

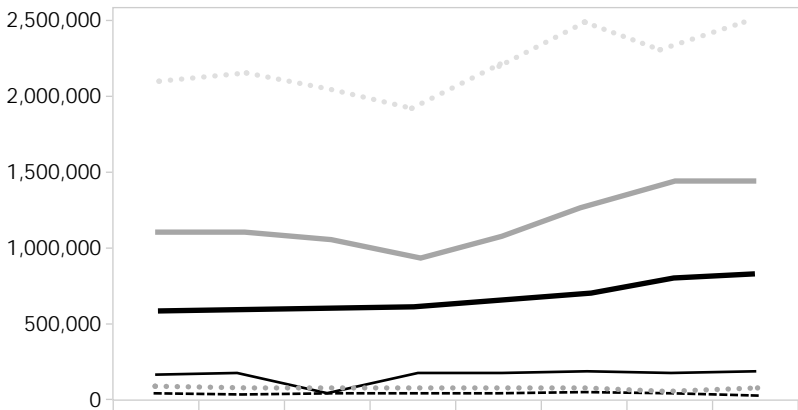
CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW OF THE CRIME PROBLEM

The broader context: crime in South Africa

Levels of crime in South Africa have been increasing over the past two decades. The democratisation of the country in 1994 created expectations for most South Africans that crime would decrease. However, these expectations did not materialise as crime trends continued to increase after 1994.²⁵ The 2001/02 SAPS annual report shows that recorded crime increased slightly from 1994/95 to 2000/01 and levelled off in 2001/02 (Figure 1).²⁶ Results of a recent national victim survey conducted by the ISS confirm this trend.²⁷

**Figure 1: Number of crimes recorded by police,
March 1994 - March 2002**



	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99	1999/2000	2000/01	2001/02
—●— Violent crime	630,108	655,866	656,193	668,223	702,979	770,499	830,293	839,639
—●— Property crime	1,108,090	1,121,079	1,082,793	901,334	1,127,750	1,213,554	1,363,923	1,372,790
—●— Violence against property	134,243	139,272	23,105	136,382	139,198	143,925	148,399	154,218
- - - Commercial crimes	63,046	60,833	62,170	63,285	63,364	67,909	66,588	56,223
●●●● Crimes dependent on police action	82,632	74,689	77,622	84,600	79,286	85,027	85,209	92,982
●●●● Total index	2,018,199	2,051,739	1,901,883	1,853,824	2,112,577	2,280,914	2,494,412	2,515,852

Trends for some crime types are, however, less positive. Levels of some violent crimes increased: attempted murder increased by 12%, common assault by 6%, and all robberies by 8% between April 2002 and March 2003. Murder is the only violent crime that is clearly decreasing, both in the short and long-term period. Decreases were also recorded for rape and serious assault (5% and 1% respectively)²⁸ although these trends are not established over as long a time period as for murder.

Since 1994, crime trends in the provinces followed a broadly similar pattern as for the country as a whole, with the exception of the Western Cape, where crime has been increasing. In terms of the volume of crime, Western Cape, Gauteng and Northern Cape had the highest crime rates. The cities with the highest volume of crime were Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town.²⁹

Although crime rates in the Eastern Cape and Port Elizabeth are not as high as other provinces and cities, they have not escaped South Africa's social ills. According to the 2001/02 SAPS annual report, Eastern Cape had the fourth highest murder rate at 52 murders per 100,000 people, and the fifth highest robbery rate at 124 per 100,000. The 2002/3 SAPS annual report shows that Eastern Cape is in the top three provinces, and Port Elizabeth the top 15 cities, with the highest levels of serious assault.

There are no easy explanations for crime in any society. Crime is caused by multiple factors that interact in a complex way. Some of the factors that have been associated with the high incidence of crime in South Africa are: the cycles of violence linked to the socio-political transition, poverty and under-development, the impact of the proliferation of firearms, changes in the demographic composition of the population, rapid urbanisation together with poor urban planning and maintenance, and a weak criminal justice system.³⁰

Culture of violence: Some explanations for the high rates of violent crime refer to the violent socio-political history that South Africa experienced. Black, coloured and Indian families suffered from institutional violence for decades through the disruption of their lives by mass removals, land dispossession and migrant labour policies of colonial administrations and apartheid. These upheavals might have led to the breakdown of family structures and poor social control. The struggle against apartheid was also violent, with liberation movements leading violent campaigns against local governments and the police. Many young people in the townships were involved in the violent destabilisation of the apartheid system. However, since 1994 there have been

no formal social reintegration processes for most youths, particularly those who never went into exile.

Poverty and under-development: Although it is difficult to prove a direct link between poverty and crime, research has shown that violent crime in particular, tends to be high in poor communities. Such crimes include assault, rape and child abuse and neglect.

At a community and neighbourhood level, violent crimes are influenced by factors such as overcrowding, poor housing design, and a lack of infrastructure and development. Most residential areas inhabited by the poor, particularly the informal settlements, tend to be overcrowded with little living space for individuals and families. In many of these areas, families share stands and are without basic amenities such as water taps, toilets, and, in some instances, electricity. Apart from the increased risk faced by people who must walk to reach these amenities, such conditions can create ongoing tensions between individuals and families, and may eventually lead to conflict.³¹ Poor areas also tend to lack facilities such as streetlights, open travel routes and well-maintained public spaces that are essential for both the police and the public in helping to prevent crime.³²

Proliferation of firearms: According to the firearm central register, the total number of firearms registered to individuals in October 2002 was 3,654,434.³³ If not properly controlled, many of these legal weapons fall into the hands of criminals. In addition, it is estimated that about 500,000 illegal firearms are in circulation in South Africa. Inadequate border control makes it possible for arms smugglers to bring large quantities of firearms into the country. Because of the oversupply of small arms in the region these sell cheaply, making them accessible in South Africa, where they are frequently used to commit crime or settle disputes.³⁴

Changes in demographic composition of the population: Crime is generally committed by youths between the ages of 14 and 25 years. Crime figures show that young men are more at risk of being convicted for a wide range of crimes and of being victims, than older men or females of any age group. South Africa has a very youthful population: over 53% of the population is under 24 years. Youths between 15 and 24 years constitute 21% of this age category.³⁵ These demographics are particularly problematic in a country where there are limited jobs and skills development opportunities. Many young people who complete their studies end up on the streets unemployed and prone to engage in criminal activities.

Rapid urbanisation: Crime rates are generally high in cities and urban areas. South African cities and towns are urbanising fast as many people from rural areas try to escape poverty by seeking opportunities in urban areas. However, limited job opportunities subject many of these newcomers to urban poverty associated with overcrowding, lack of social and economic development, and increasing consumer demands. All these conditions have been linked to high crime rates.

Exacerbating the problems of rapid urbanisation are those brought about by poor urban planning and maintenance. Bad traffic planning, poor lighting and town planning, increase opportunities for crime to be committed.³⁶

Inadequate performance of the criminal justice system: While a weak criminal justice system is not a cause of crime, it does have a detrimental effect on public feelings of safety and fear of crime. More importantly, the speedy detection and prosecution of offenders helps to deter some criminals from committing crime.

Implications for strategy development

- Several provinces and cities in the country are more affected by crime than the Eastern Cape or the NMMM. This means that national resources (such as the police) may be focused elsewhere. This must be borne in mind when the NMMM requests assistance from the SAPS in implementing its crime reduction strategy.
- NMMM is not alone in the challenges it faces. The problem of crime, and in particular of violence, is one that many other metro and local governments must deal with. (And in many cases, the scale of the challenge is greater than for the NMMM.) Those driving the metro's strategy should, wherever possible, draw on the experiences of fellow practitioners across the country.
- Because crime is both pervasive and complex to solve, strategies should aim to be as focused as possible. Priority crimes and geographic areas should be selected, and the problems then investigated in depth on an ongoing basis, to identify how best to intervene.

Crime in the NMMM

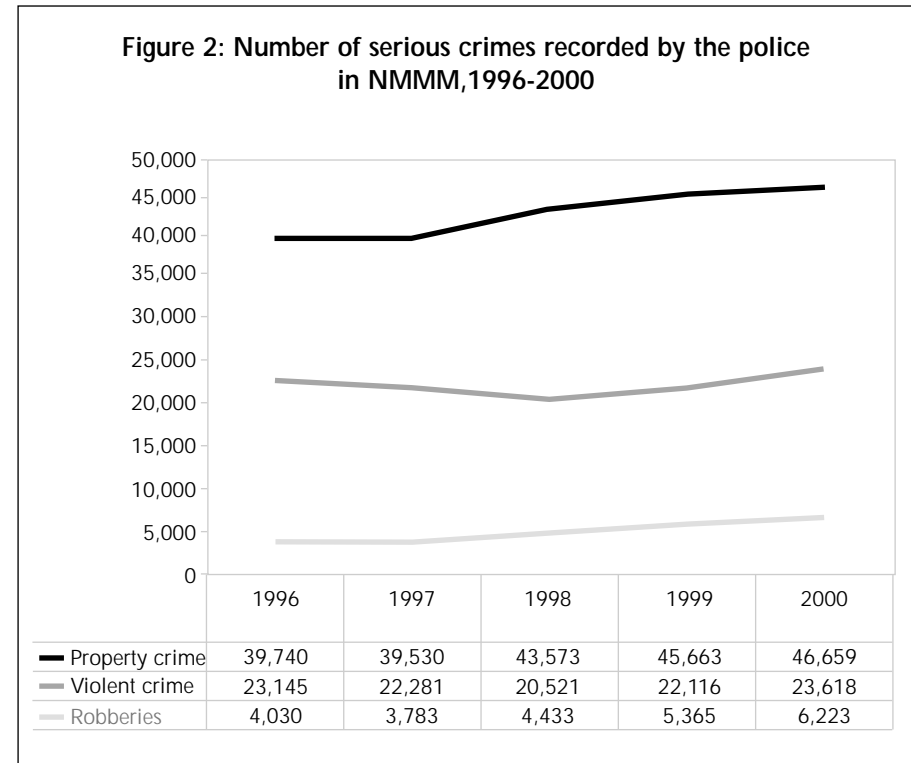
The profile of crime in the metro is based on an analysis of victim survey results, the most recent station level police crime statistics, interviews conducted with the SAPS, and results of the briefing workshops conducted with members of the NMMM council.

Most serious crime types

To determine which crimes are most serious in the metro, indicators based on actual crime levels as well as perceptions of crime, were analysed:

- the volume of crime;
- the rate at which crimes are increasing or decreasing; and
- which crimes people are most scared of.

Information was drawn from both SAPS crime statistics and from the victim survey conducted in the area by the ISS. Police crime statistics showed that, in broad terms, crimes reported most to the police in the metro were property crimes, followed by violent crime and then robbery (Figure 2).



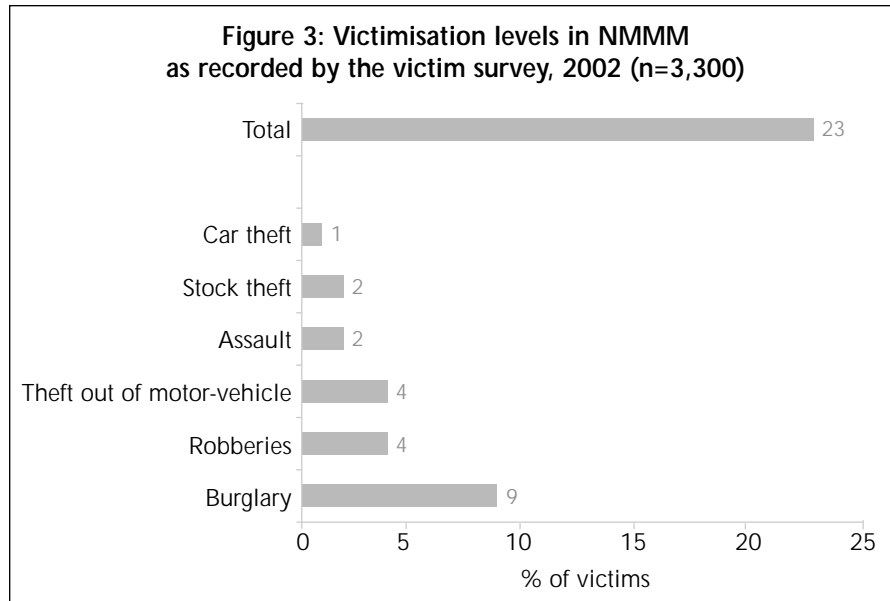
* Property crime includes all types of theft, and burglary. Violent crime includes murder, rape, and all types of assault. Robbery includes both common and aggravated robbery.

More specifically, the most prevalent types of crime recorded by the police in NMMM were:

- all thefts, including theft out of motor vehicle;
- residential burglary; and
- assault.

The victim survey results showed a similar pattern in terms of which crimes were most common. According to the survey, 23% of people living in the metro had been a victim of any crime in the 12-month period preceding the survey (Figure 3). The most prevalent crimes according to the survey, were:

- burglary;
- robbery; and
- theft out of motor vehicle.



When the rate of increase in specific crimes was analysed, robbery again stood out as a problem, as did burglary and assault. According to the police statistics, common robbery, including muggings, increased by 37% between 1996 and 2000. Aggravated robbery increased by 33% between 1996 and 2000. Other crimes that also increased at an alarming rate were vehicle theft, home burglary and common assault. Although the police statistics did not indicate that rape was particularly prevalent, or that the levels are increasing,

both the SAPS and Rape Crisis Committee identified it as an important problem in certain areas. As a result, rape was a priority crime for the police.

In terms of public perceptions about crime, residents of the NMMM said they feared the following four types of crime most:

- murder;
- rape;
- burglary; and
- robbery.

Victim surveys commonly show that murder and rape are the most feared crimes, no doubt because of the extreme violence associated with these offences. Apart from these two crime types, the results again revealed the prominence of burglary and robbery as problems crimes in the area.

Perception data gathered from the youth focus groups also indicated that robbery is a problem in the NMMM. The focus groups were conducted in PE central, New Brighton, KwaZakhele, Bethelsdorp (Northern end areas), Motherwell and KwaNobuhle. In all, 116 young people participated in 16 focus groups. The following information about crime as it affects young people was recorded:

- thirty three of the participants said they have been victims of crime between July 2002 and July 2003;
- most crimes experienced were robberies;
- about 20 of the participants who were victims said they had been victims of robbery and in most cases either knives or firearms had been used;
- most victims were men aged between 19 and 25 years;
- nearly all the victims said these crimes occurred when they were on their way home from taverns or shebeens;
- assaults and general theft were also reported.

According to the youths, robbery was not only the most common crime experienced, it was also believed to be the most prevalent crime in the area, along with burglary and theft. The youths also mentioned drug dealing and drug abuse as serious crimes affecting young people.

Implications for strategy development

An analysis of information on crime rates, changing levels of particular crimes, and public and youth perceptions of crime, suggests that the key offences that a strategy should target are robbery and home burglary. Other crimes that could be considered are assault, rape and theft out of motor vehicles.

Areas and people most affected by crime

Along with identifying which crime types are most serious, a crime audit needs to narrow the scope in terms of who is most affected by particular categories of crime. The police statistics and victim survey results were used for this purpose.

- According to the victim survey, 10 of the 17 police stations in the metro experienced higher crime levels than the average: people living in the Mount Road and Swartkops police station areas recorded the highest overall levels of victimisation at 34%, whereas those in Despatch and Kinkelbos reported the lowest levels of overall victimisation at 18% and 10% respectively.
- According to the police crime statistics, the largest proportion of crime in the wealthier suburbs was property crime, with a relatively small proportion being made up of violent crime or robbery (Figure 4). By contrast, underdeveloped areas experienced similar proportions of both

violent and property crime. Robbery accounted for the smallest chunk of all crime in all the police station areas in the NMMM, although the share of robbery was highest in poor station areas, namely KwaZakhele, New Brighton and Motherwell.

The police statistics suggest that violent crime is more of a problem in poorer areas in the metro. This was confirmed by the victim survey results, which showed that black and coloured people were more likely to be victims of both robbery and assault than whites (Figure 5). While blacks were more likely to be victims of robbery than coloureds, coloureds were most likely to experience assault than blacks or whites.

The police figures also suggest that poor communities, while being most affected by violence, do not escape property crime either. This too is confirmed by victim survey results about the incidence of home burglary: Indians (13%) were most likely to have experienced burglary, followed by blacks (10%), whites (9%) and then coloureds (6%).

Figure 4: Percentage of violent crime, property crime and robbery recorded by police in NMMM, 2000

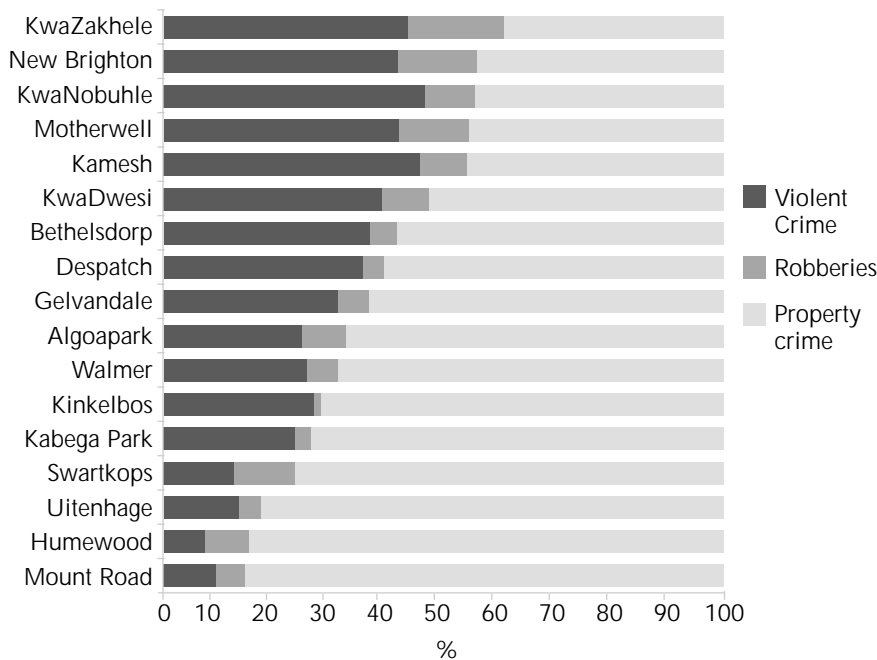
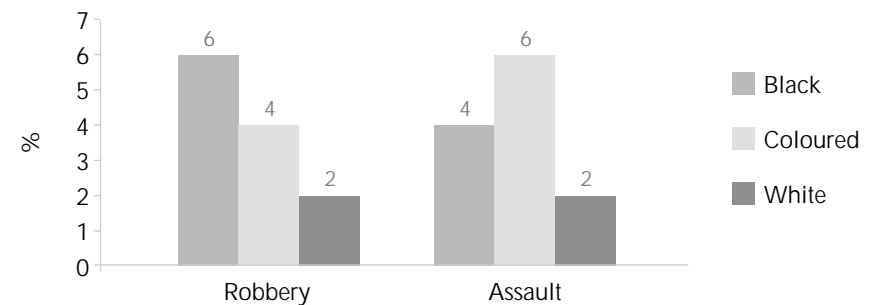


Figure 5: Incidence of robbery and assault, by race, according to the victims



Implications for strategy development

Crime does not affect all parts of the NMMM and people living within its boundaries to the same degree. Interventions aimed at dealing with violent crimes like assault and robbery, ought to focus on the poorer parts of the metro, and on black and coloured people. Property crimes like housebreaking affect a broader cross-section of the population, which makes taking decisions about where to target projects more difficult. Factors such as prevalence, impact, and public perception will need to be taken into account when selecting targets areas.