The South African Police Service (SAPS) released the crime statistics for the period 1 April 2016 to 30 March 2017. Therefore, these crime statistics cannot tell us what the situation is right now, nor what the situation may have been since April 2017. Nevertheless, they do help us to better understand long-term trends in key categories.

The term ‘property-related crime’ refers to crimes in which property is stolen without the use of violence or force (i.e. there is no direct confrontation between perpetrators and victims). The police report on the following types of property crime:

- Residential burglary
- Business burglary
- Commercial crime
- Shoplifting
- Theft out of or from motor vehicles
- Theft of motor vehicles
- Stock theft
- ‘All theft not mentioned elsewhere’

Overall, the total number of property-related crimes reported to the police decreased by a marginal 0.5% compared to the previous year.

The five categories where decreases were reported are as follows:

- Residential burglary decreased by 1.6% to 246 654 cases, representing a 0.8% increase over five years with an average of 676 homes reported broken into each day on average
- Theft of motor vehicles and motorcycles decreased by 0.9% to 53 307 cases
- Theft out of and from motor vehicle decreased by 0.9% to 138 172 cases
- ‘All theft not mentioned elsewhere’ decreased by 3.6% to 328 272
- Recorded incidents of shoplifting decreased by 1.9% to 67 454
Three categories experienced an increase namely:

- Business burglary increased by 0.8% to 75 618.
- Commercial crime (which include crimes such as cybercrime and corruption) increased by 5.2% to 73 550 in the past year.
- Stock-theft increased by 8.8% to 26 902.

These three categories affect not only business but also livelihood of employees but also commercial and subsistence farmers.

Over a ten-year period, reported residential burglary decreased by around 0.7% while theft of motor vehicles and bicycles decreased by 38%. However, business burglary increased by 29.8%.

Source: 2005/2006 to 2016/17 SAPS statistics

Provincial Picture

When population is taken into account for provinces, Western Cape residents experience the most housebreakings followed by the Northern Cape, Free State and Gauteng. These provinces report to the SAPS more burglaries per capita than the national average of 441.7 burglaries per 100 000 population.
The 2016/2017 Victims of Crime Survey noted that only half of households report these burglaries to the SAPS.\(^1\) This may impact on the above burglary rates as reporting percentages may differ by community and by province. Reporting rates may be heavily affected by confidence in the SAPS. For example, satisfaction levels with the police was only 38.4% for the victims of housebreaking in the 2016/2017 VOCS. The main reasons provided for not reporting these incidents included that the ‘police could not do anything’ and ‘police won’t do anything’.

The satisfaction levels differed depending on population group and province of residence. About 59.5% of white headed households who experienced housebreaking/burglary were satisfied with the police response compared to only 33.3% of households with Black African household heads. Northern Cape households were the most satisfied with the SAPS compared to only 28.1% of KwaZulu-Natal households.\(^2\)

Crime intelligence is vital for the police to effectively reduce burglaries. Most burglaries are perpetrated by organised crime syndicates and by repeat offenders who use criminal networks to sell their stolen goods. If effective intelligence techniques are utilised, the police should be able to identify the networks and individuals involved in these types of crimes and target them for criminal investigation. In addition to good crime intelligence, solid detective work can ensure that sufficient evidence is obtained to successfully prosecute those involved in these crimes thereby decreasing the levels at which they occur.

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Usefulness of Crime Statistics

The police crime statistics show us how reported crime levels increase or decrease over time. This is important because it can tell us whether efforts to reduce certain types of crime have been successful or not in the previous financial year.

For crime statistics to be more useful than they are now, they need to be released for each police precinct at least once per quarter. This would enable the local police to use the statistics to encourage communities to respond to emerging crime risks such as an increase in house or business robberies. Communities could then develop specific crime prevention interventions to respond the problem. After three months, communities would be able to use the crime statistics to determine whether their initiatives had been successful or not and make adjustments if necessary.

Fortunately, the Cabinet took a decision in 2016 that the crime statistics would be released every quarter. Unfortunately however, this decision has yet to be implemented properly as the quarterly crime statistics were not released at the beginning of each quarter, but at irregular intervals. Furthermore, the police precinct level statistics are not released per quarter so communities are still not able to access this information for crime prevention purposes. Hopefully, the Ministry of Police will give attention to this in the near future.

There is some good news as currently, the SAPS are working with Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) to enhance the quality and integrity of the statistics. Hopefully this process will result in better quality crime data which will result in improved responses to crime in South Africa.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Institute for Security Studies.

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

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