

‘The ones in the pile were the ones going down’¹

The reliability of violent crime statistics

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Following an announcement in 2004 by the South African government that in the coming years it would endeavour to reduce violent crime by seven to ten per cent per annum, total levels of violent crime dropped by 25 per cent over the next five years. However, a closer look at the crime statistics over this period reveals a number of peculiarities that require explanation. In recent years there have also been numerous press reports on the manipulation of crime statistics that have highlighted the existence of incentives within the SAPS not to record violent crime. This article argues that the identified peculiarities in crime statistics can be understood as linked to non-recording, which is shaped by a hierarchy of violent crime in which some categories of crime are viewed as important while others are viewed as unimportant. This implies that current violent crime statistics cannot be relied on as an indicator of trends in violent crime.

During 2004 the South African government announced that in the coming years it would endeavour to reduce violent crime by seven to ten per cent per annum. Over the following five years there was a steep decrease of 25 per cent in the overall level of violent crime in South Africa as measured by the total number of incidents of assault (common assault and assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm), robbery (common robbery and aggravated robbery), murder and attempted murder (Table 1).² The decreases have been lowest in relation to murder and aggravated robbery but have been fairly dramatic in relation to the other four offence categories; varying between 22 per cent in the case of assault GBH and 39 per cent in the case of attempted murder. As a result, during the 2003/04 to 2008/09 period, the total number of recorded cases has declined by 206 448. Of this decline, 43 per cent is accounted for by the decline in cases of common assault, and a further 27 per cent in cases of assault GBH, so that 70 per cent of the total reduction is accounted for by different categories of assault.

Table 1: Change in recorded levels of six major categories of violent crime, 2003-04 to 2008-09

	2003/ 04	2008/ 09	Change over five years	% change over five years	% of total reduct- ion
Murder	19 824	18 148	-1 676	8,5	0,8
Attempted murder	30 076	18 298	-11 778	39,2	5,7
Assault with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm	260 082	203 777	-56 305	21,6	27,3
Robbery with aggravating circumstances	133 658	121 392	-12 266	9,2	5,9
Common assault	280 942	192 838	-88 104	31,4	42,7
Common robbery	95 551	59 232	-36 319	38	17,6
Total	820 133	613 685	-206 448	25,2	100

Source: SAPS statistics

PECULIAR FIGURES

At face value the figures presented in Table 1 are peculiar for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is reasonable to assume that there should be some correlation between trends in attempted murder and trends in murder. How then to account for the fact that attempted murder is decreasing at a rate five times greater than murder? If the reduction is a result of government efforts to reduce violent crime, how is it that the SAPS, or the criminal justice system, or government more generally, were able to reduce attempted murder so dramatically, but not murder itself?

A second peculiarity relates to the comparison between purported trends in assault GBH and aggravated robbery, and those of murder. It is widely acknowledged that there are two principal drivers of the murder rate. The first includes various types of disputes which become increasingly violent and could end in cases of common assault, assault GBH, or attempted murder, with the most extreme cases resulting in murder. The predominance of these types of murders is confirmed by the latest police research, which indicates that they account for roughly 64 per cent of murders.³ Aggravated robbery is also an important driver of murder, although its contribution to the number of murders is dramatically smaller than that of dispute-type murders.⁴ The statistics presented in Table 1 indicate that there has been an 8,5 per cent decrease in the number of murders, notwithstanding the fact that both the key drivers of murder have decreased by a greater amount. In particular, assault GBH is decreasing at more than 2,5 times (21,6 per cent) the rate at which the murder rate is decreasing. How is it that this is not having a more dramatic impact on murder levels?⁵

A third peculiarity relates to the trends in common assault. Along with common robbery, this is a category of violent crime that usually escapes scrutiny from people commenting on crime statistics, as it is understood to represent a less serious form of violence.

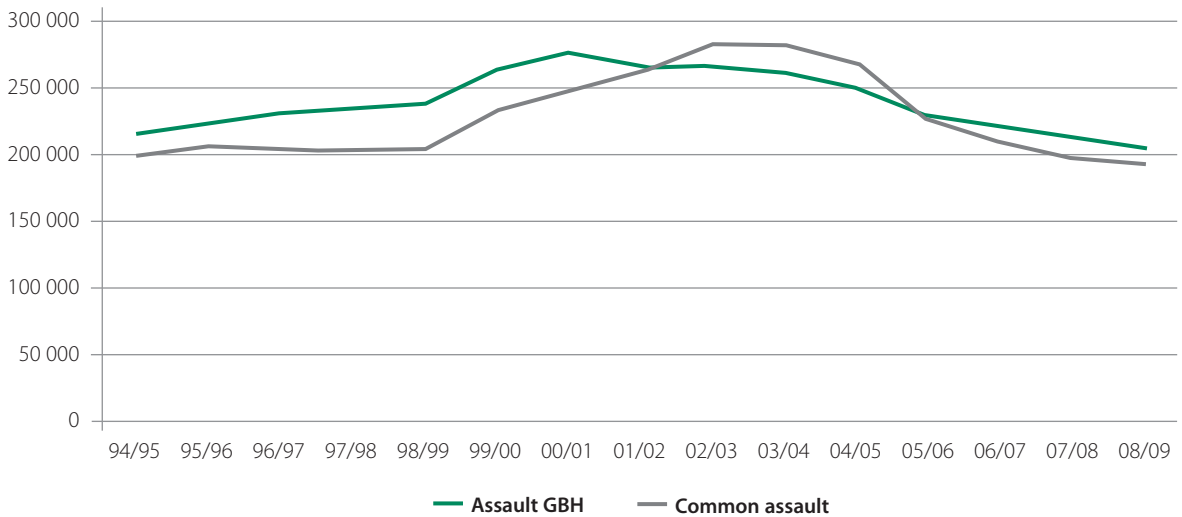
SAPS statistics on common assault and assault GBH over the period 1994/95 are reflected in

Figure 1. As can be seen, there is a similarity between recorded levels of common assault and assault GBH over this period. From 1994/5 until 2001/02 common assault was recorded at a lower rate than assault GBH. But common assault exceeded cases of assault GBH in the 2002/03 year by some 16 000 cases and in the 2003/04 year by some 20 000 cases. Though there were decreases in both categories of assault from 2002/03 to 2003/04, from then onwards both assault GBH and common assault figures dropped precipitously. Also, from this point onwards declines in common assault exceeded those for assault GBH, so that as from 2006/07, figures for common assault once again fell below those for assault GBH. One outcome of this dramatic decline in figures in both categories is that both the latest SAPS common assault figure (192 838) and assault GBH figure (203 777) are the lowest recorded in South Africa since 1994/95, when the SAPS recorded 200 248 and 215 671 of these cases respectively. Overall the reduction in common assault since 2003/04 (31 per cent or 88 104 cases) is far more dramatic than that recorded for assault GBH (22 per cent or 56 305 cases).

In any society the occurrence of assault can be understood to have a pyramid-like distribution. Less severe assaults (that would be recorded as common assault) occupy the bulk of the pyramid at the bottom. More serious assaults (that would be recorded as assault GBH) occupy a band across the middle with assault-related murders (i.e. the 'dispute type' murders referred to above) at the top.⁶

Notwithstanding this pyramid-like distribution, it is not unusual for fewer incidents of common assault to be recorded than assault GBH, as was the case in South Africa up to 2001/02. Due to the fact that victims often do not regard such cases as serious enough to report, or do not even identify them as crime, they are far less likely to report common assaults than they are to report more serious assaults.⁷ However it seems reasonable to assume that confidence in a police service will improve as police become more effective and more approachable, and that this will lead to higher rates of reporting, including more reporting of

Figure 1: Trends in recorded Common Assault and Assault GBH in South Africa, 1994-95 to 2008-09



Source: SAPS statistics

common assaults. In South Africa such an improvement in confidence, or at least in community relationships with police, may account for the distinct increase in reported levels of common assault reflected in statistics for the period from 1996/97 to 2002/03. But considering that common assault is more under-reported than assault GBH, why is it that recorded common assault should drop at a far faster rate than assault GBH, particularly during a period where it is claimed that there are improvements in police service delivery and where there is no evidence of a dramatic deterioration in police community relations (despite persistent complaints about the quality of police services)?⁸

If the trends reported in the SAPS statistics are an accurate reflection of reality, the implication is that for some reason the base of the 'assault pyramid' (reflected in cases of common assault) is withering away at a far faster rate than the middle of the pyramid (cases of assault GBH), which in turn is withering away at a faster rate than the top of the pyramid (assault-related murders). If there were an overall decline in levels of assault it might be assumed that this would have at least as much of an impact on serious assault as it does on less serious assault, rather than the decline being most concentrated in common assault.

Police often make the claim that crimes such as assault are not responsive to policing crime prevention strategies. If so, it is unlikely that policing would produce the above effect, and to do so it would need to be targeted at common assaults to the exclusion of more serious assaults. Notwithstanding the claim that assault is not responsive to policing, it is possible that enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act has contributed to the decline in common assaults. However, SAPS statistics provided in November 2009 to parliament provide no indication that reports of domestic violence received by the SAPS are declining. Instead they indicate that the number of these cases increased by eight per cent from 2006/07 to 2008/09.⁹ This includes increases even in the Northern Cape, the province that has recorded a 47 per cent decline in reported common assault in the last five years, the most dramatic decline among any of the nine provinces.

Just as it is unlikely that policing would disproportionately impact on common assault there is no reason to believe that any 'crime prevention effect' of other social interventions on the part of government (such as improvements in social grants) would contribute to faster declines in common assaults than in more serious assaults.

DISCORDANT TRENDS IN CATEGORIES OF AGGRAVATED ROBBERY

Similar peculiarities are apparent in relation to robbery. Common robbery has purportedly declined by 38 per cent, whereas aggravated robbery¹⁰ declined by only 9,2 per cent.¹¹ Just as peculiar is the radical discrepancy between trends in street robbery (in which figures have plummeted) and trends in the other six 'high profile' categories of aggravated robbery (which have been doing the opposite). As illustrated in Table 2, apart from street robbery, all categories of aggravated robbery have increased, most obviously residential and business robbery. The nine per cent decline in the number of aggravated robbery cases reflected in Table 1 is purely attributable to the fact that the net increase of 12 360 cases in the six categories is offset by a decrease of 27 706 cases of street robbery.

Table 2: Change in recorded levels of seven sub-categories of aggravated robbery, 2003-04 to 2008-09

	Recorded cases 2003 – 04	Recorded cases 2008 – 09	Change over five years	% change over five years	% of total change in this category
Vehicle hijacking	13 793	14 201	408	3	3
Cash in transit heists	192	395	203	106	1
Truck hijacking	901	1 245	344	38	2
Bank robbery	54	144	90	167	1
Residential robbery	9 351	14 481	5 130	55	33
Business robbery	3 677	9 862	6 185	168	40
Street robbery	105 690	77 984	-27 706	-26	-181
Total	133 658	118 312	-15 346	-11	-100

Source: SAPS statistics

What can be made of this discrepancy? Is it possible that those involved in street robbery

spontaneously opted to desist from their activities, with more and more street robbers endorsing this decision? Or have street robbers decided en masse to switch to other types of robbery? Or is it that government efforts to reduce robbery have miraculously reduced street robbery, notwithstanding the fact that policing and business-led crime prevention initiatives give priority to preventing and tracking down the culprits involved in the smaller 'high profile six' categories, particularly the 'trio' crimes of hijacking, residential and business robbery?¹²

PRESS REPORTS OF THE MANIPULATION OF CRIME STATISTICS

In recent years there have been persistent reports in the press about the 'cooking of crime statistics' by police. In a selection of press articles on the matter,¹³ allegations relating to such manipulation are made in relation to five of South Africa's nine provinces. In this selection of press articles, eleven different police stations in the Western Cape, four stations in Gauteng, one station in KwaZulu-Natal and one station in Limpopo are alleged to have manipulated crime statistics. Whilst not referring to any single police station, a brief press report in January 2010 also referred to an ICD investigation that pointed to various 'irregularities' in the SAPS in the Free State, including the 'manipulation of crime statistics'.

One prominent example is the Mountain Rise police station in Pietermaritzburg. In June 2009 press reports indicated that a SAPS inspector at the station had been suspended after alleging that statistics at the station were being manipulated. It was claimed that police at the station were instructed not to record criminal complaints unless the suspects were immediately available or facts easily ascertainable. Unrecorded dockets were allegedly kept aside in a separate room and eventually burnt.¹⁴ The practice had become institutionalised on the instructions of the station commissioner who had been deployed to the station early in 2007. The inspector was subsequently reinstated (and apparently seconded to the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation)

whilst an ICD investigation confirmed the allegations and culminated in a recommendation that disciplinary action be taken against the station commissioner.¹⁵

Also in June 2009, the Western Cape MEC for Safety and Security, Lennit Max, went public with allegations that at the police stations in Paarl, Paarl East, Mbekweni, Wellington and Oudtshoorn, cases were downgraded (i.e. offences were recorded as less serious than had been reported) or not recorded at all. Max is reported to have said that he feared the manipulation of crime statistics he had so far been notified of was only a fraction of what had occurred at the province's 147 police stations. Press reports in October 2009 also indicated that an SAPS disciplinary process had found the station commissioner and others at the Lansdowne police station guilty of tampering with crime statistics.¹⁶

Another press article referred to a leaked internal report sent to the Western Cape provincial commissioner in December 2006, indicating that 'quite a substantial number of stations are involved in manipulation'. The report referred specifically to the Porterville, Piketberg and Paarl East police stations. A report in June 2007 referred to such manipulation at the Bishop Lavis police station, with other reports in 2007 and 2008 referring to similar practices at the Knysna and Gugulethu police stations.¹⁷ Subsequent press reports appeared to confirm the existence of evidence of cases systematically not being recorded at the Knysna police station.¹⁸

The non-recording or 'downgrading' of cases of crime referred to in these press reports is not specific to cases of violent crime. The press reports refer to a diversity of cases, including attempted murder, assault, robbery, rape, fraud, various forms of theft, and burglary. Some of the articles dealing with the issue have given particular prominence to the non-recording of sexual offences, reflecting how seriously the press views these cases. Organisations focusing on sexual offences have also given prominence to the non-recording of these types of offences. In August 2009, Joan van Niekerk of Childline told

Parliament's portfolio committee on women and children that police were turning away 'numerous' sexual abuses victims, 'telling parents that their children will be traumatised by the criminal justice system process, that they can do nothing if the child is too young to testify'.¹⁹

One explanation for the non-recording emerging from the press reports is that the Police Performance Chart has provided a perverse incentive for the practice. The SAPS 'Performance Chart' is a computerised system linked to the SAPS Crime Administration System, which ranks stations according to improvements in their performance as measured by reductions in crime and increases in the rate of detection. The Performance Chart clearly provides an incentive to station commissioners for the non-recording of cases, particularly those that are unlikely to be detected. This is because a reduction in recorded cases results in a favourable performance rating for any given police station – but because the Performance Chart also ranks stations on 'detection rates', there is a positive motivation to record cases that are likely to be solved. Members at the winning stations (i.e. those stations that record the highest performance rating scores) in each province are apparently entitled to a performance bonus.²⁰ Both the Tzaneen and Mountain Rise police stations were apparently the best performing stations in their provinces in 2008 as a result of their non-recording of key categories of crime.

Non-recording appears to have had a particularly strong impact on cases of violent crime. One reason for this is that the Performance Chart gives particular weight to violent crime cases so that the incentive not to record these cases is stronger (see Andrew Faull's article in this edition of SACQ). However, considering the dramatic way in which statistics on violent crime have plummeted, and the fact that this coincides with the period subsequent to the introduction of the seven to ten per cent targets in 2004, it seems reasonable to conclude that these targets have also provided a strong motivation for non-recording.

The targets were implemented without due consideration being given to the possible negative

implications thereof. Referring to cases of rape, for instance, one provincial commissioner is quoted as saying that the target of seven to ten per cent reduction is 'impossible to achieve – the only way we can do it is to turn victims away'.²¹ In addition to the financial incentives for police officers not to record crime, reports indicate that an additional incentive was that station commanders were placed under direct pressure by senior SAPS management if their crime statistics increased, irrespective of evidence of other improvements in the performance of their police stations.²² Due to the fact that these were targets that government had committed to, police management had a strong motivation to ensure that they were achieved, for fear of embarrassing government and incurring the displeasure of senior politicians.

The Performance Chart and the seven to ten per cent targets can therefore be seen to have provided both 'carrot and stick' motivations to reduce the recording of crime. The Performance Chart created internal incentives for stations not to record crime. Motivators might have included the possibility of performance bonuses as well as the concern that if one did not manipulate the statistics, one's station would have been identified as 'under-performing'. In relation to the seven to ten per cent targets it appears that station commissioners would have been concerned about incurring the acrimony of senior management. Senior management was more concerned with reducing recorded crime than with how this reduction was achieved.

WHY ARE SOME CATEGORIES OF VIOLENT CRIME GOING UP?

If one accepts that there are peculiarities in relation to statistics on violent crime, and that the system of perverse incentives described may explain these peculiarities, there nonetheless remains an anomaly. Notwithstanding the fact that there were reductions in all of the major categories of violent crime reflected in Table 1, notable increases were recorded in six of the seven sub-categories of aggravated robbery as indicated in Table 2. How can it be that the system of

perverse incentives highlighted above could be 'selective' in its impact on different categories of violent crime?

In understanding why this is possible, it is necessary to recognise that in South Africa there is a largely unacknowledged hierarchy of violent crime, which contributes to some categories of violent crime being regarded as important and others as unimportant. There are two dynamics that shape this hierarchy. The first of these is the seriousness of offences themselves. Thus two of the three categories²³ that have recorded the highest overall reductions are common assault and common robbery, categories that (as indicated above) are widely regarded as less serious.

The second factor might be described as the 'politics of violent crime'. What this means is that different victim constituencies, or their advocates, compete for recognition and attention to be given to specific types of violent crime. The effect of this in South Africa, and no doubt in other countries, is that types of crime that are of concern to the most powerful and articulate tend to be considered as most important, and those that affect less powerful constituencies are by comparison virtually invisible, and tend to be neglected in public policy.²⁴

If this is true it is not a coincidence that the forms of violent crime in which increases have been recorded, and which probably have been more reliably recorded, are those forms of violent crime that most affect businesses and the middle class. Vehicle hijacking is likely to mostly affect the middle class, since poor people are less likely to be vehicle owners, but it is not clear whether this is also the case for residential robbery.

Nevertheless, as was the case with hijacking in the 1990s, during the last decade residential robbery has become prominent because of the apparent increased targeting of middle class homes. Even though it may be common in poorer areas, it is because of its impact on the middle class that it has come to be seen as a priority crime. Similarly, business robbery has come to be regarded as a priority crime because of its impact on the formal

business sector, though the businesses that are most vulnerable to robbery may be those in the informal sector.

There may be other factors at work here. Upper middle class victims, who constitute a substantial proportion of the victims of residential robberies and car hijackings, are probably more likely to want proof that the case has been registered for insurance purposes, and may also be more likely to make follow-up calls to the police to check on progress with the case, motivating for their cases to be recorded.²⁵ However, violent crime cases with middle class victims are not only more likely to be recorded, but because these types of crime impact on businesses or the middle class, they have come to be seen as more important – and are likely to be better recorded, even in poorer areas.²⁶

The hierarchy of violent crime is a product of the combined effect of these two types of dynamics.²⁷ Thus it is the offences that are less important in terms of this hierarchy, offences that by and large impact on poorer South Africans, that are most likely not to be recorded and that have therefore been declining most precipitously.²⁸

CONCLUSION

This article has considered a number of peculiarities in current statistics on violent crime and argued that these peculiarities make sense when understood in relation to the 'perverse incentives' created by the establishment of the SAPS Performance Chart and pressure from government for the SAPS to reduce violent crime by seven to ten per cent per annum.

The implication is that the non-recording of crime is widespread within the SAPS and that this non-recording is responsible for much of the reduction in violent crime that has been reported in statistics over recent years. The implication of this, in turn, is that current crime statistics cannot be regarded as a reliable indicator of trends in crime, particularly in violent crime.

Reports in the press of stations involved in the manipulation of crime statistics have raised

doubts about the reliability of police crime statistics. Yet there is still a tendency on the part of the Ministry of Police to view these stations as exceptions to the rule.²⁹ In totality these reports point towards a pervasive pattern of manipulation of crime statistics, notwithstanding the fact that the police stations identified above only make up roughly one per cent of the total number of police stations.³⁰ It seems reasonable to assume that the stations identified in the press reports referred to represent the tip of the iceberg of this phenomenon, both on the basis of the reports and because the peculiar patterns in crime statistics can be explained by the perverse incentives that have been established to under-record crime. Thus, rather than being a reflection of the extent of the problem, the press reports are an indication of the paucity of whistle blowing. While this is disappointing it is not necessarily surprising. The inspector at Mountain Rise, for instance, gave testimony of how he was victimised at the station after various attempts to draw attention to the issue, including the attention of senior SAPS management and state prosecutors.³¹

There are specific difficulties and risks related to the use of crime statistics as a key performance measure for the police. One difficulty is that levels of reporting do not purely reflect crime trends, but also changes in attitudes to the police. If people have greater confidence in the police they will be more inclined to report cases to them. A reduction in crime statistics can only reasonably be used as a police performance measure in a social environment where police-community relations are at an optimal level and can be expected to remain very stable.

Another obvious drawback is that using crime statistics as a performance measure creates perverse incentives. If police are being evaluated on how many cases they report, they will be motivated to discourage reporting or otherwise manipulate the recording process to get the numbers down. It is therefore only viable to use crime statistics as a police performance measure in circumstances where the process of recording crime itself has a high level of integrity and reliability.³²

There is therefore obviously a need to establish a culture of integrity in recording crime statistics in the SAPS. Whether or not the pending Stats SA investigation into SAPS crime statistics will contribute to this objective cannot be known at this point, but what is clear is that until it is demonstrated that such a culture has been established³³ there will be serious doubts about the reliability of official crime statistics, as well as questions about whether crime statistics and detection rates should be included as key indicators in performance measures.

The issue of crime statistics has been a vexed one throughout much of the post-1994 period. Government has often appeared to view these statistics primarily in terms of the negative image they might create. Government ministers have variously tried to restrict their availability, to the point of imposing a complete moratorium on their release from July 2000 to May 2001. Crime has thus in many ways been a matter of image management for government, rather than an incentive to develop proper strategies for reducing crime. The credibility and integrity of SAPS crime statistics are now casualties of this approach. If there is one principal lesson that should be drawn from this, it is that tackling violent crime can no longer be an issue of image management and must become the focus of clear strategies that are properly implemented.

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NOTES

- 1 The title is a quote from one of the journalists who was involved in exposing the manipulation of statistics at Mountain Rise police station, referring to a pile of unrecorded dockets. (Telephone conversation, M Laganparsad, 25 September 2009).
- 2 Due to the fact that the system of reporting statistics of sexual offences has changed as a result of the new Sexual Offences Act, 32 of 2007, this article does not discuss whether recording practice has impacted on such offences; though they of course constitute a key manifestation of the problem of violent crime.
- 3 South African Police Service, Crime Situation in South Africa, Pretoria: SAPS Strategic Management (Head Office), 2009. Available at http://www.saps.gov.za/saps_profile/strategic_framework/annual_report/2008_2009/2_crime_situation_sa.pdf (accessed 22 January 2010).
- 4 Robbery may be estimated to account for roughly 13% of murders if statistics in the SAPS report cited above are read against other statistics that indicate that robberies account for roughly 80% of murders that take place in the context of another crime. On the latter see Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, *Streets of Pain, Streets of Sorrow: The circumstances of the occurrence of murder in six areas with high rates of murder*, Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation and Department of Safety and Security, 2008.
- 5 Note that the approach here is to assume that murder is declining at roughly the rate indicated. However questions have also been raised as to whether the reported trends in murder can in fact be taken at face value (J Redpath & M O'Donovan, *The impact of minimum sentencing in South Africa*, Open Society Foundation for South Africa, 2006.)
- 6 In the UK context it has been said, for instance, that 'serious' assaults judged in terms of levels of injury are greatly outnumbered by cases resulting in only minor injury: Home Office data are cited that put the ratio of 'more serious' to 'less serious' offences at 1:20. M Levi and M Maguire, Violent crime, in M Maguire, R Morgan, and R Reiner, (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (3rd Edition), Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002, 805.
- 7 An Australian study indicated that the seriousness of the assault, indicated for instance by the severity of injury as well as the number of perpetrators, was one factor impacting on whether victims saw the assault as a crime or not. Where assaults were seen as a crime 60% were reported, while where they were not seen as a crime, only 16% were reported. See J Clare and F Morgan, Factors affecting perceived criminality: evidence from victims of assault, *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 376, Australian Institute of Criminology. On factors affecting recording of crime more generally see M Maguire, Crime statistics, in M Maguire, R Morgan and R Reiner, (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology* (4th Edition). Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2007, 255-262. Intimidation would also be a factor influencing reporting but would also be likely to apply to cases of assault GBH as well as common assault.
- 8 For instance in the 2003 National Victimisation Survey, 46% of respondents said they thought that police were doing a poor job while by 2007 this number had dropped to 37%. (M 'O Donovan, South Africans' perceptions of the police and the courts, *ISS Paper* 176, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2008).
- 9 Document dated 28 October 2010 from the National Commissioner of the SAPS addressed to the Committee Secretary of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth, Children and People with Disabilities with the subject line 'Replies to questions for government departments'. South African Police Service. The figures reported are 2006/07 (88 777), 2007/08 (95 218), and 2008/09 (95 555).
- 10 Aggravated robbery is distinguished from common robbery on the basis that it involves the use or threatened use of weapons such as guns or knives.
- 11 One factor that might also impact on these statistics

- was an agreement entered into by cell phone companies and the SAPS in April 2005 in terms of which stolen handsets were supposed to be reported to the cell-phone company in order to be blacklisted. Police sometimes refused to record such cases until the complainant provided proof that the phone had been blacklisted. See N Mawson, Police, cell-firms in anti-theft drive, *Engineering News*, 14 April 2005. Available at <http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/police-cell-firms-in-antitheft-drive-2005-04-14>, (accessed 12 February 2009).
- 12 See for example G Newham, Cops and robbers: a new approach – The Gauteng Aggravated Robbery Strategy, SACQ 29, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2009.
 - 13 F Maponya, Cops 'cook' their crime figures – Serious cases deliberately covered up, *Sowetan*, 2 December 2008; S Regchand, Top police station 'fiddled crime stats' – policeman files affidavit, *The Mercury*, 11 June 2009; G Underhill and S Alcock, KZN police station cooked crime stats, *Mail & Guardian*, 29 January 2010, 10; C Dolley, Max attacks police boss, *Cape Times*, 24 June 2009, 1; G Underhill, Chandler used to set an example, *Mail & Guardian*, 16 October 2009; S Alcock, Fear made police cook stats, *Mail & Guardian*, 10 July 2009; G Underhill, Top cops 'knew stats were cooked', *Mail & Guardian*, 16 October 2009; G Underhill, How cops cooked crime books, *Mail & Guardian*, 23 October 2009; M Langanparsad & N Davids, How cops fiddle crime statistics, SAPA; Police chief, deputies face music, *Business Day*, 18 January 2010.
 - 14 S Regchand, Top police station 'fiddled crime stats' – policeman files affidavit, *The Mercury*, 11 June 2009.
 - 15 Underhill and Alcock, KZN police station cooked crime stats, 10.
 - 16 Underhill, Chandler used to set an example.
 - 17 Underhill, Top cops 'knew stats were cooked'.
 - 18 Underhill, How cops cooked crime books.
 - 19 SAPA, Cops 'turning away sex abuse victims', 26 August 2009.
 - 20 S Alcock, Crime stats scam exposed, *Mail & Guardian*, 3 July 2009; Underhill and Alcock, KZN police station cooked crime stats, 10.
 - 21 SAPA, Cops 'turning away sex abuse victims'.
 - 22 See S Alcock, Fear made police cook stats, which includes the quote that 'good management practices' were confused with 'management by fear'. See also Andrew Faull article in this edition of SACQ.
 - 23 These being attempted murder, common robbery and common assault.
 - 24 Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, *The violent nature of crime in South Africa: A concept paper*. Prepared for the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster, Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation & Department of Safety and Security, 2008; Creating a violence free society – Key findings and recommendations of the study on the violent nature of crime in South Africa, Johannesburg: Unpublished report, 2009.
 - 25 A further question is whether the degree of independent monitoring is likely to impact on recording behaviour. For example, cash-in-transit heists and bank robberies are closely and independently monitored by groups in the business sector, limiting the space for crime statistics to be manipulated. (See J Burger, Worrying trends – the official 2008/09 South African crime statistics, SACQ 30, Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2008, 4. Most vehicles and middle class homes and businesses are insured. If the SAPS statistics showed reductions while the insurance industry revealed increases this would be likely to become a public issue. However it is not clear that this type of factor would impact on crime recording practice at police stations, which is the concern of this article.
 - 26 Note that there may also be a 'net-widening effect' resulting from the fact that robberies at informal businesses are increasingly recorded as business robberies rather than as 'other' robberies.
 - 27 The status of cases of sexual violence is more ambiguous. While they by and large involve the victimization of poorer women, partly as a result of political mobilization against violence against women, rape cases are also acknowledged as 'serious crime'.
 - 28 In addition to the dynamics arising from this hierarchy another factor would be the simple question of whether a specific category of crime is amenable to non-recording or other manipulation. Thus in addition to the fact that it is regarded by its nature as a serious offence, murder would appear to be less amenable to non-recording partly because, even in the absence of a criminal case, all cases of murder are still supposed to be the subject of an inquest. By contrast, cases of attempted murder are less concrete in nature but also more open to being 'downgraded' as the classification of a case as 'attempted murder' partly involves a judgment about the intention of the perpetrator.
 - 29 For instance, a spokesperson for the Minister of Police is reported to have emphasised the fact that police stations that had been the subject of allegations made up 'zero' percent of police stations in the country. Langanparsad & Davids, op cit.
 - 30 There are 1 116 police station in South Africa, according to the latest SAPS annual report, xvi.
 - 31 S Alcock, Crime stats scam exposed, *Mail & Guardian*, 3 July 2009.
 - 32 In the absence of such reliability crime statistics might best be seen as an indicator of the safety challenges that government and society face.
 - 33 Independent audits of crime reporting might be one measure that would help in this regard.