

CRIME PROFILE: VEHICLE CRIMES

This section profiles thefts of motor vehicles, including car hijackings. The survey asked people whether they or a member of their household had been a victim of car theft. A separate category also recorded details of those people who reported a vehicle hijacking. This analysis therefore includes a crime considered (both by the police and other victim surveys) as a property crime (vehicle theft) and one considered 'violent' (vehicle hijacking).

Questions about car theft applied to the respondent's household while questions regarding hijacking were asked of the respondents themselves. Car theft is thus analysed as a household crime and hijacking as a personal crime. The crimes were defined in the following way:

- *Car theft* includes the theft of a car, van or bakkie in which no force was used. If people said force was used, they were referred to the section of the questionnaire dealing with hijacking.
- *Car hijacking* refers to an incident in which someone's car, van or bakkie was taken by force while they were present.

The following characteristics of vehicle crimes are considered:

- crime levels and a profile of who the victims are;
- who is most at risk (age and gender are not covered for car theft since this is a household crime);
- when and where the crimes occurred; and
- the nature of the crimes, including violence and injury in the course of hijackings.

Crime levels and victim profile

Between 1993 and April 1998, 489 vehicle crimes were reported to the survey in Pretoria. Of these, the majority (388) were vehicle thefts and 101 were hijackings. Most thefts and hijackings in a single year were reported in 1997 (Table 9).

Table 9: Number of vehicle crimes reported to the survey, 1993-April 1998

Year	Car theft	Car hijacking	Total crimes
1993	45	8	53
1994	66	12	78
1995	35	11	46
1996	80	20	100
1997	119	39	158
Jan-April 1998	43	11	54
Total	388	101	489
% of total sample	15.2	3.9	19.1

(n=2547)			
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Of the total of 2 547 people interviewed, 15 per cent were victims of car theft and 4 per cent had their vehicles hijacked between 1993 and April 1998. Car theft is the second most common crime affecting people in Pretoria; only burglary was reported more often (by 21 per cent of respondents).

Of all crimes occurring in Pretoria, levels of robbery and mugging come a close third to car theft levels: 14 per cent of people mentioned this crime, compared to 15 per cent for vehicle theft. Car hijacking is much less common, although levels of this violent crime are lower in Pretoria than those recorded in the Johannesburg and Durban city victim surveys.

Of those who said a car was stolen from them or their household, almost the same proportion were African (47 per cent) as were white (45,6 per cent) (see Table 10). Of all the crimes covered by the survey, this is the largest proportion of white victims, and as in the case of burglary, reflects patterns of ownership and thus opportunity – key factors in who is victimised by property crime.

According to the crime profiles above, violence is much more likely to affect African people than white people. This trend is illustrated by examining who the victims of car hijacking – a violent crime – were in Pretoria. More than two-thirds of the victims of this crime were African (65 per cent) and the vast majority were men (73,5%). Nearly half of the victims of hijacking were between the ages of 26 and 40 years (46,5 per cent) (Table 10).

Table 10: Profile of vehicle crime victims, 1993-April 1998

	Vehicle hijacking	Vehicle theft
Race %		
African	65.0	47.4
Wite	31.0	45.6
Coloured	3.0	3.6
Asian	1.0	3.3
Total	100.0	100.0
Age %		
18-25 yrs	9.9	n/a
26-40 yrs	46.5	n/a
41-60 yrs	37.6	n/a
60+ yrs	5.9	n/a
Total	100.0	
Gender %		
Male	73.5	n/a
Female	26.5	n/a
Total	100.0	

Note: the age and gender breakdown of the victims of car theft are not included here because these were asked of households and not individuals.

Who is most at risk

The profile above indicates the degree of risk for vehicle crimes. Table 4 shows the risk for all adults in Pretoria of vehicle crime relative to other crime types. Of all those interviewed in Pretoria, Africans were the most likely to be victims of car theft (7 per cent) and car hijacking (2,5 per cent) (Table 4).

The risk for white and African people, however, is almost equal for car theft, and represents the narrowest margin of difference in risk between these two groups of all crime types covered by the survey. People aged between 26 and 40 years and all males are more likely to be hijacked than anyone else, although there is little difference in risk between men and women or between people of different age groups.

An analysis of vehicle crime victimisation within each subsample provides more insight into the relative risk for various groups:

- *Risk of vehicle crime within each race group:* The risk of vehicle theft is greatest for Asians and whites in Pretoria. Of all Asians surveyed, 23 per cent said a car was stolen from them or someone in their household; 20 per cent of white people said the same. Of the coloureds and Africans interviewed, 16 per cent and 12 per cent, respectively, reported car theft. The risk for car hijacking follows a different pattern: Africans and whites are equally at risk. In the case of each race group, 4 per cent said they had been hijacked (see Figure 16).

Of all the crimes covered in the survey, Asians, whites and coloureds are therefore most at risk of burglary and car theft – in other words, the property crimes in which no violence was used. Africans, in comparison, stand a good chance of becoming victims of both violent crime and property crime.

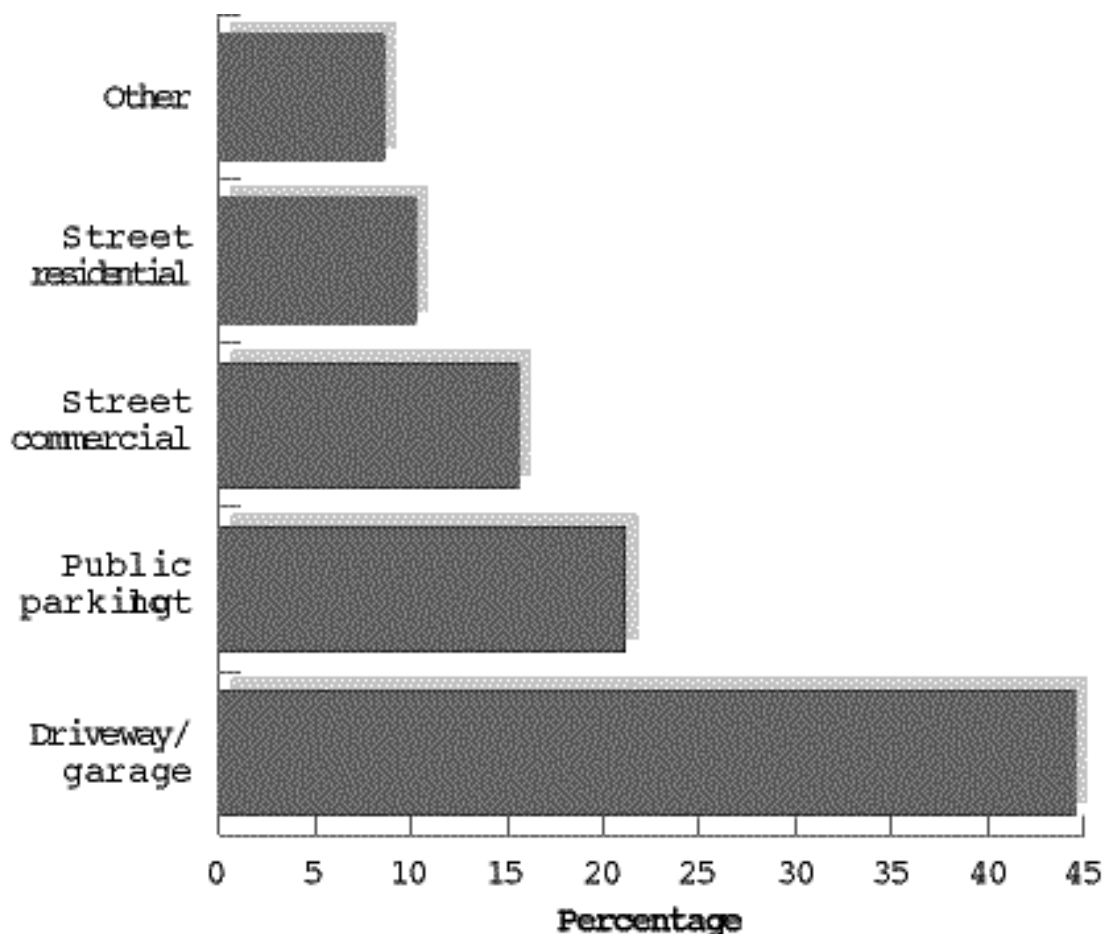
- *Risk of car hijacking for different age groups:* The risk of car hijacking is equal for people between the ages of 26 and 60 years. Of those people aged 41 to 60 who were interviewed, 5 per cent reported this crime, compared with 4,5 per cent of those between 26 and 40 years. Only 2 per cent, respectively, of people in the youngest and oldest age categories said they were hijacked. This is not surprising, since people in the middle age category are the most likely – given that they are more economically active – to drive cars.
- *Risk of car hijacking for different gender groups:* 5 per cent of all men surveyed said they had been the victims of a car hijacking, compared with 2 per cent of all women interviewed. This follows other victimisation patterns in which men are generally more likely to be victimised than women.
- *Risk of vehicle crimes for people living in different parts of the city:* People living in the suburbs are more likely to be victims of vehicle crimes than those living elsewhere in Pretoria. Of all those suburban residents interviewed, 9 per cent said a car had been stolen and 2 per cent reported vehicle hijacking. For people who live in the townships,

comparable vehicle crime rates were 3 per cent for car theft and 2 per cent for hijacking. Again, the higher risk of vehicle crime for people living in the suburbs reflects wealth and ownership and thus the opportunity for such crimes. People's destinations and where they park their vehicles, also determine their risk of car theft and hijacking, however. The location of these crimes is considered in more detail below. Since these analyses suggest that most cars are stolen from people's homes, risk is probably most closely associated with where victims live than with where they travel. The same does not necessarily apply to car hijacking, however.

Where and when car theft occurred

The vast majority of vehicles are stolen in suburbs (70 per cent) around Pretoria. Twenty two per cent were taken in townships, 4 per cent from places in the inner city and 3 per cent from informal settlements. Since the risk of vehicle theft is the highest for people living in the suburbs, this suggests that most of these crimes occurred where people live. Nearly half (44,5 per cent) of cars were stolen from people's driveways or garages and 10 per cent were taken from streets in residential areas – many of which could also be streets outside the victim's home. Only 21 per cent of cars were stolen from public parking lots and 16 per cent from streets in commercial parts of the city (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Where vehicle thefts happened



This presents particular challenges for the reduction of this crime. Preventive measures such as car guards and visible police patrols are likely to have the greatest effect in smaller, busier parts of the city like designated city blocks or car parks. It is notoriously difficult to maintain a visible police presence in vast residential areas such as suburbs. In many of these areas, however, environmental design measures such as street lighting and increased surveillance of streets and driveways, could prove effective. Obviously, increasing the availability of off-street parking would be the most desirable.

Car thefts are more likely during the week (60 per cent) than on the weekend (40,3 per cent), and occur mostly when it is dark. Equal proportions of these crimes were committed at night as during the day: 49 per cent occurred between 18h00 and 6h00 and 51 per cent between 6h00-18h00. Darkness provides cover for offenders, and it is likely that the most common location of night-time incidents is people's homes, while more cars are stolen from public places during the day – largely because more are parked in these areas during the day.

Thus, in order to properly estimate the risk of car theft in different locations, the number of cars parked in different places at particular times should be considered. Since cars are parked the longest outside people's homes, it is not surprising that most thefts occur there. On the basis of such estimates, the British Crime Survey found that cars parked in public car parks were four times more at risk of theft than those parked in the street outside the owner's home or work.³³

The nature of vehicle theft

People were asked about attempted and actual car thefts. The vast majority of car thefts (85 per cent) resulted in the loss of the vehicle, which indicates a high success rate for offenders. Security devices and precautions – to the extent that they might be used – do not seem particularly effective in deterring car theft.

Under these circumstances, insurance is particularly important. Unlike burglary victims, most (65 per cent) car theft victims said the stolen car was insured. White victims of car theft were much more likely (83 per cent) to have had insurance than African victims (33%). Insurance would clearly reduce the impact of car theft significantly for the victims and their households, since only 28 per cent of victims said their car was actually recovered after being stolen. This is a particularly low recovery rate, and since people were not asked who recovered their cars, it is unclear how many of these recoveries can be attributed to the police.

Comparative survey data show that, in the UK, 64 per cent of stolen cars were recovered in 1995, half of which were found within 24 hours, a further third within a week. Crime surveys in cities of developing countries recorded lower recovery rates than in the UK, but higher than in Pretoria: 55,2 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, 47 per cent in Latin America and 44 per cent in Asia.³⁴

Where and when car hijacking occurred

The numbers of hijacking victims are too small to present a representative picture of this crime in Pretoria. The details discussed here therefore refer only to those victims who were interviewed, and should not be extrapolated to all hijack victims in the metropolitan area.

An almost equal proportion of hijackings happened in suburbs (45 per cent) as in townships (40 per cent). Half of vehicles were robbed at an intersection (51 per cent), and a quarter (25,5 per cent) were taken from people's driveways and garages. Fifteen per cent occurred in the streets of residential areas. Most of the hijackings reported to the survey occurred during the week (64 per cent) and during daylight hours, between 6h00-18h00 (54%). Forty six per cent of hijackings happened between 18h00-24h00. Since these crimes involve the taking of vehicles from people by force, it is not surprising that the majority happen when people are most likely to be using their cars.

The nature of car hijacking

Unlike the other crimes aimed at property covered in the survey, such as robbery, burglary and car theft, offenders had less success in taking people's cars from them by force. In 59 per cent of hijackings, cars were actually stolen; comparative 'success' rates for the other crimes listed above were over 80%.

It is unclear from the survey why a larger proportion of hijackings than other crimes did not result in property loss. It is possible that people were able to get away more easily, since violence was used against them in only half of the hijackings (49%), with only 22 per cent of victims saying they sustained injuries as a result of the crime. This was the case despite the fact that a gun was used in 68 per cent of hijackings. A knife was used in 13 per cent of the attacks.

Most of those people who reported a hijacking to the survey were driving the car when the incident occurred (76 per cent), while a quarter (24 per cent) were passengers. This confirms warnings put out by the police that offenders tend to target drivers who are alone in their vehicles. Hijack victims were also probably fairly well off: 66 per cent said they owned the car that was taken and 77 per cent said the vehicle was insured.

How victims responded

Only the victims of car hijacking were asked whether they changed their behaviour in response to the crime. Of all victims interviewed in the survey, those who had experienced a hijacking were the least likely to change their behaviour after the crime. In all, 57 per cent of hijack victims said they took some sort of action, compared with around 70 per cent among burglary and mugging victims. The likely explanation is that hijacking victims feel there is not much they can do to avoid this crime. Victims of violent crimes, such as assault and murder, reported similar low levels of behaviour change.

Of those hijacking victims that did take preventive action, the majority avoided certain places (61 per cent). Increased vigilance was not a common response (14 per cent). These victims are the only ones of all those covered by the survey to say they did not feel safer as a result of taking these precautions.

Sixty eight per cent said the avoidance behaviour had no effect, while only 32 per cent said they felt safer. Hijacking is the one crime type which probably causes the greatest fear of crime. Responding to this anxiety is likely to be difficult, since encouraging preventive action in the case of these victims – unlike those of other crimes – does not appear to make people feel safer.