

REPORTING TO THE POLICE

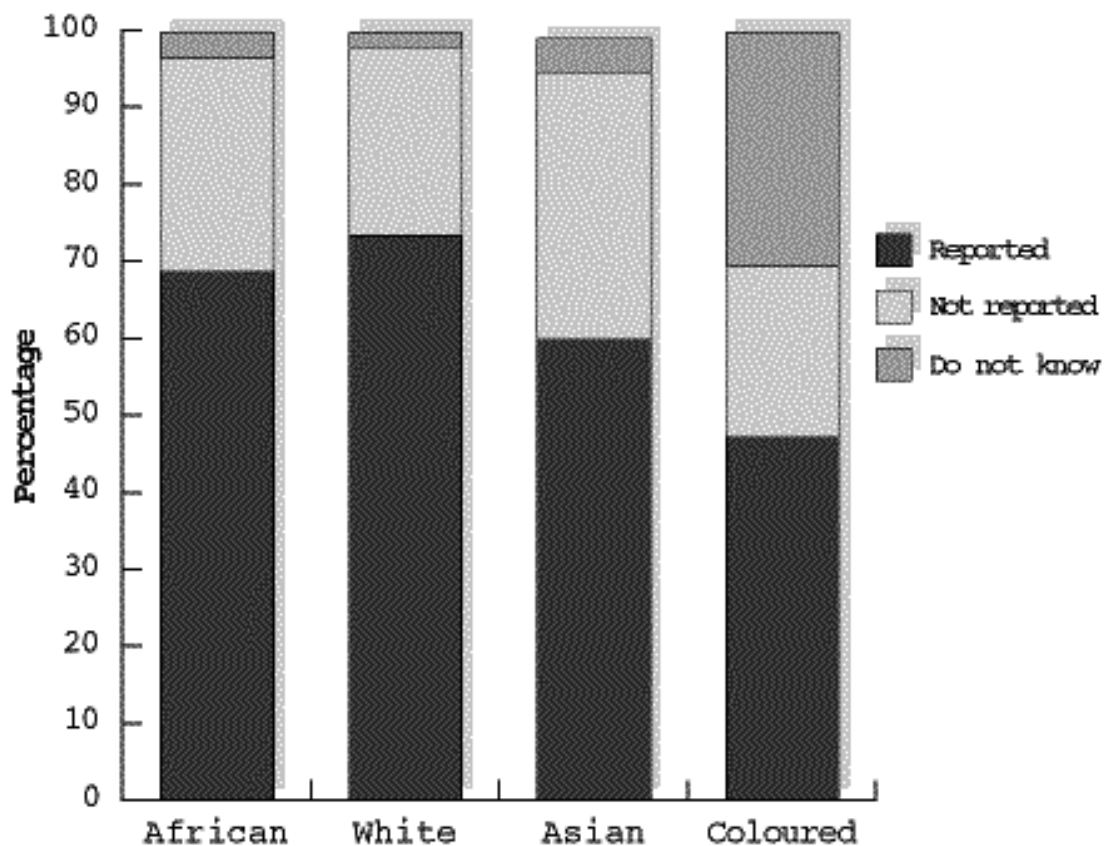
One of the key reasons for variations between the data presented by victim surveys and those of the police, is that the surveys capture crimes which the public do not report, as well as those which the police do not record. By measuring the extent of unreported crime, the reasons for not reporting, as well as victims' satisfaction with the police service during this process, victim surveys provide critical information about the functioning of the criminal justice system. This information is important not only for assessing the efficiency of police service delivery, but also to enable the police to plan operations in a way that reduces crime: "*[Crimes that are] reported will largely determine the nature and size of the police workload, since the vast majority of offences remain outside the scope of action by the police unless notified by victims.*"¹⁴

The majority of crimes (69 per cent) covered by the Pretoria victim survey were reported to the police. While this has been the trend across all cities surveyed by the ISS, overall reporting levels in Pretoria were higher than in the other metropolitan areas. In Johannesburg, for example, 61,5 per cent of people said they reported their most recent experiences of crime to the police.

Despite South Africa's history of poor relations between the police and the majority of the population, as well as dramatically uneven resource distribution between white and black communities, these reporting rates are remarkably consistent with those in other countries. The British Crime Survey recorded a reporting rate of 67 per cent for serious offences (of the kind that are covered in the Pretoria city survey). This rate is similar to that in the US national crime survey, and higher than in many other countries according to the International Crime Victim Survey.¹⁵

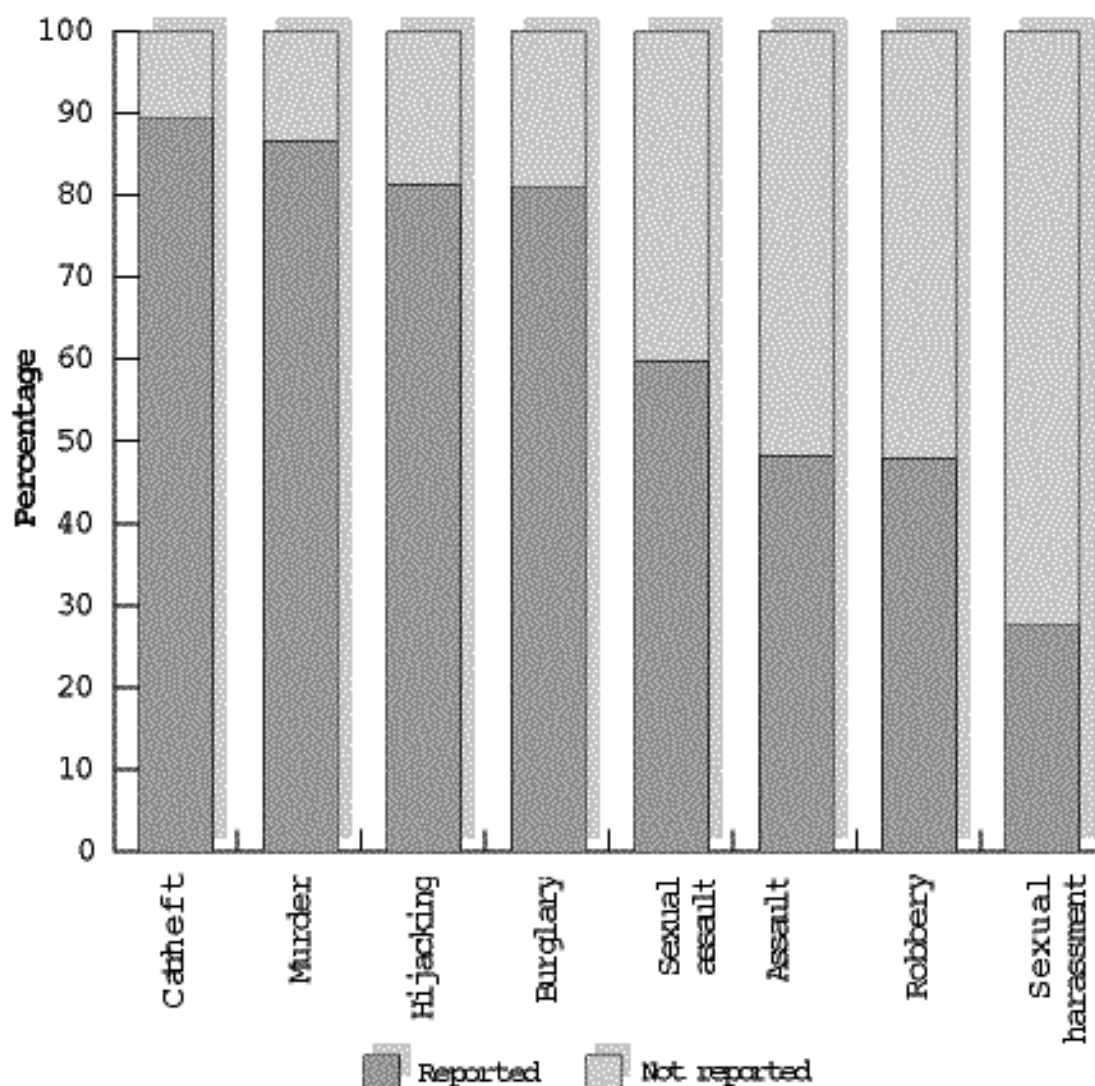
Whether or not people notify the police of offences depends on several factors, and reporting rates vary as a result among different sectors of society. In Pretoria, 73 per cent of white people reported incidents that happened to them – making them the group most likely to do so. Fewer Africans notified the police (69 per cent), with only 47 per cent of coloureds saying crimes that happened to them were reported (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Proportion of people who reported their most recent experience of crime (all categories) to the police



Reporting rates also vary substantially for different crime types. In Pretoria – as indeed elsewhere – certain crimes against property are frequently brought to the police’s attention. In the case of car theft and hijacking, 89 per cent and 81 per cent of these offences, respectively, were reported to the police (Figure 7). Less serious crimes aimed at property (such as mugging), as well as violent crime (such as assault), are seldom reported, however. Only 48 per cent of mugging and robbery incidents and an equal proportion of assaults were brought to the police’s attention. Sexual harassment was least likely to be reported, with only 28 per cent of people saying that they notified the police.

Figure 7: Proportion of particular crime victims who reported their most recent experience to the police

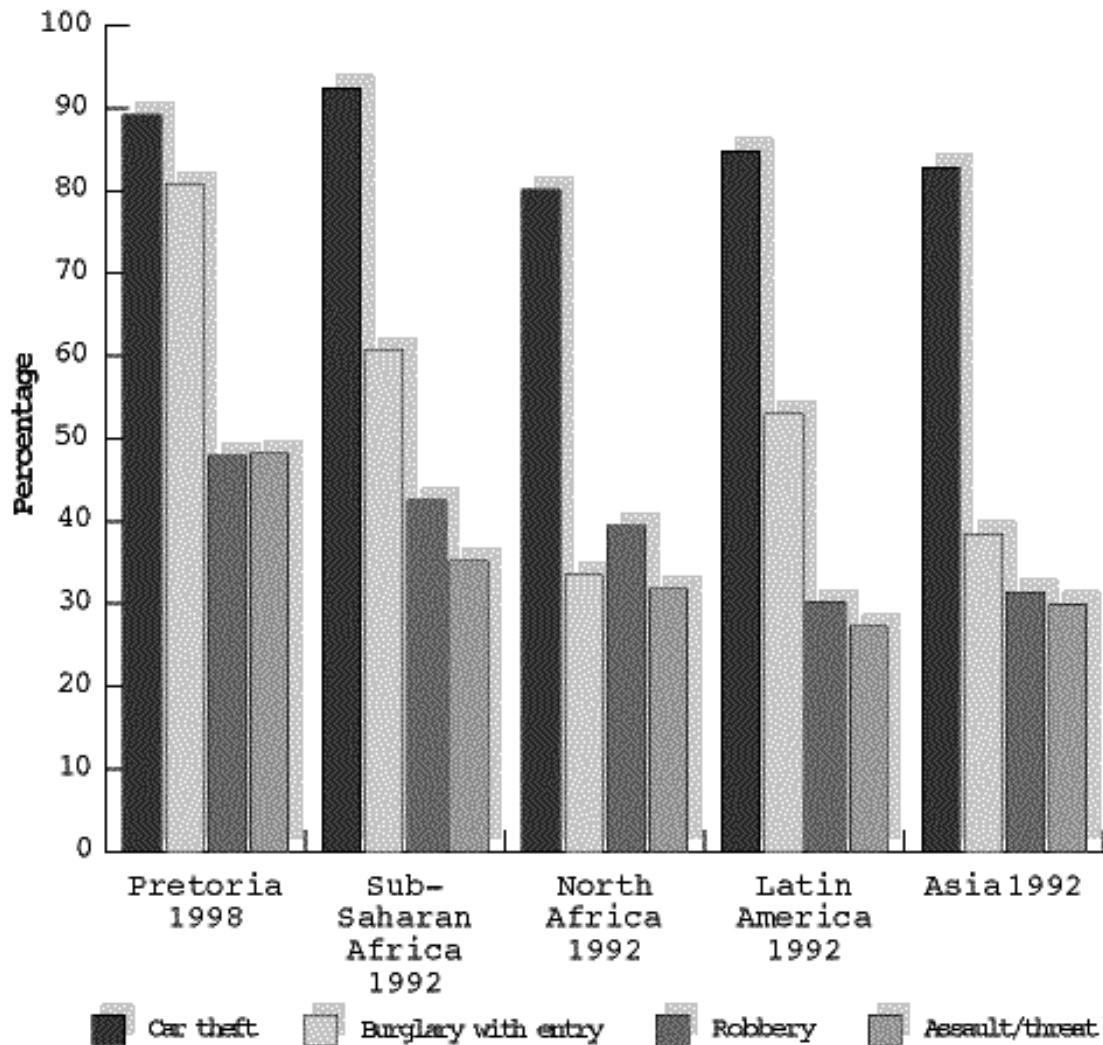


Again, reporting rates for particular crimes are consistent with those documented elsewhere – indeed, in some cases reporting levels are higher in Pretoria than in other places. In the UK, 97 per cent of vehicle thefts and 84 per cent of burglaries with loss, are reported. At 57 per cent, more robberies are reported in that country than in Pretoria,¹⁶ although reporting rates of ‘wounding’ and ‘common assault’ – which can be compared with ‘assault’ in the Pretoria survey were similar: 34 per cent of common assaults and 39 per cent of woundings were brought to the police’s attention in the UK, compared with 48 per cent of assault cases in Pretoria.¹⁷

Comparisons with other developing countries show consistently lower reporting ratios in particular cities than those recorded in Pretoria. Victim surveys in Latin American and Asian cities showed that 85 per cent and 83 per cent of car thefts, respectively, were reported (compared with 89 per cent in Pretoria).¹⁸ In the case of other crimes, reporting levels were much lower than in Pretoria: for burglary with entry, the comparable proportions in Latin American and Asian cities were 53 per cent and 39 per cent (81 per cent in Pretoria); 30 per cent and 31,5 per cent of robberies, respectively (48 per

cent in Pretoria) and 27 per cent and 30 per cent of assaults, respectively (48 per cent in Pretoria) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Reporting rates in cities of the developing world, Pretoria victim survey & IC (V) S



Factors influencing reporting

Whether or not victims report crimes to the police generally depends on several factors:

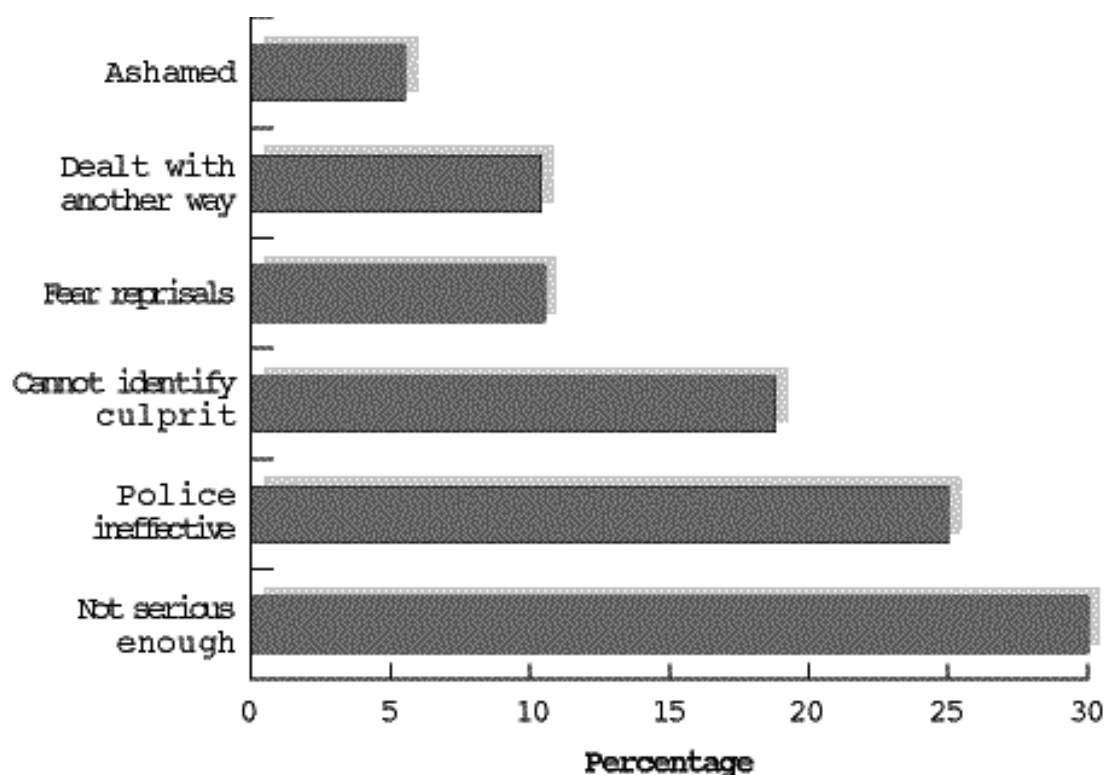
- *The nature of the offence:* In particular, victims' will decide whether to report based on the seriousness of the event. This decision will be affected by other factors such as the value of the stolen items and whether they are easily retrieved or replaced; how easily the nearest police station can be accessed in terms of distance, roads, telephones and transport; and a lack of evidence, which may influence a victim's assessment of whether the crime itself is serious enough to warrant reporting.

- *Perceptions of the police and criminal justice system:* A negative attitude towards the police, as well as the anticipated outcome once a crime has been reported, influence the victim's decision to notify the authorities. This includes the way police treat victims in the charge office; handle reports and consequently act (the perceptions of victims in Pretoria about such issues are considered in detail below), as well as the nature of procedures in court. This has been found to be significant for victims of violent crimes in particular.¹⁹
- *Access to solutions beyond law enforcement and criminal justice:* If victims believe they can resolve the incident in one way or another through the assistance of family, friends, victim support agencies, private security organisations (including services such as the Netstar vehicle tracking system), or self-help (including vigilante) activities, they will be less inclined to report incidents to the police.
- *Fear of reprisals:* Victims may be reluctant to report crimes, particularly if the offender is known to them, for fear that they will be intimidated or 'silenced'. This is particularly a problem when witness protection is poorly developed or ineffectual, as well as in close-knit communities.

Comparative victim surveys – in both developed and developing countries – conclude that the main reason given by victims for not reporting related to the event itself. Most often, the event was not serious enough, followed by negative views of the police's ability to do much about the offence.²⁰

In the Pretoria city victim survey, similar explanations were given by victims of crime for not reporting to the police. Of those who gave reasons, the most common responses were that the crime was not serious enough (30 per cent) and that the police were ineffective (25 per cent). Nineteen per cent of victims thought it was no use, since they could not identify the culprit. Few people said they feared the consequences, or that they had found other solutions (which included reporting the incident to the local community police forum (CPF), private security company, or taking the law into their own hands) (Figure 9). Of interest, particularly given the shortage of policing resources in African townships, was that no victims said they could not get easy access to the police or that reporting was inconvenient.

Figure 9: Reasons for not reporting crime (all types) to police



Why victims choose to report (or not report) crime is complex. An analysis of fifty nations surveyed by the International Crime Victim Survey has shown that income level is the most important factor related to the reporting of crime, followed by the perceived seriousness of the event. Other relevant factors include age, level of education and gender.²¹ The British Crime Survey tested reporting levels against victims' own assessment of the seriousness of particular crimes. The conclusion was that, while seriousness is the main issue, mediating factors include self-interest, (such as wanting to make insurance claims and recover property), expectations of the police, and whether the victim knows the offender.²²

Insurance is regarded as a key factor influencing victims' decision to report a crime to the police. Trends in the insurance industry could therefore affect reporting. In the UK, patterns of insurance cover and claiming have changed over time: insurance coverage has fallen in those areas which experience high crime levels and among vulnerable groups who live there. Reasons include fears of premium increases, protecting a no-claims bonus, and avoiding paying a high 'excess' upon making a claim.²³

Since many people interviewed in Pretoria did not have insurance, changes in insurance trends in future could affect crime levels recorded by the police. The victim survey found that less than half (45 per cent) of the victims of crimes aimed at property (car theft, hijacking, burglary and robbery) said they had insurance. Access to insurance is limited to those who can afford it: of those people living in townships in Pretoria, only 15 per cent said their property was covered, compared with 63 per cent of people living in suburbs.

However, the influence of insurance on reporting should not be overstated. In Pretoria, of those victims of car theft, hijacking, burglary and robbery/mugging whose property was covered by insurance, 84 per cent reported the incident to the police. But a significant proportion of people who did not have insurance also reported, namely 68 per cent. Insurance does not therefore appear to be a key factor influencing the reporting of property crimes as a whole in Pretoria.

The prospect of the police recovering stolen goods appears to provide a much greater incentive in reporting than does insurance. A significant factor in who reports and who does not, is whether property was actually stolen in the course of a crime. Of those victims who said property was stolen, 77 per cent reported the crime to the police, compared with only 45 per cent of those who said nothing was taken (Figure 10). More sophisticated analyses elsewhere suggest similar findings: the British Crime Survey asked direct questions about the link between reporting to the police and having insurance, and concluded that few victims report simply for the benefit of making an insurance claim, although many who do not claim insurance might report if they did claim.

Figure 10: Reporting levels by victims of property crimes in which goods were stolen

