

Tshwane (Pretoria) Office

Physical:

Block C, Brooklyn Court, Veale Street,
New Muckleneuck, Tshwane (Pretoria)

Postal:

PO Box 1787, Brooklyn Square 0075

Tshwane (Pretoria), South Africa

Tel: +27 12 346 9500/02

Fax: +27 12 460 0998

E-mail: iss@issafrica.org



www.issafrica.org

VAT No: 473 0129 782

Non-Profit Reg No: 006-981 NPO

A Non-Profit Trust, Reg No: T1922/91

Executive Director: Dr Jakkie Cilliers

Chairperson of the Council: Dr Salim Ahmed Salim

Trustees: Selby Baqwa, Lucy Mailula, Jakkie Cilliers

FACT SHEET:

Explaining the official crime statistics for 2010/11

9 September 2011

Total crime levels in South Africa

South Africa's overall crime situation has clearly improved substantially compared to the past few years, especially in relation to interpersonal and property related violent crimes. This is good news sorely needed by a nation that has for a long time borne the brunt of an intolerable crime problem. The crime figures for 2010/11 are not able to tell us about current levels of crime, but they can tell us what happened between March 2010 and March 2011. They also allow us to follow the trends in overall levels of crime nationally and provincially over the past eight years, since 2003/4.

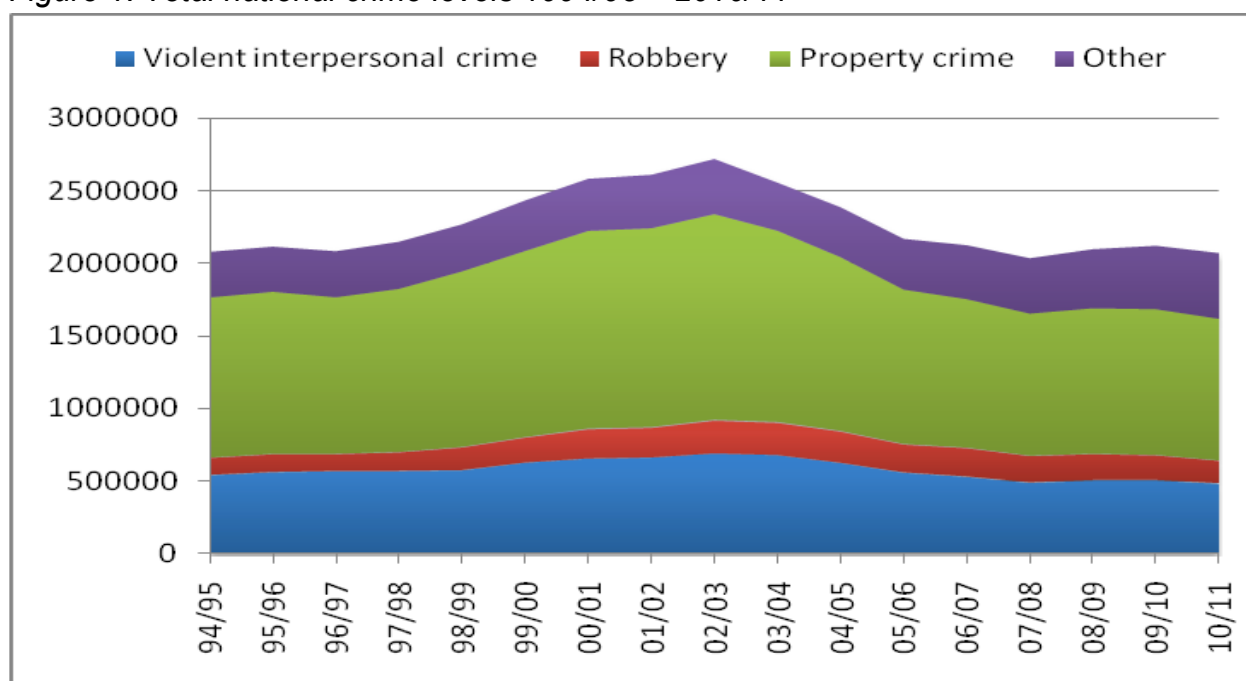
Many people don't realise that the South African crime rate peaked in the 2002/03 financial year recording its highest level since 1994. Between 2002/03 and 2007/08, the total crime level decreased by about 25%. Over the following two years ending in 2009/2010, the total crime rate then increased by 4%. This trend was mostly driven by increases in property related crime such as commercial crime and burglary. However, total crime in 2010/11 resumed its downward trend when it decreased by 2.4% on the previous year dropping from 2 121 887 to 2 071 487 reported cases.

On the basis of these new figures, there is much to be optimistic about. Over the past few years we have seen a significant improvement in key categories of crime, particularly in relation to interpersonal and property related violent crimes. Of course, it is important to bear in mind that these figures do not allow us to reach the conclusion that crime is no longer a problem in South Africa. Far too many murders, rapes and robberies take place each day and the impact of crime still tears at our social fabric. The experiences of victims should not be forgotten when looking at the crime trends nor



should we forget the very real fear that many South Africans experience each day because of our high crime rate.

Figure 1: Total national crime levels 1994/95 – 2010/11



While the national crime levels provide us with an indication of which categories are increasing or decreasing, they don't tell us anything about the victims and perpetrators, or the key reasons behind changes in the trends. Unless one disaggregates the crime statistics by crime type at provincial or local level, the statistics can raise more questions than they answer.

Can we trust the crime statistics?

Every year when the police release the crime figures questions are asked about the credibility of the statistics. These questions are partly based on reported cases of figures having been manipulated at police station level in order to present a positive picture that would improve the image of the SAPS. It is not possible to determine with any certainty how big this problem is or what impact it might have on the crime statistics. However, it is unlikely that station-level manipulation will dramatically alter trends over time, and the overall crime picture is likely to be a fair reflection of the national crime rate.

We base our opinion on the official crime statistics from other independent data sources available from which to assess the trends. For example, the three independent 'National



Victims of Crime' surveys conducted in 1997, 2003 and 2007. We can also assess trends in business-related crime from data collected by private bodies such as the South African Banking Risk and Information Centre (SABRIC), the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa. Another useful source is the annual Grant Thornton International Business Report measured victimisation trends among business owners, their immediate families and employees.

Data from all of these sources points to decreases in serious and violent crimes and thereby corroborates the police's crime statistics for the current reporting period.

There are however certain categories of crime for which it is very difficult to obtain comparative information. This is particularly the case for rape and other sexual offences. The lack of comparative information for sexual offences is however only one of the problems we face since these crimes also suffer from particularly low reporting rates. In addition to which the SAPS statistics have since 2005 only provided us with information about 'total sexual offences' – a very broad category which doesn't allow us to determine specific trends.

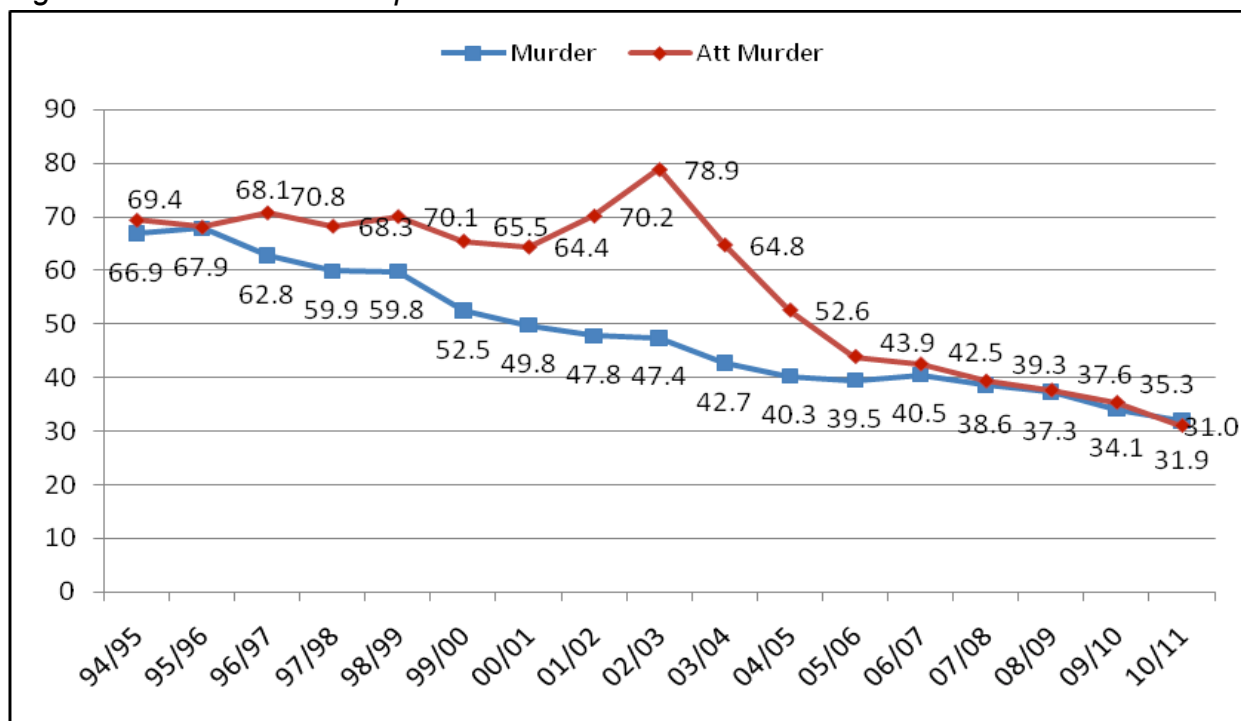
Murder and attempted murder

Murder and attempted murder rates maintain their consistent downward trend of the last sixteen years. Since 2009/10 murder has decreased by 6.5% per 100,000 people, which is slightly less than the decrease of 8.4% we saw between 2007/8 and 2009/10. Attempted murder decreased by 12.2%, which is more than double the 6% per 100,000 population decrease last year. The national murder rate is thus 31.9 per 100 000 and attempted murder is at 31 per 100 000 (Figure 2).

These rates are based on 15 940 murders and 15492 attempted murders that were reported to the South African Police Service in 2010/11. Although it is a very positive sign that our murder rate is declining continuously and has done so substantially over the years, South Africa's murder rate is still 4.5 times greater than the international average of approximately 7 murders per 100 000. We still require considerable improvements before our murder rate is not considered unacceptably high and it is necessary to undertake research into the effective interventions that will improve the situation in violence prone communities.



Figure 2: Murder and attempted murder trends 1994/95 – 2010/11



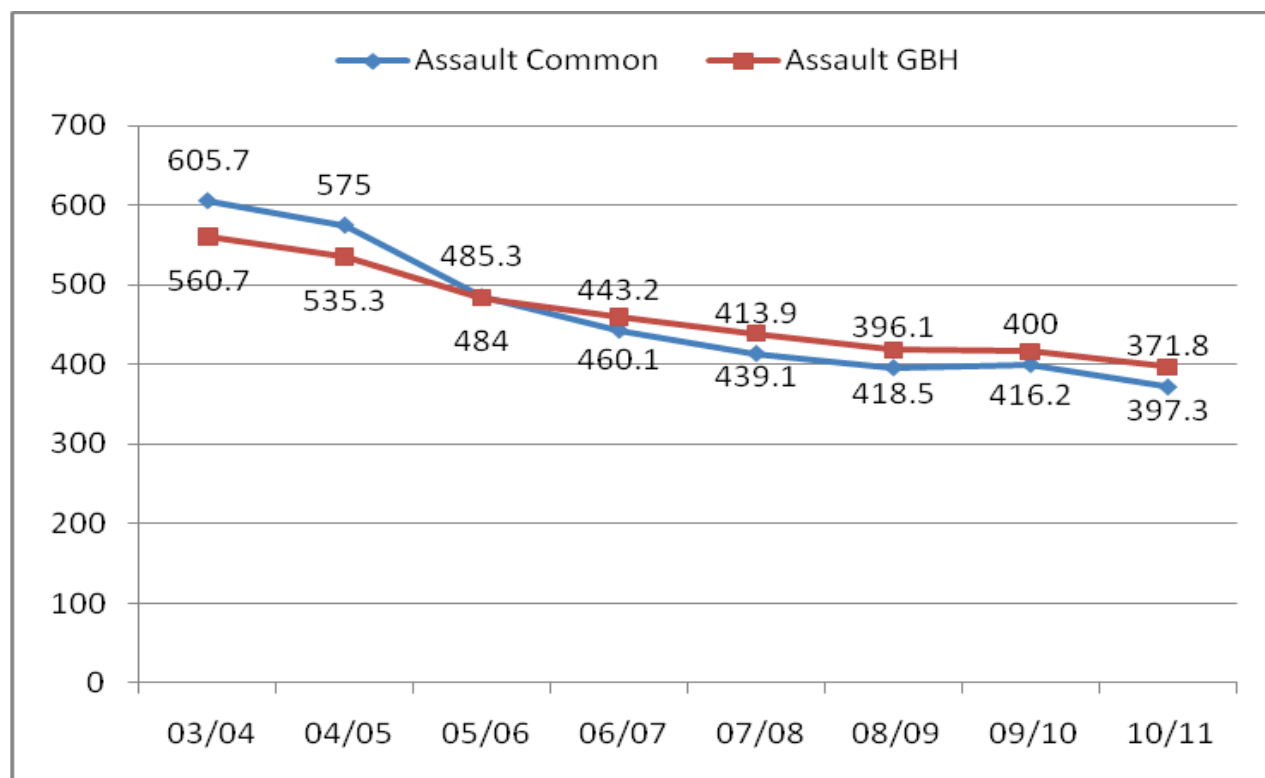
A vast majority of murder victims are males with eight males being murdered in South Africa for every female murder victim. A worrying trend in the most recent statistics is that the murders of women increased by 5% when compared to the previous year. Greater attention must be given as to why this is the case and appropriate interventions undertaken to address the increase in the murder of women in South Africa.

Assault common and assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm (GBH)

Assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm (GBH) considered serious assault where people are injured continues its downward trend of the last seven years and decreased this year by a further 4.6% to a rate of 397.3 per 100 000. After a slight increase of 1% in 2009/10, common assault has again decreased this year by 7.1% and now stands at 372 per 100 000. While the police do not provide a break down of the assault statistics it is generally recognised that many cases of domestic violence are recorded within this category.



Figure 3: Trends for assault common and assault with grievous bodily harm 2003/04 – 2010/11



Sexual offences

The new *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, No. 32 of 2007*, came into effect in December 2007 and created a number of 'new' sexual offences other than 'conventional' rape. This makes it impossible to compare the statistics on sexual offences before December 2007 with more recent figures.

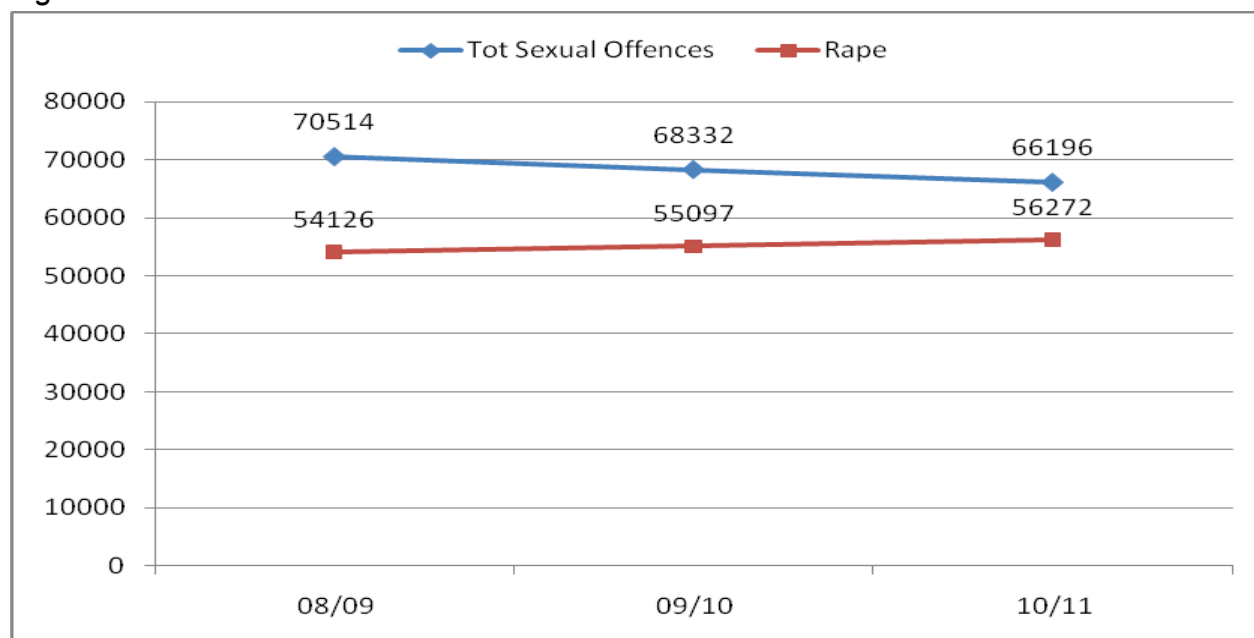
However, it is possible to assess the trends over the past three years. In 2008/9 the police recorded 70 514 cases of 'total sexual offences'. In the 2009/10 this figure declined slightly to 68 332; and in 2010/11 it decreased again to 66 196. However these figures don't tell us much about sexual violence because the catch-all category of total sexual offences covers a wide range of crimes. As many as 59 offences are defined by the Sexual Offences Amendment Act including crimes related to sex-work and public indecency. It is also important to remember that sexual offences suffer from low reporting rates and the crime statistics are thus not a good indication of the actual number of cases.

For the first time since 2005 the Minister of Police, in his speech, provided the statistics for rape. He said that rape continues to increase, as it has since 2008/9. In 2008/9 the



police recorded 54 126 cases of rape, this increased to 55 097 in 2009/10 and increased again this year to 56 272 (representing a 2.1% increase from the previous year).

Figure 4: Sexual offences 2008/09 – 2010/11

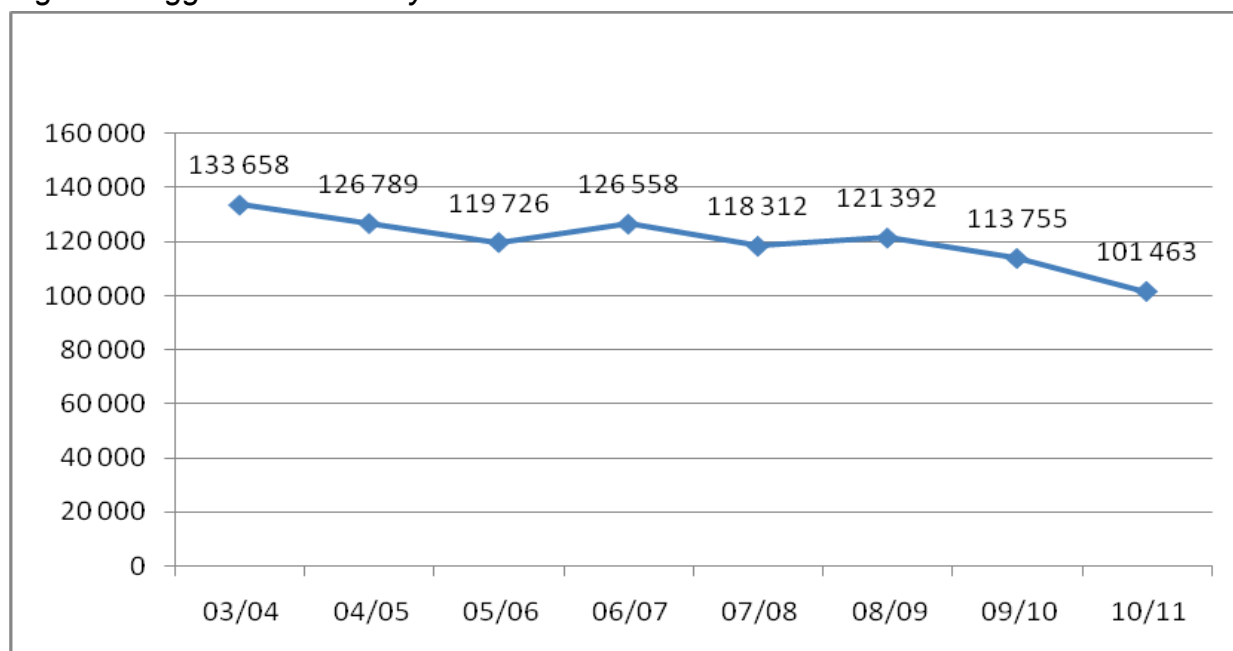


Aggravated robbery

Aggravated robbery is a form of violent property related crime and comprises of seven sub-categories, including street robbery, robbery at residential premises (house robbery), robbery at non-residential premises (business robbery), carjacking, truck hijacking, cash-in-transit (CIT) robbery and bank robbery.



Figure 5: Aggravated robbery 2003/04 – 2010/11



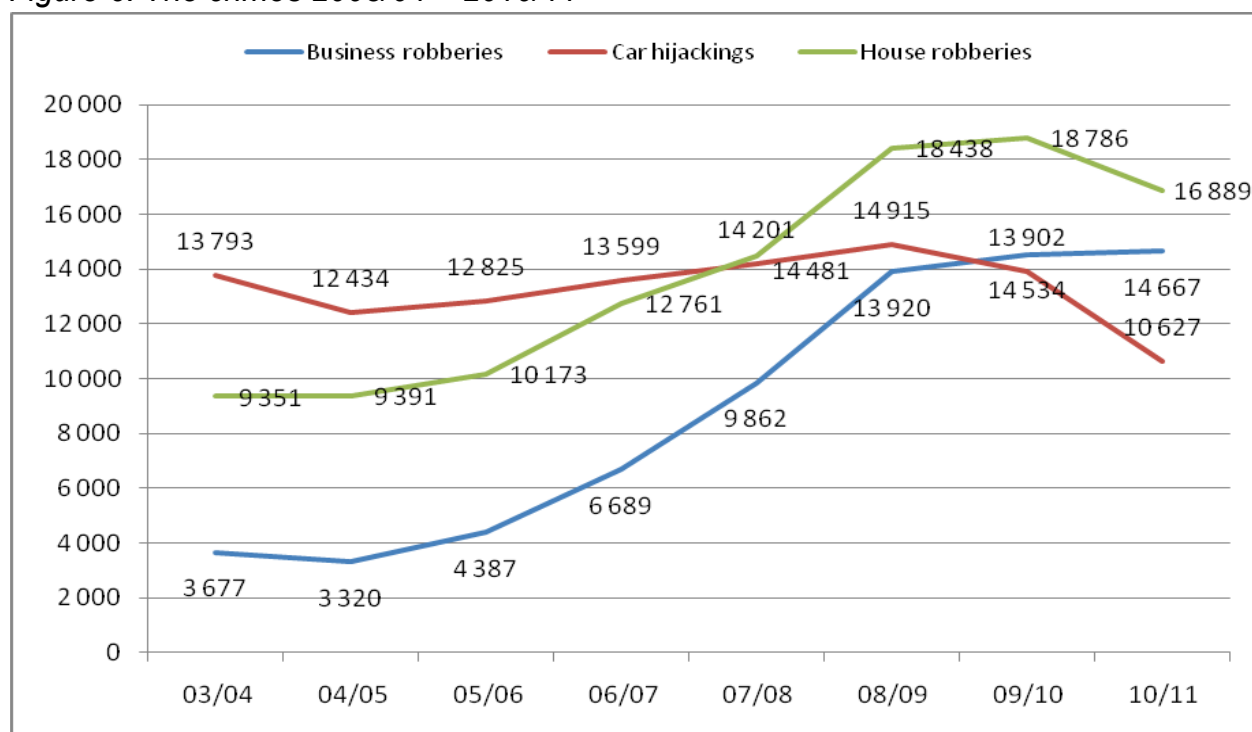
This form of robbery has a serious impact on perceptions of safety because of its violent nature and the oft-reported brutality of the robbers. The economic impact of aggravated robbery is both direct (cash and property) and indirect (emotional trauma, cost of security, insurance and investment limitations). As a consequence it is encouraging that this type of crime has now decreased by 10.8 % since 2009/10.

Aggregated robbery is at an eight year low with a 24.1% decrease since 2003/2004. This is the third consecutive year that we have seen decreases in total levels of aggravated robbery (16.4% over the 3 years). However, within the category of aggravated robbery it is especially the so-called trio crimes of house robbery, business robbery and car hijacking that catches the popular imagination and feeds into negative perceptions of safety.

That vehicle hijackings have declined by 23% this year is extremely good news, as is the fact that house robbery decreased by 10.1%, the first time a decrease has been recorded since 2003/04. The 100% increase in house robberies between 2003/04 and 2009/10 has caused notable concern within the police and promoted substantial public fear. Another shift has occurred in business robbery which increased by 298.9% since 2003/2004. The rate of increase in business robbery slowed down for the first time in six years from previous annual average increases of around 40% to a marginal increase of 0.9% in the past year.



Figure 6: Trio crimes 2003/04 – 2010/11



The decrease in business robbery is arguably a consequence of cooperation between the police, and role-players such as SABRIC and the Consumer Goods Council. Improved police practices such as visible policing and the effective use of crime intelligence could also be credited with these changes.

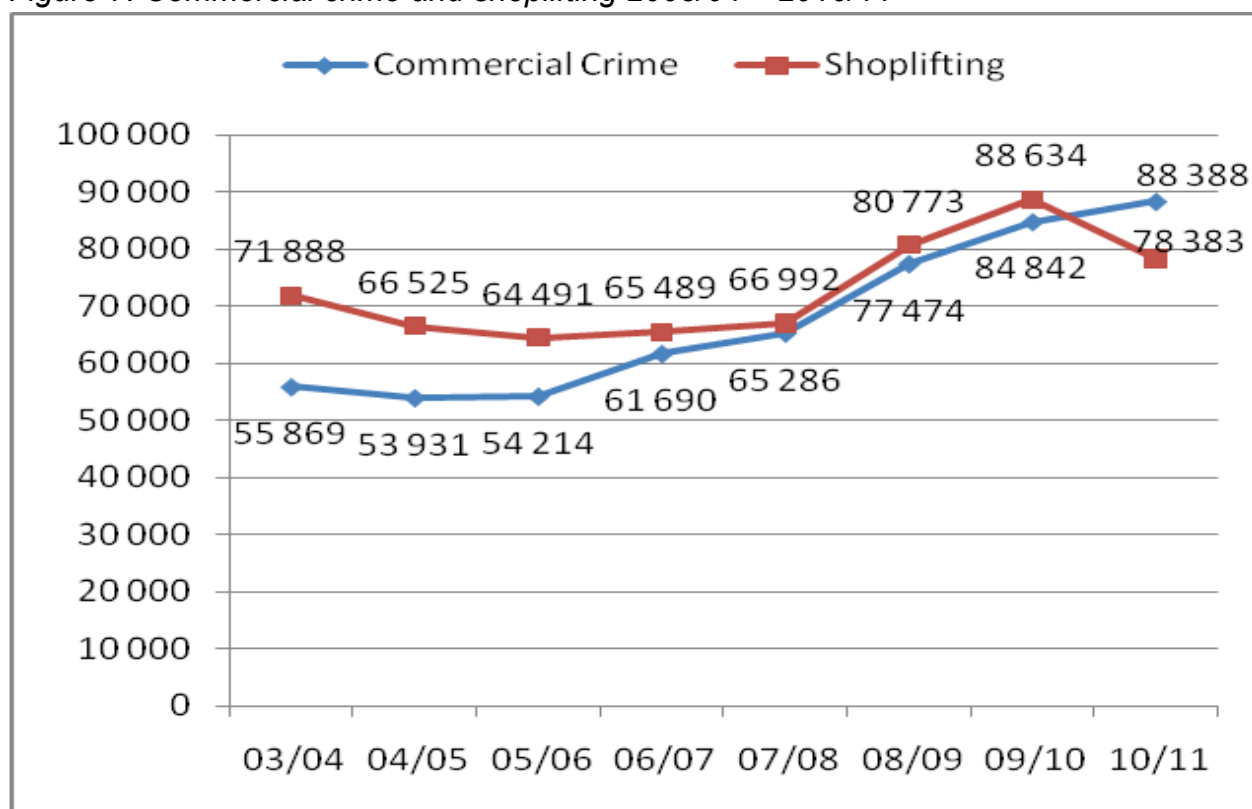
Commercial crime and shoplifting

Unlike other forms of crime, commercial crime has continued with its upward trend this year with a year-on-year increase of some 4.2%. This means that since 2003/4 we have seen an increase of some 58.2% in while collar crime. White-collar crime is most prevalent in Gauteng with 34 756 cases, followed by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape with reported cases of 15 276 and 11 888 respectively.

Shoplifting on the other hand has seen an 11.6% decrease since 2009/10, despite the economic recession. The Western Cape stands out as having the highest ratio of shoplifting in the country with 359.2 cases per 100 000 or 18 763 reported cases, while Gauteng has a rate of 221.3 cases per 100 000 which accounts for 24 767 reported cases or one third of all shoplifting cases nationally.



Figure 7: Commercial crime and shoplifting 2003/04 – 2010/11



To what extent is policing causing crime to go down?

There is a common assumption that the crime statistics are a reflection of police performance. Therefore, people think that if the crime statistics increase that the police must be doing a bad job and if they decrease the police must be performing effectively. However, in most cases of crime, this is not a correct assumption to make. The possible reasons for reductions in at a national crime rates are rarely simple or straightforward. Even in countries where there a substantial amount of capacity exists for research and analysis, experts seldom agree on why certain crimes increase or decrease.

What we do know however is that there are always a number of different reasons why national crime rates change and that the impact of different factors may vary. For example, crimes associated with interpersonal violence such as murder, attempted murder, assault and rape, largely happens between people that know each other (between 60-80% of cases) and with specific reference to murder, police docket analysis has shown that approximately 65% of these incidents were motivated by 'social situations' involving arguments, jealousy and other domestic issues and were often associated with alcohol abuse. A far smaller proportion of murder (16%) occurs as a result of another crime such as robbery.



The extent to which various socio-economic factors drive the murder rate may differ from community to community. Consequently, the police can do little to address most of the factors that lead to most murders, assaults and rape and therefore changes in these crimes are often as a result of factors independent of policing.

This does not mean that the police have no contribution to make in reducing these types of crime. It is most likely that the legislation restricting firearm ownership and the removal of large numbers of illegal firearms by the police has played an important role in reducing the murder rate in South Africa. However, in the most recent statistics even though the number of people charged with illegal possession of firearms declined by 2% the murder rate continued to decrease notably.

There are various crimes upon which the police can have a very direct impact. These are typically organised and violent property related crimes such as aggravated robbery and ATM bombings are concerned we expect the police to make an impact, both in terms of deterrence and through thorough investigations and good intelligence that should result in proactive and reactive action, including arrests.

To some extent we did see some positive indications of the police's ability to achieve this type of impact during the FIFA World Cup in 2010. We saw increased levels of police visibility and law enforcement, as well as some impressive arrests for serious and violent crimes committed during this event. Some of these good policing practices are continuing and should be further expanded.

This fact sheet was prepared by Gareth Newham, Johan Burger, Chandre Gould & Lizette Lancaster. The Crime and Justice Programme, Institute for Security Studies

For more information including detailed crime maps for all policing precincts in South Africa please visit the Crime and Justice Information and Analysis Hub at www.issafrica.org/crimehub

