical knowledge is systematically embedded in operational practice. In this configuration, evidence does not remain advisory or peripheral; rather, it actively shapes policing strategies, deployment decisions and investigative priorities (Ratcliffe, 2016:15-18; Santos, 2014:147). Together, these conditions enable a transformation in which EBP is realised not only through the availability of data or analytical tools, but through the institutionalisation of knowledge as a governing principle of policing.

From Marginalisation to Foundation: A Knowledge Governance Transition

The transition from the current to the reimagined state represents a shift from a technical conception of EBP toward an institutional knowledge governance model. In the former, emphasis is placed primarily on data systems, analytical tools and outputs. In the latter, the focus shifts to the conditions under which knowledge is recognised, trusted and operationalised in the organisation (Head, 2010:79-81; Weisburd et al., 2015:3-5). This transition is not merely structural, but epistemic. It requires a reconfiguration of how knowledge is valued within policing institutions, moving from implicit reliance to explicit recognition and formal integration. Leadership plays a critical role in this process, as organisational leaders determine whether analytical knowledge is legitimised, incorporated into decision-making processes and translated into action (Lum et al., 2011:6-8). Importantly, the framework highlights that the limitations of CIMAC are not primarily technical in nature, but institutional. The challenges facing crime analysis units stem from governance failures, weak professionalisation and insufficient epistemic recognition, rather than deficiencies in analytical capability (Belur & Johnson, 2018:769-771; Ratcliffe, 2008:90-92).

Analytical Utility of the Framework

The CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework developed in this study serves both a conceptual and an analytical function. Conceptually, it contributes to debates on EBP by positioning knowledge governance as central to policing effectiveness. Analytically, it provides a lens through which the empirical findings of this study can be interpreted, particularly the tension between CIMAC's operational centrality and its institutional marginalisation. By explicitly modelling the relationship between knowledge, governance and policing outcomes, the framework offers a structured basis for understanding both the constraints and the transformative potential of CIMAC within the SAPS. It further provides a foundation for policy and organisational reform, by identifying the key institutional conditions required to shift from marginal analytical support to a fully integrated knowledge system. Ultimately, reimagining CIMAC as a foundational component of policing represents a necessary step toward achieving sustainable improvements in effectiveness, accountability and legitimacy within the South African policing context.

Operationalising the CIMAC Knowledge Governance Framework

From an analytical perspective, and consistent with the conceptual contribution of this study, the findings demonstrate epistemic slippage, in which the distinction between knowledge production and operational responsibility becomes obscured. Although CIMAC contributes to policing outcomes by enabling informed decision making, it does not directly reduce crime. If this distinction is not maintained, analytical units become burdened with unrealistic expectations, particularly in contexts where performance systems prioritise crime statistics over analytical contributions (Maboa & Horne, 2024a:540-542). As one participant noted: "*CIMAC is judged based on crime stats, but those stats depend on many things, not just the analysis*" (Sample B). This illustrates how evaluative frameworks can obscure CIMAC's epistemic role by relying on inappropriate performance indicators, thereby undervaluing its contribution as a knowledge producer. Empirical evidence further indicates that such misaligned evaluation practices weaken the institutional recognition of crime analysts and limit the effective utilisation of analytical outputs in decision making (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145).

The findings reported on here, point to a broader knowledge governance challenge in which CIMAC's functions are operationally recognised, but not epistemically understood. This misalignment reflects a lack of clarity on how analytical contributions should be evaluated within the policing system. In contrast, the international participants articulated clearer distinctions between analytical and enforcement roles, with one noting: "*Crime analysis is about completing the analysis cycle and providing decision-support products, not about reducing crime directly*" (Sample F). This perspective highlights the importance of institutional clarity in differentiating knowledge production from

operational outcomes, and underscores the role of leadership and organisational design in shaping how analytical work is understood and applied.

The tension between formal policy positioning and practitioner expectations reveals a governance paradox: while CIMAC is formally defined as a decision-support structure, it is frequently held accountable for crime outcomes in practice. This disconnect reflects a failure to translate policy into institutional practice, and is reinforced by the limited integration of analysts into decision-making structures (Maboa & Horne, 2024b:143-145). Within the conceptual framework put forward here, this condition corresponds to the "current state" of an inverted epistemic hierarchy in which knowledge is produced and relied upon, but remains insufficiently recognised and improperly evaluated. As a result, translating analytical outputs into actionable policing strategies is constrained.

From a knowledge governance perspective, these findings underscore the need for clear differentiation between the knowledge-generation, decision-making and enforcement functions. Without such differentiation, analytical units remain situated within a cycle of epistemic ambiguity, where they are simultaneously relied upon and misinterpreted. Movement toward the "reimagined state" identified in the conceptual framework requires the strengthening of epistemic authority, the improvement of institutional clarity and the establishment of evaluation frameworks that reflect CIMAC's role as a knowledge-producing system. This shift entails recognising analytical work as constitutive of policing itself, rather than subordinate to enforcement.

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the need to transition from fragmented approaches toward a coherent knowledge governance framework for EBP within the SAPS. Grounded in empirical insights and informed by the CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework (Figure 1), it is recommended that the SAPS develop and institutionalise clear knowledge governance structures that distinguish between the knowledge-production, decision-making and enforcement functions. In this regard, it is further recommended that performance management systems be revised to ensure that CIMAC is evaluated on the quality, relevance and utilisation of analytical outputs, rather than primarily on crime statistics. Such reforms would reduce epistemic slippage and strengthen alignment between formal policy objectives and organisational practices.

It is also recommended that the SAPS strengthen the systematic application of crime analysis to support proactive policing. Analytical outputs should be consistently utilised to identify crime patterns, hotspots and trends, thereby ensuring that policing interventions are guided by structured problem diagnosis, rather than reactive responses. In support of this, it is recommended that CIMAC be formally recognised as a core institutional knowledge system rather than a peripheral support function. This would require strengthening analytical processes and positioning crime analysis as central to both operational and strategic decision making.

Another recommendation is that the SAPS enhance the epistemic authority of crime analysts by ensuring their meaningful inclusion in operational planning meetings, briefing processes and strategic decision-making forums. Strengthening the institutional standing of analysts would enable analytical knowledge to move beyond an advisory role, to function as an active driver of policing decisions. In tandem, it is recommended that CIMAC outputs be systematically embedded in station-level organisational processes, including operational planning, briefing and debriefing sessions, performance reviews and resource allocation discussions. This would necessitate the development of clear organisational protocols that define how analytical insights should inform operational decisions, as well as the establishment of leadership accountability for engaging with, and responding to, CIMAC-generated knowledge. Without such institutional mechanisms, analytical outputs are likely to remain marginal to operational practice.

It is recommended that the SAPS strengthen the integration of crime analysis into broader crime-reduction strategies, by ensuring that analytical outputs directly inform deployment decisions, investigative priorities and operational planning. Given that crime analysis contributes indirectly to crime reduction, its effectiveness depends on the extent to which it is translated into concrete operational actions. Strengthening the linkages between analysis, decision making and implementation is therefore essential for improving policing outcomes.

Finally, it is recommended that the SAPS address any structural and epistemic constraints affecting CIMAC through a range of targeted interventions. These should include protecting CIMAC personnel from being assigned non-analytical duties, as role dilution undermines analytical effectiveness, and greater investment in analytical capacity through enhanced human resources, technological tools and logistical support. It is also recommended that analyst deployment be aligned with crime patterns, particularly in high-crime areas, and that structured career pathways be established to support professionalisation and retention. Continuous training programmes should be institutionalised to strengthen both technical and analytical competencies, while leadership development initiatives should be

implemented to improve organisational understanding of evidence-based policing and knowledge utilisation. Collectively, these measures are necessary to address organisational misalignment and enable CIMAC to function as a stable, legitimate and effective knowledge system within policing practice.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of CIMAC within the SAPS through the dual lenses of EBP and knowledge governance, and in doing so developed the CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework, to integrate the theoretical, organisational and epistemic dimensions of policing practice. The findings indicate that although crime analysis is widely recognised as essential to contemporary policing, its effectiveness is not determined solely by analytical capability – rather, it is shaped by the institutional conditions under which knowledge is produced, legitimised and utilised.

Consistent with the broader literature on evidence-based policing, CIMAC is formally positioned as a knowledge-producing and decision-support structure. Admittedly, this formal positioning is not consistently reflected in practice. The study identified a persistent misalignment between institutional mandates and organisational expectations, whereby CIMAC is implicitly held accountable for crime-reduction outcomes. This phenomenon, conceptualised as epistemic slippage, reflects a conflation of knowledge production with enforcement performance. Such misalignment distorts evaluation criteria, undermines analytical legitimacy, and limits the effective integration of crime analysis into policing processes.

From a criminological perspective, the findings reaffirm that crime exhibits discernible patterns, is shaped by situational dynamics and is responsive to targeted interventions. Crime analysis is therefore central to enabling proactive and intelligence-led policing. However, as this study has demonstrated, the relationship between crime analysis and crime reduction is indirect, and mediated by organisational processes. CIMAC contributes to policing outcomes by informing decision making, guiding resource allocation and supporting targeted interventions, but these contributions are contingent on the extent to which analytical outputs are embedded within operational practice.

A key contribution of this study lies in reconceptualising CIMAC as a policing knowledge system, thereby shifting the analytical focus from technical outputs to the governance of knowledge itself. Within such a system, analytical knowledge must be systematically produced, circulated, validated and integrated into decision-making structures. As the findings reveal, this process remains constrained by weak epistemic authority, fragmented organisational conditions and limited institutional integration. Crime analysts continue to occupy a marginal position within decision-making hierarchies despite operational reliance on their outputs. This reflects a broader condition of epistemic marginalisation in which knowledge is central to practice, yet peripheral to institutional power.

The CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework developed in this study, provides a structured lens through which these dynamics can be understood. This conceptual framework distinguishes between a current state (characterised by an inverted epistemic hierarchy in which analytical knowledge is undervalued) and a reimagined state (in which CIMAC functions as a foundational knowledge system underpinning policing effectiveness). Moving between these states requires not only structural adjustments, but a fundamental epistemic shift in how knowledge is valued, governed and operationalised within policing institutions.

Importantly, the study highlights that the primary limitations facing CIMAC are institutional rather than technical. Challenges such as role dilution, limited professionalisation, inadequate resourcing and weak integration into decision-making processes reflect systemic shortcomings in knowledge governance. Addressing these challenges requires a strengthening of the epistemic authority of analysts, an improvement of organisational conditions for knowledge utilisation, and the establishment of formal mechanisms to embed analytical outputs into everyday policing practice.

In conclusion, the researchers argue that the future of evidence-based policing within the SAPS is reliant on the successful institutionalisation of knowledge as a central organising principle of policing. The CIMAC knowledge governance conceptual framework offers both a diagnostic and a transformative model for achieving this objective. Repositioning CIMAC as a foundational knowledge system requires a deliberate shift from viewing crime analysis as a peripheral support function, to recognising it as integral to policing itself. Such a shift is essential for ensuring that analytical knowledge meaningfully informs decision making, enhances operational effectiveness, and contributes to sustainable approaches to crime reduction.

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