

CHAPTER 4

REPORTING CRIME TO THE POLICE

Key points

- Car theft was the crime most likely to be reported to the police, with 83% of victims reporting.
- Reporting rates for violent crimes are comparatively low.
- Crop theft and simple theft were the least likely to be reported.
- Having insurance does not appear to be the only motivation for reporting. Factors such as the perceived seriousness of the crime, the experience of violence and access to policing also play a role.
- The perception or experience of police corruption was one of the major reasons given for not reporting crime to the police. The belief that the police would not take the crime seriously, or that goods would not be recovered were also factors affecting reporting.
- For all crimes with the exception of assault, victims who reported to the police were more likely to be dissatisfied than satisfied with the way the police treated them.
- Higher levels of satisfaction with the police among assault victims who reported the crime might be explained by the reportedly high rates of arrest for this crime in Dar es Salaam.
- Victims of burglary were the most likely to be dissatisfied with police, with only 19% saying they were satisfied.
- When explaining the reason for dissatisfaction when reporting crime, the lack of police action and the police not taking the crime seriously were the most common explanations.

Although the general distribution of crime types in official statistics resembles that of the data presented in the city survey, it can be safely assumed that actual crime levels may be higher than police figures suggest, since many incidents are not reported to the authorities. The propensity to report crime is determined by a range of factors and, as such, the accuracy of official crime statistics is, in turn, largely determined by the influence of these factors. Some of the factors affecting reporting are:

- *Public perceptions of police and criminal justice effectiveness:* Reporting is less likely if citizens believe that going to the police will make little difference. Thus, in some – although not all – instances, the extent of reporting to the police provides an indication of the degree of police effectiveness as perceived by the public. Furthermore, the perceptions and experience of how the criminal justice system treats victims from the point of reporting and throughout the court proceedings can influence reporting. In the case of violent crime, this has been found to be quite significant.
- *The accessibility of the police:* The likelihood of reporting is often determined by factors that impact upon the accessibility of the police such as the distance to the nearest police station. Equally, factors that are likely to improve the accessibility of the police – such as telephones or the availability of public transport – may increase the rate of reporting.
- *The perceived seriousness of the crime:* Citizens are unlikely to report those crimes – for example, cases of petty theft or minor assault – which they do not view as serious or even regard as criminal. Influencing factors include the value of goods stolen and the degree of injury and trauma experienced. However, perceptions of the degree of seriousness of any criminal offence are often relative, determined by, among others, the overall level of crime in any area. This means that some crimes, for example housebreaking, which are viewed as serious in areas where they are not common, may be taken less seriously in areas where they are more prevalent.
- *Reporting for insurance claim purposes:* The likelihood that most serious property crimes – for example, car theft, burglary or car-hijacking – will be reported, is increased by the fact that insurance claims require a police case number.
- *Desire for a positive case outcome:* Reporting in the hope that stolen goods will be recovered and/or the offender punished can be a strong motivating factor. Low recovery and conviction rates for crimes such as burglary and ‘simple theft’ suggest that this may often be unrealistic. However, the extent to which this is known is doubtful, particularly when the victim is not insured and recovery is the only option, or where the victim feels a moral obligation to report.
- *Access to alternative justice mechanisms:* If victims believe they can resolve the incident in one way or another with the assistance of family, friends, SunguSungu, victim support agencies, private security, ward counsellors, alternative dispute mechanisms, self-help activities (including vigilantism), they will be less inclined to report it to the police.

- *Fear of the consequences of reporting:* In the case of particular violent crimes, reporting may be undermined when the victim fears the consequences of approaching the police. This applies particularly to cases of domestic violence where the victim may rely on the perpetrator as the breadwinner or fear that the perpetrator will take revenge on them for reporting an incident to the police.
- *Corruption:* High levels of corruption among the police or perceptions of corruption may deter reporting, since the victim may be required to pay for police assistance or, alternatively, the victim may fear that the offender will go unpunished or goods will not be returned as a result of corrupt practices among officers.

Reporting rates

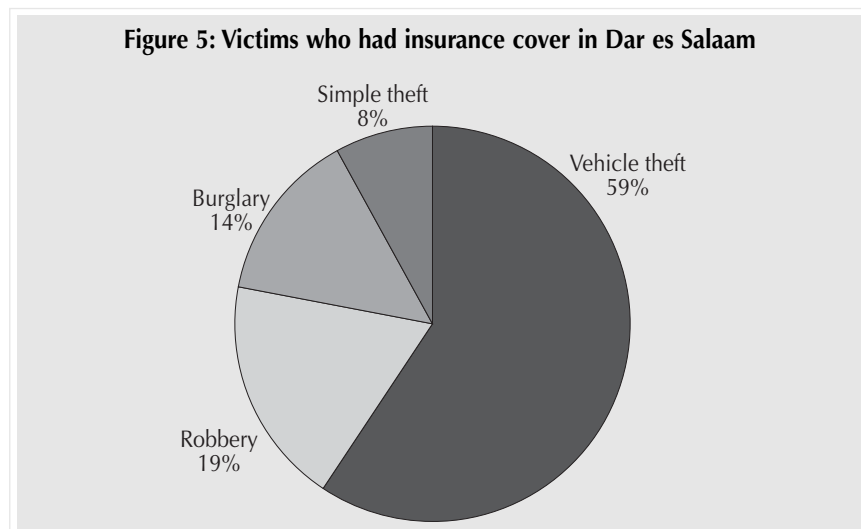
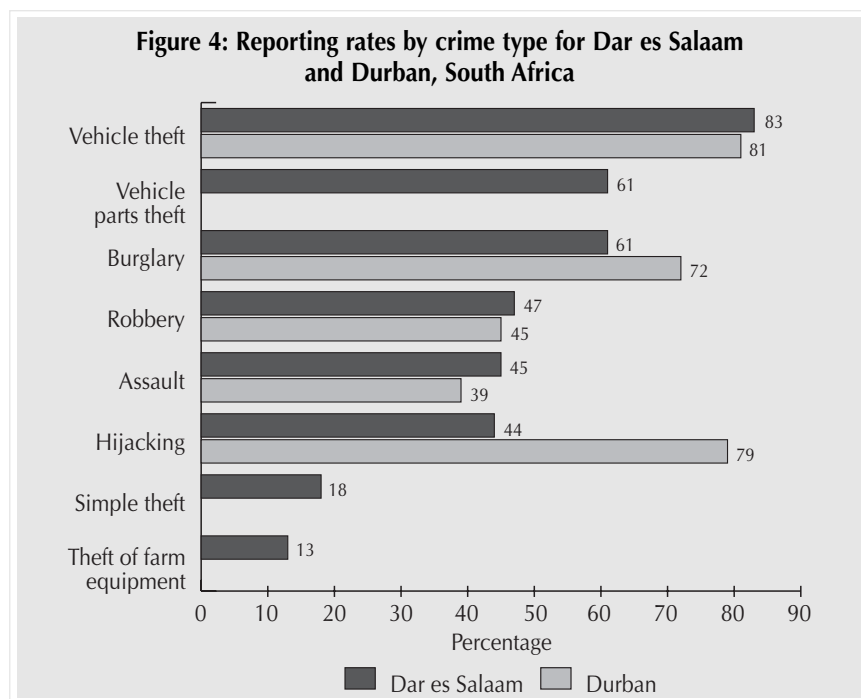
Recognising the limitations of police crime statistics, the survey attempted to determine the propensity of victims to report crimes to the police. For each of the crimes, respondents were asked whether they, or somebody else had reported the most recent incident to the police.

Levels of reporting varied according to crime type. Serious property crimes had a relatively high level of reporting (figure 4). The vast majority of victims of motor vehicle theft reported the crime to the police. Nearly two-thirds of burglary victims and victims of vehicle part theft reported the crime to the police. Just under half of robbery and assault victims reported the offence. For simple theft and farm equipment theft, the reporting rates were low – all less than 20%. The general levels of reporting were not very different from those recorded in the Durban victim survey (figure 4).

The victim survey attempted to ascertain the degree to which the reporting of property crimes such as those outlined above could be linked to insurance coverage (figure 5). In the cases of crimes such as car theft, simple theft, burglary and robbery, the proportion of victims who reported the offence to the police was substantially higher than the percentage who had insurance coverage (figure 5).

These findings provide some evidence that reporting of property-related crimes is not driven primarily by the need to make an insurance claim. Reporting, it seems, may be driven more by the victim’s perception of the seriousness of the crime rather than by an immediate need to replace the lost property.

In order to understand the dynamics of reporting, the survey asked three additional questions in relation to each crime type:



- 1 For those victims of a crime who did not report the crime to the police, the survey asked respondents to provide reasons for not reporting the crime.
- 2 For those victims of a crime who did report the crime to the police, the survey asked if the respondent was satisfied or dissatisfied with the response received.
- 3 As a follow-up to the previous question, the same group of reporting victims were asked to give their reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

The responses provide insight into a number of factors influencing reporting including the respondent's perceptions and experiences of policing.

Question 1 asking why people did not report, was more likely to reveal their negative perceptions of policing. The question is asked of non-reporting victims whose answers would not be based on a specific experience of interaction with the police. However, it is possible that a number of the respondents may have had some previous experience of the police.

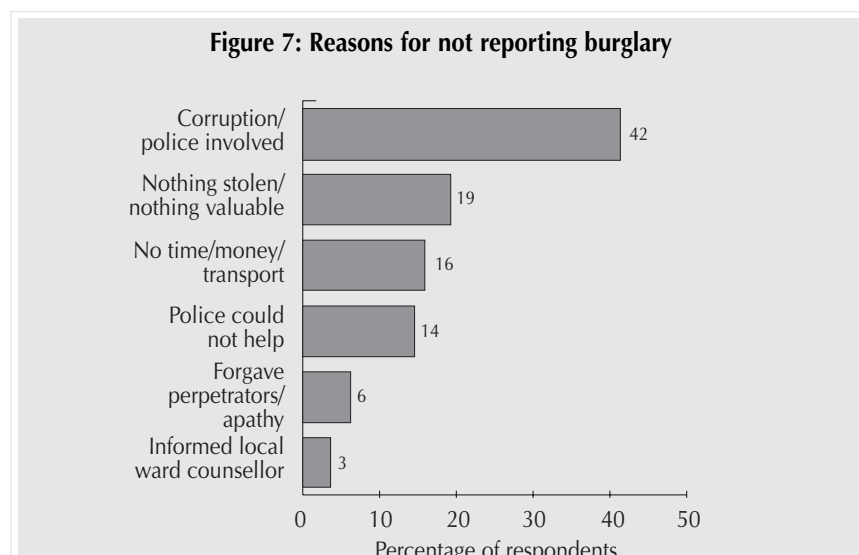
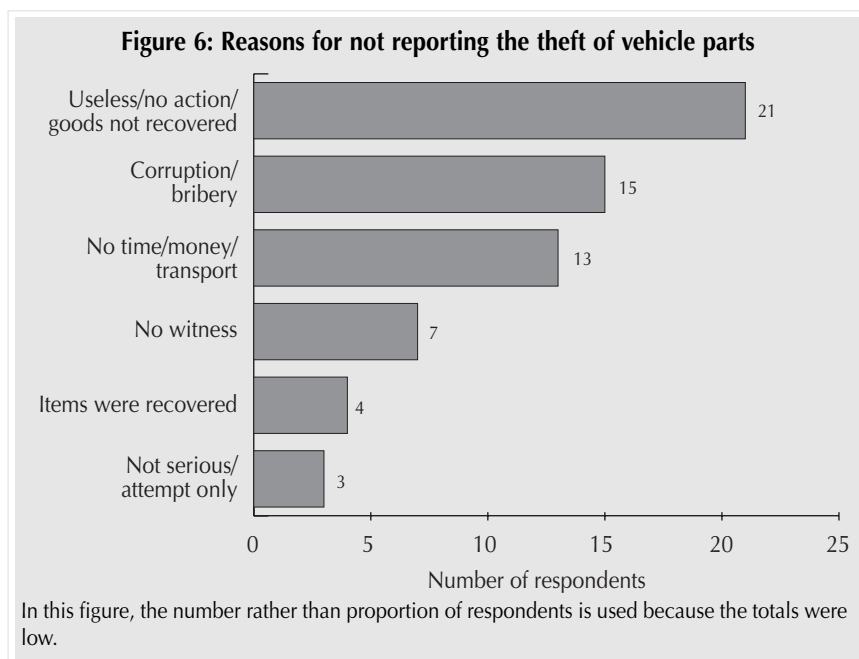
Questions 2 and 3 were asked of those who did actually report crimes and answers are therefore based on real experience and interaction. These responses are therefore more indicative of police performance and levels of service.

Reasons for not reporting

Reasons for not reporting varied according to crime type. However, there was a strong tendency in the overall responses to mention police corruption and, to a lesser extent, that the police consider certain crimes as trivial. For corruption, in particular, the number of victims who gave this as the reason for not reporting was considerably higher in Dar es Salaam than in South African cities.

For victims of vehicle parts theft, the most common reason for not reporting was that it would be a waste of time since it was unlikely that the parts would be recovered (figure 6). The second most common response was that police corruption dissuaded the victim from reporting.

The most common reason given by burglary victims for not reporting the crime was police corruption and bribery – mentioned by 42% of respondents. This was followed by the fact that nothing was stolen or that stolen items had little value (figure 7). As was the case for most of the other crime types, the problem of not having enough money to reach the police station was also mentioned by several respondents.



The lack of time, money or transport was the main reason given by victims of simple theft for not reporting the crime to the police (figure 8). The trends for robbery were similar (figure 9). In both cases, police corruption and the perception that the police do not take these crimes seriously were also noted by many respondents.

Victims of crop theft and livestock theft mentioned the lack of time, money and transport as the primary reasons for not reporting (figure 10).

The trends for assault were quite different from the other crimes. In this case, the most common reason given by victims for not reporting was that the offender was a partner and relative and that there was thus no reason to report the crime (figure 11). As many as 60% of assault victims said this was the case. As discussed later, a large proportion of assaults can be attributed to domestic violence. These findings suggest that violence of this form is often treated as a household or family matter and not a matter for the police. Furthermore, when the offender is a relative or partner, fear of reprisals may also discourage reporting.

Satisfaction among victims who reported crime

Since relatively few victims reported crime, the number of respondents answering the question regarding satisfaction with the police for some crime types was not sufficient for statistical analysis. As a result, the theft of stock, crops and farm equipment, vehicle theft, murder and car-hijacking are excluded here.

For most crimes, with the exception of assault, levels of dissatisfaction with the police were high, ranging from 83% for simple theft, to 73% for vehicle part theft, 66% for robbery and 61% for burglary.

When explaining their dissatisfaction, respondents were most likely to identify the lack of police action and police not taking the crime seriously (with the exception of robbery). In the case of burglary, this was mentioned by 28% of respondents (figure 12). Reasons for satisfaction, not surprisingly, were linked to whether arrests were made. The problem of corruption was not mentioned as often as in the previous question asked of non-reporting victims. This may suggest that police corruption is less prevalent than is generally perceived, since the victims responding to this question had actually interacted with the police. The one exception was robbery. Victims of robbery who reported the offence mentioned corruption more than any other problem as the reason for their dissatisfaction.

The trends for assault were again quite different from those of other crime types (figure 13). Most assault victims who reported the crime to the police were satisfied

with the way the police responded (58%). The remaining 42% were not satisfied with the treatment they received. In explaining their responses, 48% of assault victims said the reason they were satisfied was that an arrest was made. This suggests that reporting of assault cases to the police should be encouraged, because the police respond positively to reports by arresting perpetrators and investigating cases.

