



REPORT

Proceedings of the Crime, Justice and Politics Programme (CJPP) seminar on the release of the third National Victims of Crime Survey (2007) and the launch of the Crime and Justice Information Hub (CJIH) Pretoria, 8 May 2008

Dr. Jakkie Cilliers the Executive Director of the ISS opened the seminar by way of introductory and welcome remarks. During his talk he thanked the various representatives of civil society, the donor community, public officials, the media and academics for showing up at this event.

The responsibilities for chairing the seminar were taken up by Prince Mashele who in his capacity as Programme Head briefly spoke about the name change from CJP to CJPP. More pertinently, he unveiled the CJIH and the thinking behind it as an information-hub. Prince revealed that the information hub includes a 'Situation Room' that is made up of maps and information and telecommunications technologies for the illustration, tracking and analysis of national crime trends. He also explained that through the daily activities of researchers at CJPP, the CJIH is aimed at making a positive contribution to the fight against crime by operating as a unique one-stop information hub on crime and its solutions.

The three main panelists included:

- (1) Dr. Johan Burger, ISS – who provided an update on the crime situation in the country with the aid of official 2006/7 South African Polices Services crime stats and additional 2008 data from entities such as SABRIC;
- (2) Antoinette Louw, ISS – whose presentation focused on the methodology, main findings and highlights of the victims of crime survey;
- (3) Antony Altbeker, Author and Independent Consultant – who provided a critique of the survey.

Dr. Burger started off by saying that although South Africa has in the past few years been characterised by an overall decrease in the crime rate, 2006/07 was a particularly bad year with regard to violent crimes. Whilst some crimes such as rape had fallen by 4.2% between 2005/06 and 2006/7, house and business robberies had increased by 7% and 29.3% respectively. He revealed that these

were indeed the fastest growing crimes in the country. Another area of concern is the rise of ATM attacks as a crime threat. Whilst these attacks stood at 82 in 2006 they rose up to 368 in 2007. Pertinently, towards the end of his presentation Dr. Burger went on to suggest that there was some positive news as far as the first semester of 2008 was concerned (in comparison with 2007) in the sense that the early data appears to show overall decreases in crime with the exception of house and business robberies.

Antoinette Louw started her presentation by going through some of the methodological dimensions of the victims of crime survey in terms of data collection, analysis and presentation of the findings. She revealed that the 2007 survey had been conducted between October and November 2007. Households were randomly selected across the country based on updated 2001 census data published by StatsSA in 2007. A national sample of 4,500 was realised from all the 9 provinces. She paid attention to the following key (findings) issues and/or questions from the survey:

- How have crime levels, as measured by the survey, changed since 1998?
- How safe do South Africans' feel and how have our views about crime changed over time?
- Access to, and confidence in, the police?
- To what extent are we, as individuals and communities, taking responsibility for our safety?

It is in this regard that she revealed that in terms of the percentage of respondents who experienced crime in the past 12 months the survey shows that crime is generally down to 12% since 1998 and 4% since 2003. Notable decreases (in terms of people's experiences) include the following crime categories: corruption, theft out of vehicle and stock theft. However, key increases include robbery and car theft. Housebreaking remains as the most common crime.

With regard to the question of South Africans' perceptions of their own safety, respondents were asked for their opinions on how crime levels had changed in their areas over the past four years? In response to this, Antoinette pointed out that the findings show that even though victimisation levels had decreased since 2003, most South Africans still thought that crime was on the increase. In fact, more people held this view in 2007 than in 2003. Of interest here was the finding that Indian respondents were much more likely to think that crime has increased. This trend was evident across several indicators of perception and fear of crime. Other views (by racial category) have become more similar since 2003.

More specifically, when asked about how safe the respondents felt about walking alone in their own areas after dark she said that South Africans feel increasingly unsafe in their areas, despite declining crime levels. Again, almost all Indian respondents said they felt unsafe with only 3% saying that they felt safe.

During her presentation she also remarked that the survey finding concerning the increase in perceptions about robbery and housebreaking was worrying given that these are the crimes that tend to heighten peoples feelings of being unsafe. In addition, despite good access to the police, public feelings of safety and levels of confidence in the police have continued to fall since 2003.

Finally, despite policy and strategy aimed at Community Policing Forums and similar initiatives, Antoinette said that the survey shows that public participation in these forums remains as low in 2007 as in 2003. She went on to suggest that perhaps what is required is a new approach to mobilising the public against crime.

Antony Altebeker offered a rejoinder to the presentations of the two previous speakers. In doing this, he suggested that the rise in robbery rates maybe due to urbanisation, low conviction rates and the displacement of robbery from non-violent property crime. As far as the survey was concerned he pointed out that the robbery victimisation rate of 4% – 4,000 people per 100,000 (10 times the SAPS figure) – is actually double the result for 2003. He went on to query as to whether the robbery rate had really doubled in five years? He raised concerns about the methodology of the Survey in terms of sample size. He also argued that the issue of the household versus individual crime was not clearly delineated in the Survey. He called for a change in framing of the related question. As far as he was concerned if you exclude household figures from 2007, then the rise for robbery rates is much smaller (from 2% to 2.1%, rather than from 2% to 4%). In addition, Antony felt that if you do include household crimes (in 2003 and/or 2007), then one couldn't just add them to the individual's direct experience when calculating the victimisation rate.

The seminar ended with a question and answer session / discussion through which the audience got to engage and debate with each other and the presenters on the content and implications of the Survey findings.

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