

VICTIM SUPPORT AND OTHER INTERVENTIONS

As with the need to address the fear of crime, there has been a shift in recent years in the thinking of criminal justice agencies away from focusing on arresting and convicting criminals, to the provision of better treatment and services for the victims of crime. In line with this, both the government and non-governmental organisations have sought to meet these needs. Addressing the needs of victims, both practically and emotionally, enables them to cope better with their victimisation and to regain faith in the criminal justice system's ability to protect them.

These developments and the benefits of victim support have been recognised in South Africa. However, the city victim surveys conducted by the ISS have indicated that awareness levels and the use of victim support agencies are very low. As a result, the more recent surveys asked people who they turned to for help after victimisation, what kind of support they would have liked, whether they used the services offered by support agencies, as well as perceptions of their usefulness.

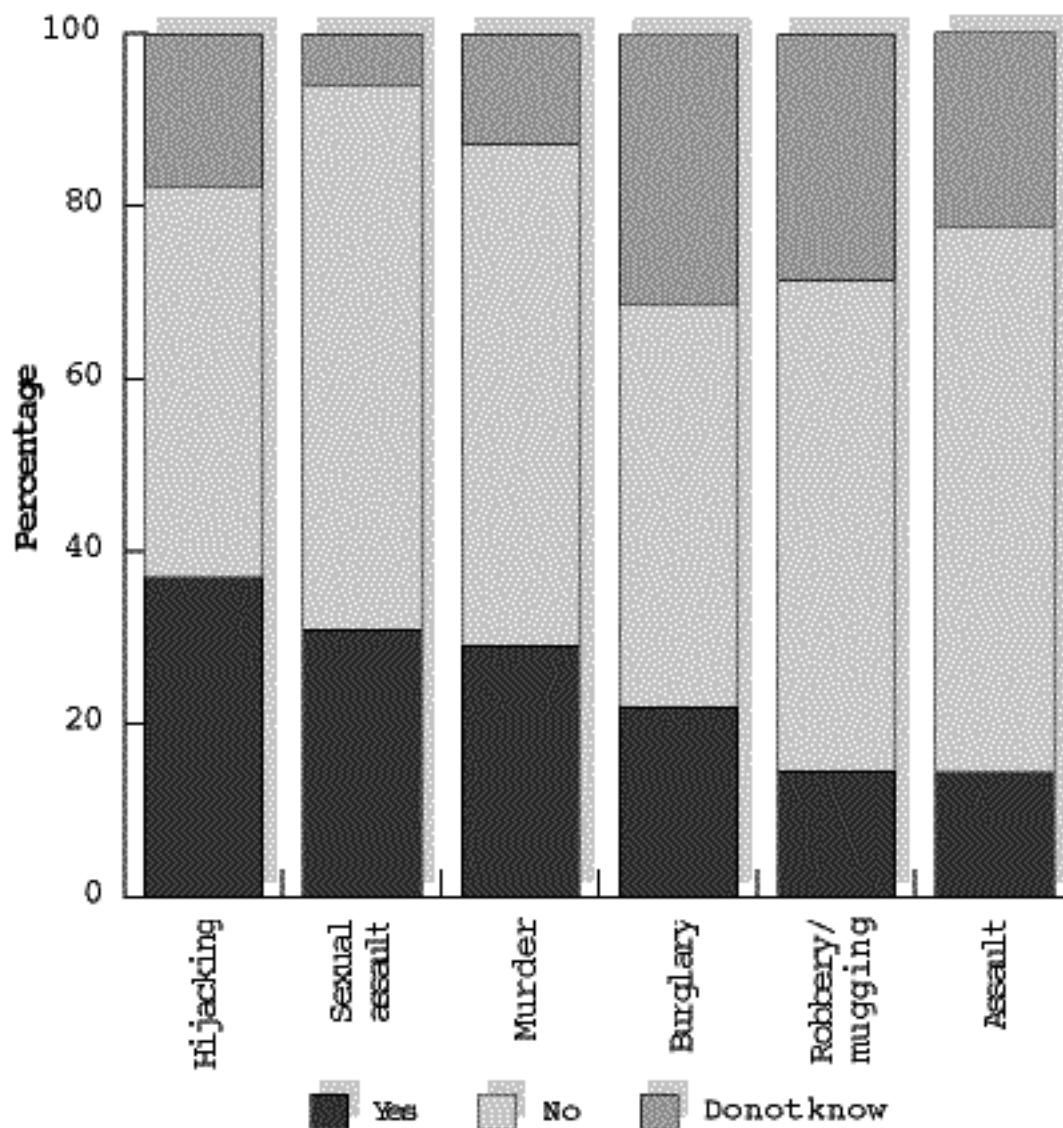
The results largely confirm that few victims in Pretoria know about such agencies or make use of their services. In addition, many victims turn to the police for help. In the light of these findings, which need to be interpreted with caution, this section also considers what strategies people think would best reduce crime in Pretoria.

Assistance to victims

Respondents could select from a range of options in identifying who they sought assistance from after being victimised. While trends differed depending on the crime they had experienced, most victims sought help in the most intimate places – such as from family and friends – and in the most public and official places – such as the police. Nearly half of the victims across all crime types said they turned to family and friends for assistance. One-third of those who reported car hijacking, burglary and murder said they sought the help of the police. Around 20 per cent of the victims of the remaining crime types said the same.

These findings suggest little inclination among victims to seek assistance from those groups most often tasked with responding to victims' needs, such as community police forums, street committees, counsellors and religious bodies. This may be related, however, to perceptions of the availability of such agencies, and the degree of access people have to them. The need for assistance is nevertheless great, and is confirmed by the extensive use of family and friends after victimisation. What form this assistance should take, however, is less certain. When asked whether they thought the services of victim support agencies would be useful, the majority of victims were unsure and nearly a quarter said they would not be of use (Figure 31). This suggests both a lack of awareness of the existence of such services and of their potential benefits, as well as scepticism about the desirability of traditional forms of victim assistance such as counselling.

Figure 31: Whether victim support agencies were considered useful by victims



Given this, victims were asked what type of help they would have liked. Again, trends varied among victims of different crimes. Victims of crimes directed at property, such as burglary, mugging and hijacking, mostly asked for effective law enforcement and preventive information (Figure 32). Victims of violent crimes, such as assault, murder and sexual assault, also sought effective law enforcement, followed by moral support and counselling in the case of sexual assault victims (Figure 33). Thus, apart from those who reported sexual crimes, few victims sought the assistance of counsellors or community support. Practical financial support to compensate for the impact of crime was also not a popular requirement.

Figure 32: Kind of support that victims of crimes aimed at property would have liked

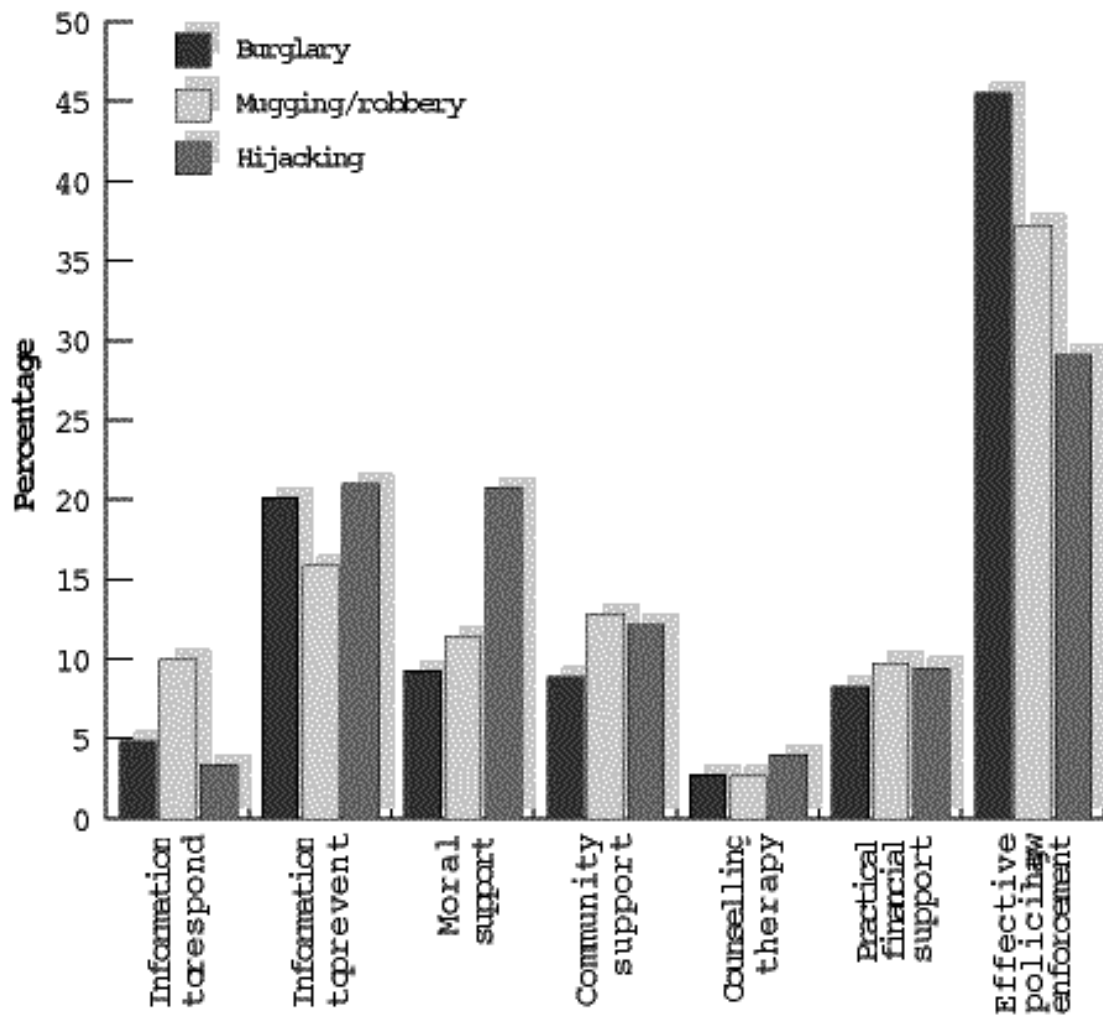
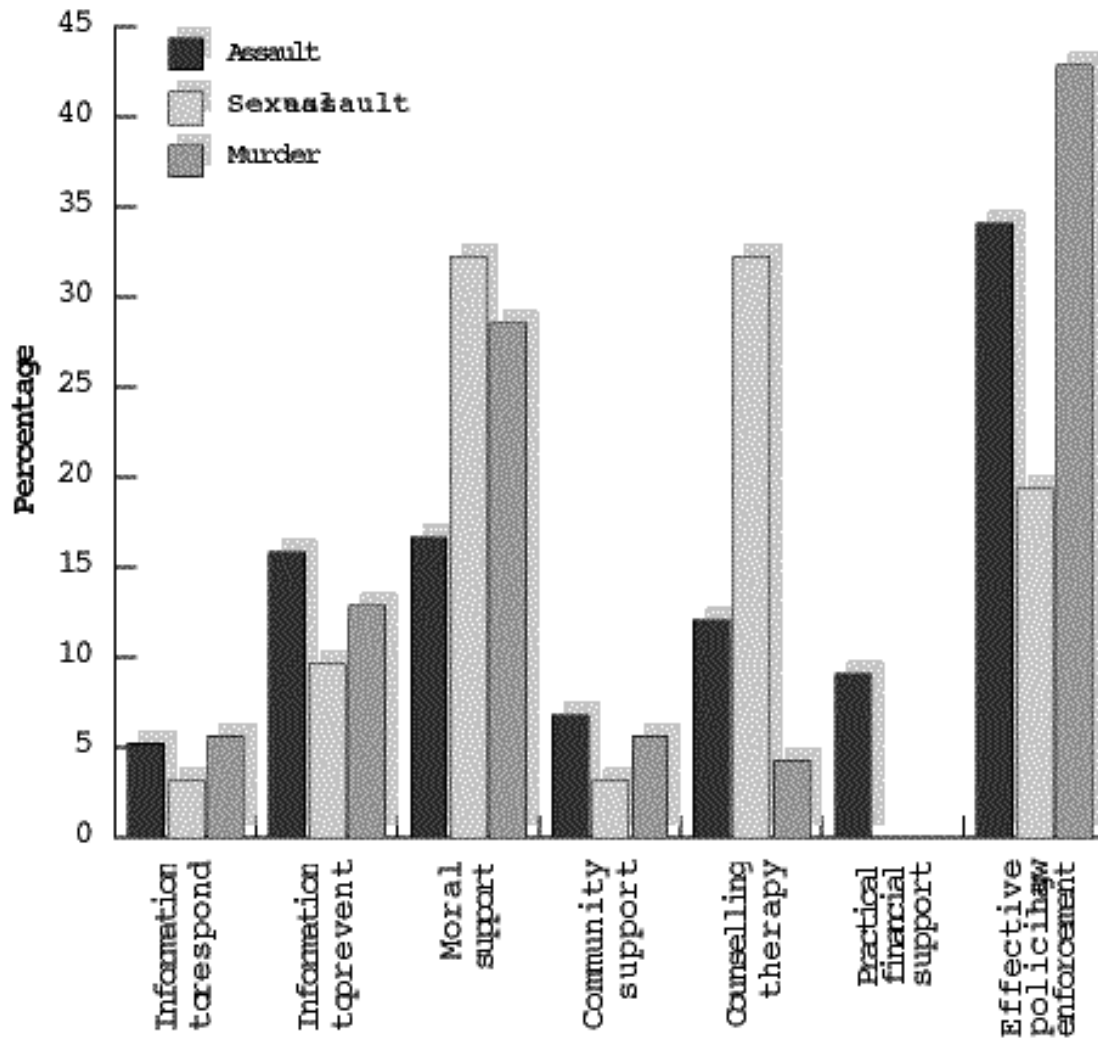


Figure 33: Kind of support that victims of violent crime would have liked



A surprising number of victims wanted better policing; and indeed this is where many victims turned to for help. Both are encouraging, since it suggests that, despite a lack of confidence in their ability to reduce crime, all faith has not been lost in the police. However, it is equally likely that, in search of some response to their plight, victims simply have nowhere else to turn. It may also be the case that soon after victimisation by serious crimes, victims think more of justice and retribution than of the trauma they have suffered. This may become a concern only some time after the experience.

The lack of alternatives to the police is illustrated by the fact that, when asked whether they had ever heard of victim support agencies, the vast majority of victims said they had not. Hijacking victims were more likely than any others to know about such agencies, probably because of the high profile of the crime and the substantial preventive and other information supplied by the media and the police (Figure 34). An even smaller proportion of victims said they had never actually used the services of such agencies. For the victims of most crime types, 5 per cent or less had experience of support agencies. Murder victims were the only exception: 7 per cent said they had used these services (Figure 35).

Figure 34: Whether victims of particular crimes had heard of victim support agencies

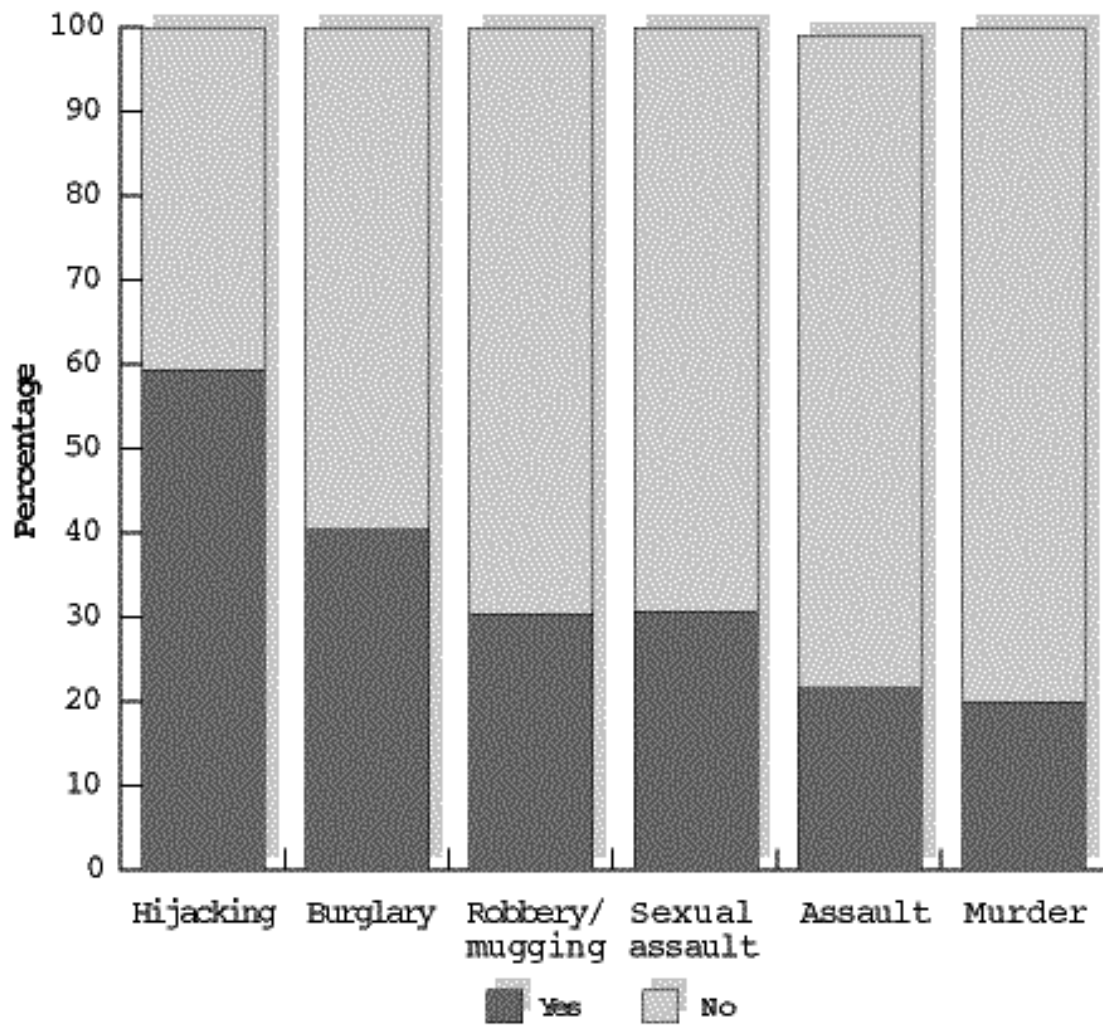
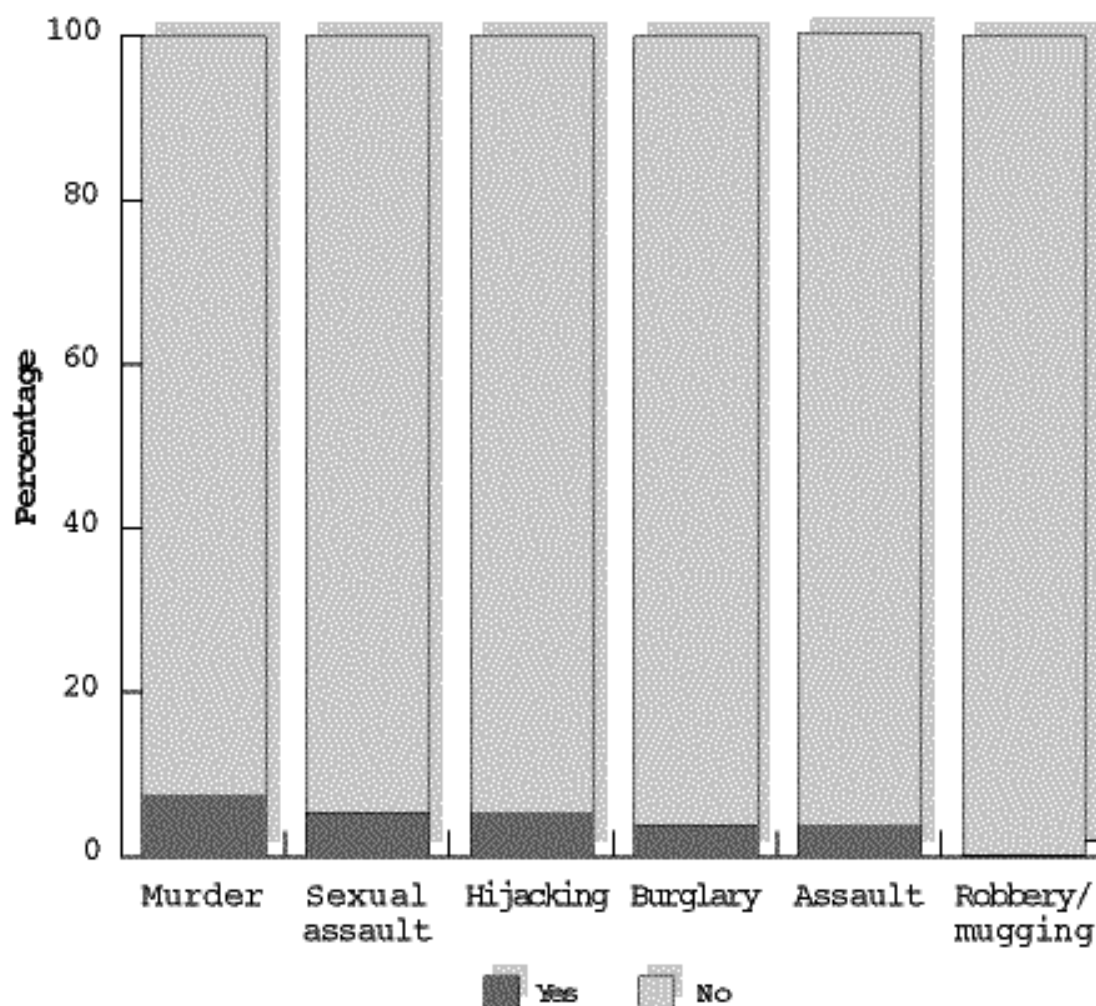


Figure 35: Whether victims of particular crimes had used the services of victim support agencies



In the absence of victim support services which meet the needs of the majority of people, and an awareness of their existence and benefits (and no doubt given the very high levels of crime), law enforcement is regarded as key by the victims of crime. This is a view shared by the population of Pretoria more generally as well.

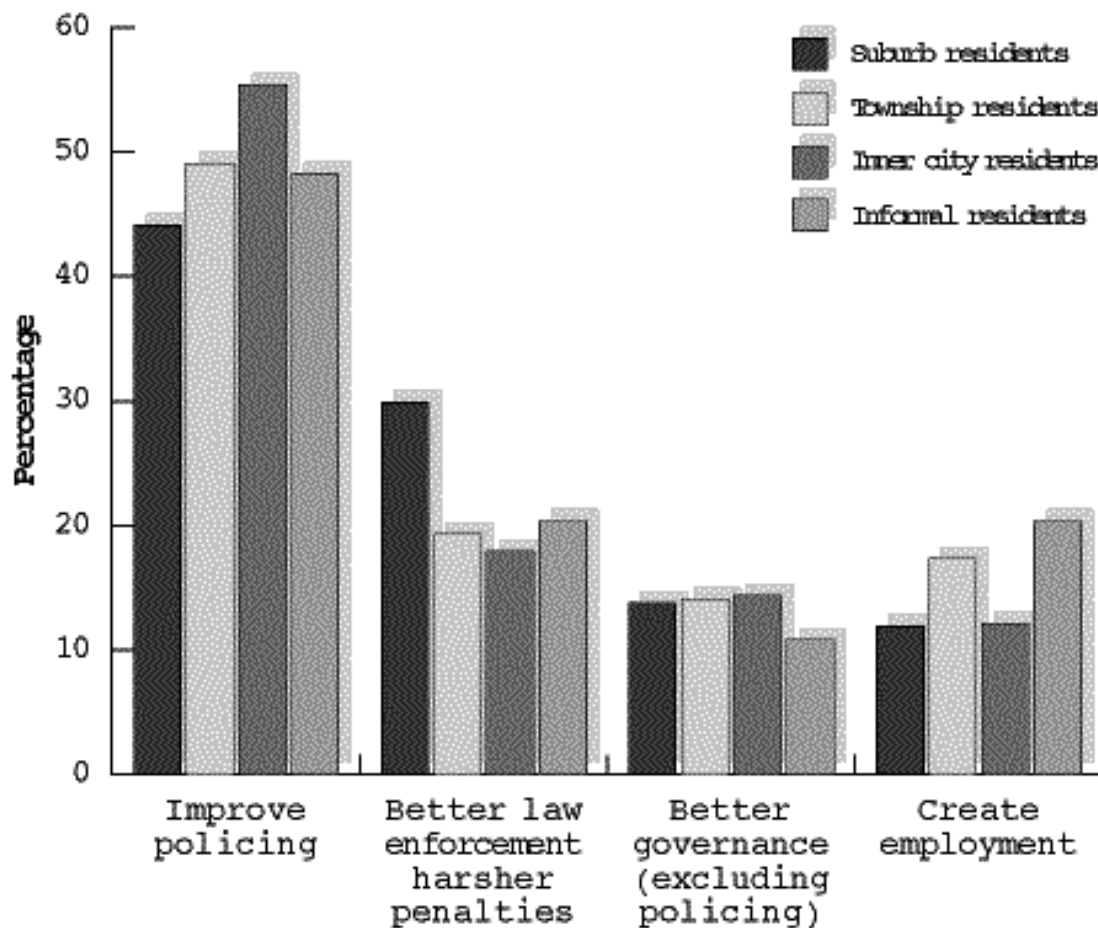
Strategies to make Pretoria safer

People were asked both what the government could do to make the city safer, as well as what they themselves could do. In both cases, the majority of people identified policing and criminal justice solutions as the most important. Nearly half of all respondents (47 per cent) said the government should improve policing, and a further 26 per cent called for better law enforcement. Equal proportions thought better governance in general (excluding criminal justice issues) and creating jobs (14 per cent, respectively) would improve safety in the city.

Not everyone in Pretoria shared these views, however, reflecting varying levels of crime, fear of crime and service delivery by the police for people living in different parts of the city. People living in the townships, inner city and

informal areas were more likely to identify better policing as a critical intervention for government than were those in the suburbs (Figure 36).

Figure 36: Views of people living in different parts of the city on what government can do to make Pretoria safe



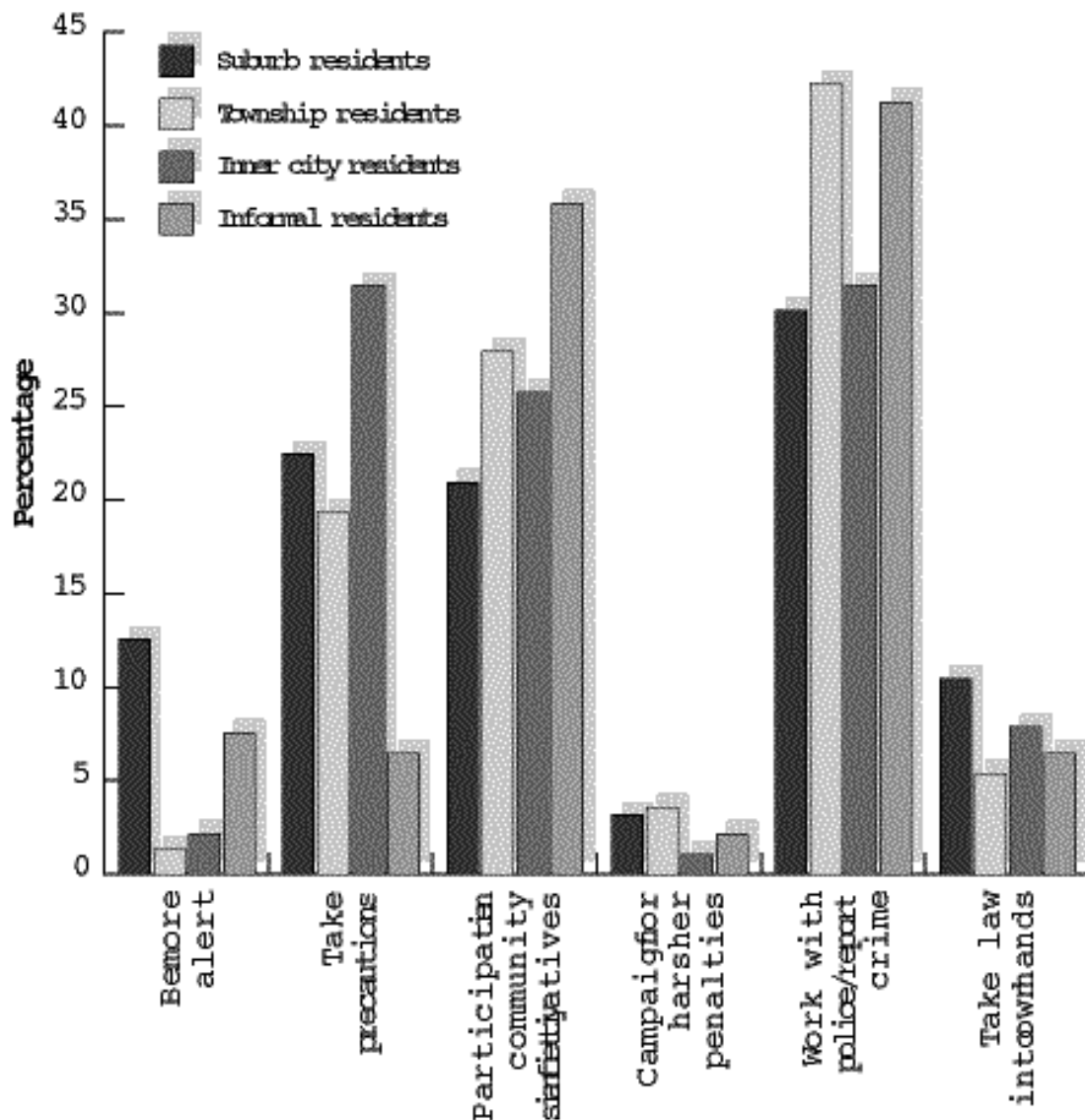
Similar trends applied to those people who identified employment creation as an issue. In a reversal of this trend, harsher penalties and better law enforcement was a more popular solution for people in the suburbs than for any others. The views of men and women also diverged on the issue. Thirty two per cent of women thought harsher penalties and law enforcement was needed, compared with 21 per cent of men, who, in turn, were more likely to favour improving the police (54 per cent) than were women (38 per cent). It is likely that women’s fear of sexual crimes influenced this selection: effective justice is often regarded as the most important short term solution to sexual violence, while the effectiveness of the police in securing women’s safety is often questioned.

Government cannot be expected to provide effective safety to the city’s residents alone. People were therefore asked what they could do to make Pretoria a safer place. Again, many people saw the solution in terms of more effective policing and criminal justice. Thirty four per cent said they would support the efforts of the police and report crimes. A significant proportion, however, also identified community-based initiatives, private security and preventive behaviour as important. A quarter of people said they would

participate in community safety initiatives, and 30 per cent opted for taking precautions and being more alert.

Significantly, these are all constructive responses which do not threaten the state – one potential consequence of high levels of fear of crime and low levels of confidence in the government’s ability to respond. In fact, only 9 per cent of people in Pretoria said that taking the law into their own hands could enhance safety in the city. This solution was more popular among people living in the suburbs (10,5 per cent) than those in townships (5 per cent) and in informal settlements (6,5 per cent). People living in the less wealthy parts of the city were more inclined to choose co-operative safety strategies than individual interventions (Figure 37). More township and informal settlement residents said they would work with the police and participate in community safety initiatives than did people living in the suburbs. In the latter parts of the city in turn, preventive behaviour such as taking precautions and being more alert was more popular than in the townships and informal areas

Figure 37: Views of people living in different parts of the city on what they can do to make Pretoria safer



Implications for interventions

The attitudes of people in Pretoria with regard to victim support and other state and non-state interventions, considered against the backdrop of levels of crime and fear of crime, suggest several conclusions for the development of a local crime prevention strategy in the city:

- People see the police as key to the enhancing of safety in the city. Given that levels of anxiety about crime are particularly high, and that actual crime levels and the risk of victimisation often bear little relation to fear, interventions should include the police wherever possible. Visible police patrols, for example, while they are less likely to reduce actual crime levels, can have an important impact on lessening the fear of crime. Similarly, enhancing surveillance in areas which induce fear of crime is important, and need not necessarily involve the police. Car guards, private security and the public can also fulfil this role.
- Related to this, interventions to reduce fear of crime in Pretoria's inner city areas are important. Many crimes are less likely to happen here than in other parts of the city, yet most people feel unsafe in the city centre. A visible police presence, environmental design interventions, such as better lighting and surveillance, regulation of informal traders and the enforcement of other bylaws, could reduce levels of anxiety.
- Many people in Pretoria are prepared to take preventive action and participate in community initiatives to enhance their safety. Furthermore, many people identified information to prevent crime as one type of support they would have liked after victimisation. A local crime prevention strategy can make a key intervention by providing people with this type of information. This is also likely to reduce feelings of insecurity, since many victims said they felt safer after taking such precautions. Preventive action, however, seems to be favoured by certain sectors of the population more than by others, and may relate to issues of affordability: those people who have options and can make choices are often more able to afford behaviour changes.
- Meeting the needs of the victims of violent crime is likely to present the greatest challenges. These crimes often result in the greatest levels of fear, and their victims are least likely to take preventive measures in the wake of victimisation. For those that do, feelings of safety are not likely to improve dramatically. Since many violent crimes occur in the home environment and between people who know one another, outside interventions both to prevent and respond to these offences, are also more difficult. However, victims of violence clearly require moral support, counselling and protection. Since many turn to the police for assistance (and not to counsellors and other community-based structures), improving their perceptions of the police through better service delivery in the charge office would provide an important point of contact through which to reach these victims. These are also good places to supply victims with information about victim support services, their location and potential benefits. Victims of violent crime are also

most likely to use the services of support agencies – where these exist – and the activities of these agencies should therefore be supported.

- The survey indicates clearly that crime levels, the extent of anxiety about crime, as well as the responses of people towards crime and the police, differ for those living in townships and suburbs. Many of these trends are also distinct for white and black people in Pretoria. These disparities need to be applied to whatever strategies and programmes are developed for the Greater Pretoria Metropolitan Council.