



TECHNIUM
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

Vol. 27, 2022

**A new decade
for social changes**

www.techniumscience.com

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

Understanding policing of vehicle hijacking in Alexandra Gauteng Province, South Africa: The prospects, challenges and effective responses

Tshoane SM

Department of Safety and Security Management. Faculty of Humanities, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

tshoanesm@tut.ac.za

Abstract. The goals of this research were to evaluate and explain the prospects, challenges and the effective response of the South African Police Service (SAPS) in combating vehicle hijacking. Vehicle hijacking is defined as being “when a person has taken a vehicle through force, violent acts, or the threat of intimidation, a person has committed the crime of vehicle hijacking”. South Africa experiences one of the highest motor vehicle hijacking rates in the world. Although vehicle hijacking is a worldwide phenomenon, it has increased drastically in the Alexandra Township (Gauteng Province—South Africa). The study adopts a qualitative research approach with the intention of striving to grasp an imperative understanding, accompanied by a subjective rationale of the extent and nature of vehicle hijacking, and to evaluate the police strategies in combating vehicle hijacking, thereby also gaining valuable insight and understanding of the underlying contributing factors in the Alexandra policing area. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-nine (29) participants drawn from the South African police service department, public prosecutors from the Alexandra regional court, community leaders, community members, victims, and perpetrators. Indirect observation, structured and semi-structured interviews were utilised to afford the study an understanding of the extent and nature of vehicle hijacking and its affiliating factors, as provided from the perspective of the participants. The results revealed that the South African Police Service did not have a clear strategy to deal the scourge of vehicle hijacking. Secondly, contributing factors to vehicle hijacking were poverty and unemployment in the Alexandra policing area. Thirdly, illegal firearms, unregistered street mechanics, and scarp yards specifically, appeared to be the main causes of vehicle hijacking. The study recommends that the South African police service members in the Alexandra policing area should adopt effective planning and collaborative problem-solving partnerships. Crime prevention requires the optimal use of their limited resources, and effective partnerships and will increased efficiency. More importantly, the complexity of prevention often requires initiatives and interventions that go well beyond the scope of the mandate and resources of any one organization.

Keywords. crime, vehicle hijacking, policing, crime prevention, strategy. South Africa

Introduction

Crime is a global challenge that threatens not only the safety and security of communities but also the peace and stability of the country itself (Tshoane, 2019). Phahlane

(2017) concurred that the scourge of vehicular crime, armed hijacking, in particular, is a constant fear in the minds of South African motorists. Crime statistics released by the South African police service (SAPS) reveal that one vehicle is hijacked every 32 minutes (SAPS, Crime statistics: 2016). South Africa experiences one of the highest motor vehicle hijacking rates in the world. According to statistics released by the South African Police Service in March 2017, a total of 12 743 vehicles were hijacked in South Africa between April 2016 and December 2016 that's 14.9% more than in the 2015/16 financial year.

In 2015, 61% of hijacking occurred in Gauteng alone. Against these staggering figures, the arrest and conviction rates were dismal. Gauteng covers only 1.4% of South Africa's land, and houses 18% of the population (South African Police Service, 2017). This simply means that more than 25 motor vehicles were hijacked every day, on average, in the 2014/15 financial year in the Alexandra Township. This is concerning, as most of these cases are the result of organized crime syndicates. This was revealed by the spokesperson for Alexandra police station (Tshoane, 2019). The purpose of this article was to evaluate the the prospects, challenges and effective responses of the SAPS in combating vehicle hijackings in Alexandra policing area of Gauteng Province, South Africa.

Literature overview

Vehicle hijacking as an international problem

Davis (2013) vehicle hijackings are random, unpredictable usually involve guns and have increased in the past few years until they are as common as fatal car accidents. A justice department study released, shows that an estimated 177,500 vehicle hijackings, or attempted vehicle hijacking, occurred between 2005 and 2015. While most do not end in injury or death for the victims, at least 60 percent involve handguns. The recent Los Angeles vehicle hijacking in which two college students, including one from Japan, were slain, underscores the volatile nature of such crimes (Burger, 2007)

Australia

The extent and nature of vehicle hijacking in Australia

According to Brennan and Dauvergne (2013) Australia does not specifically record the number of vehicle hijackings; such crimes are variously recorded as assault, robbery, motor vehicle theft, or some combination. However, a 2008 paper by the [Australian Institute of Criminology](#), analysing police and insurance records, suggested that fewer than 300 vehicle hijacking occur annually in Australia (about 0.5% of all hijacking incidents in the country).

According to Brennan and Dauvergne (2013) the paper noted that the low incidence of vehicle hijacking, compared to the United States, is attributable to the low firearm-related crime overall in Australia, and the fact that the "broader socioeconomic picture of Australian society is one of relative good health in terms of wealth distribution and social cohesion", thus providing little motivation for victimization that is both personal and violent. The paper notes that although vehicle hijacking was rare, isolated hot spots do arise occasionally, and that since the late 1990s, (Sydney) has experienced several vehicles hijacking clusters. These last around three to six months, and occur in different locations including the eastern suburbs, the inner city and the south-western area (Davis, 2013).

USA

The extent and nature of vehicle hijacking in the USA

Braun and Clarke (2013) explained that vehicle hijacking was common in Newark, New Jersey, in 2008, and a wave of vehicle hijacking took place again in 2010. There were 288 vehicle hijackings in the city in 2010 (a 70% increase from the previous year), and Essex County (which includes Newark) had 69 in December 2010 alone. The Associated Press reported that "unlike previous vehicle hijacking, in which thieves would strip vehicles for parts or sell them in other states, the recent wave perplexed law enforcement officials because almost all appeared to be done by thrill-seeking young men who would steal the cars for a few hours, drive them around and then abandon them."

The major United States city with the highest rates of vehicle hijacking is Detroit. In 2008, Detroit had 1,231 vehicle hijackings, more than three a day. By 2013, that number had fallen to 701, but this was still the highest known number of vehicle hijackings for any major city in the country (Davis, 2013).

Canada

Extent and nature of vehicle hijacking in Canada

According to SAPS (2019), motor vehicle hijacking was one of the most frequently police-reported crimes in Canada. In 2017, police reported approximately 146,000 motor vehicle hijackings, an average of about 400 vehicles per day. More than half (54%) were cars; another 35% were trucks, vans or SUVs; 4% were motorcycles and the remaining 8% were other types of vehicles. In addition, there were about 2,500 motor vehicles that were hijacked during the commission of another, more serious, offence. In 2007, police identified about 16,000 persons accused of motor vehicle hijacking in Canada. The rate was highest among 15 to 18-year old, and gradually tapered with increasing age. Accused persons 15 to 18 years of age accounted for 3 in 10 solved vehicle hijackings. Motor vehicle hijacking is one of the least likely crimes to be solved by police. Of all vehicles hijacked in 2007, only 11% resulted in an accused person being identified by police (Davis, 2013).

According to Burger (2007) by comparison, 22% of all other property-related offences were solved by police. Over 100 vehicle hijackings were reported between May and October 2012. The cars were all taken apart for scrap and sold to a local business. International Broadcasting Convention said that even though numbers aren't on the rise, on average, a vehicle is hijacked every three and half minutes in Canada—about 420 a day. Every year, it is estimated that about 40 people die and 65 are injured as a direct result of vehicle hijacking. Hijacked vehicles are often sold for a quick profit—sometimes to fund other criminal activity such as drug smuggling, or even terrorism, said the IBC. (Police-reported motor vehicle hijacking in Canada, 2007).

Theoretical perspectives on vehicle hijacking

The researcher believes it might be appropriate to start the theoretical undertone of this study with the rational choice theory. Van der Westhuizen proposed the rational choice theory in her unpublished master's dissertation (1998) as the ultimate classical theory to explain the Victimization of Domestic Workers in a (Post) modern South African Society: An Explorative Study. This was to prove that victims, as well as offenders, choose to either fall victims of crime, or commit offences, based on their childhood and background experiences. She also emphasized the importance of situational factors as being part of factors beyond human control that influence humans in society to operate and live the lives they do.

Before the 1700's, the offender was, traditionally, described as an irrational, purposeless and unpredictable human being. It was the classical school of thought that offered the first naturalistic explanation for the occurrence of crime and basic ideas about crime and the criminal justice system. Most theorists were philosophers, and it was Cesare Beccaria (1738-1994) who mostly influenced the classical school of thought by referring to human beings as rational beings with a free will who can make rational choices and decisions regarding their behavior. Most forms of wrongdoing ought not to be regarded as manifestations of mental disturbances. By over-emphasizing pathological characteristics in offenders, and denying the existence of rational components, the constructive analysis of criminal behavior is hindered, in this case vehicle hijacking.

With reference to the above, it was Cornish and Clark (1986) that developed the rational choice theory in 1986. They started with the assumption that, by their criminal behavior, offenders make rational decisions/choices and in the process seek to benefit themselves. Utility is one of the most important concepts of the rational choice perspective. Van der Westhuizen (1998:122) states that humans operate on a utilitarian, or practical basis of pleasure, and pain calculations. This supposes that man (based on his knowledge and understanding) considers certain options, pros and cons, and then chooses, in a rational way, the action which holds the maximum benefit for him (Cordner, 1997).

5. Research methodology

For this study, a qualitative research approach was used to properly research the phenomena, challenges and effective responses to human trafficking. The research design was exploratory, which allows the researcher to listen to and understand the participants regarding their ideals and personal experience (Creswell, 2014:30). Qualitative research provides people with a means of attempting to understand a world that cannot be understood in terms of numbers and objectivity. Qualitative approaches provide ways of transcribing and analysing the discursive construction of everyday events and of exploring the historical nature of life within a social group or local setting (De Vos, 2011:108). For this study, the use of a qualitative research approach permitted an in-depth of the participants' responses and a detailed understanding of the SAPS strategies to combat vehicle hijacking in the Alexandra policing area.

5.1 Study Population

The data for this study was collected within the Alexandra Township. The sample consisted of twenty-nine (29) participants. Their complex views and detailed understanding of the South African police strategies to combat vehicle hijacking in the study area was explored.

5.1.1 Table for the Selected Study Sample

SAPS	Community	Perpetrators (Johannesburg prison)	victims	prosecutors	Total
8	15	2	2	2	29

(Source: researcher's illustration)

5.2 Sampling Procedures

To select the participants of this study, purposive sampling was used. This sampling method is based completely on the judgement of the researcher. Researchers rely on their experience, ingenuity, and previous research findings to deliberately ensure that the sample

obtained may be regarded as representative of the relevant population (Huysamen, 2011). Purposive sampling involved handpicking participants from the target population SAPS and society. This sampling was relevant to this study because the participants selected informed the researcher's understanding of the area of enquiry. The information collected provided the applicable and appropriate data required to illuminate the researcher's understanding of the south African police strategies to combat vehicle hijacking in the Alexandra policing area. It was argued by Henning and Kaiser that in one study, saturation could be achieved at 17 interviews and in another study, saturation might be accomplished at 14 interviews. Boddy (2016:426) indicated that samples as low as 12 would be apt for data saturation among relatively homogeneous populations in qualitative study. The contention of the authors of this article is that participants/interviewees in this study belonged to a homogenous population of SAPS and community members. Whereas on the other hand, but by the same token, Burns and Grove (2011: 377) opine that in quantitative sampling, there are no hard or fast rules about the sample size, but a sample should have at least 30 respondents. The present article is not quantitative, but qualitative.

Purposive sampling was adopted owing to researchers' judgement of participants' capability and potentiality to provide valuable information geared towards the actualisation of the study objective. This sampling technique was considered apt, due to the peculiar characteristics of the study population, i.e., SAPS and community members, particularly those with years of experience on the job, and track records of active engagement in the unit's operations of crowd management. The choice of purposive sampling for the article is guided by the study purpose (Kegler, Comeau & Cooper, 2019: 24). Kegler, Comeau and Cooper (2019: 27) note a large majority of qualitative sampling to be either purposeful or purposive. Meaning that selection of the participants or cases should be clearly guided by the study purpose.

5.3 Data Collection Techniques

The study required the participants to be able to express their views and perceptions freely, therefore, it utilised interviews to collect data. Interviews are a method of gathering information through an oral transformation using an interview schedule. Shneiderman and Plaisant (2015:314) highlight that using interviews has the following advantages:

- They allow for the obtaining of detailed information.
- Direct contact with the participants leads to specific and constructive suggestions.

The study used a semi-structured interview schedule as it allowed the researcher to use the preplanned interview schedule, and it allowed for rich discussions between the participants and the researcher. The interviews were in-depth and done on a one on one this was done to prohibit detailed information. The interviews took place at locations that were chosen by the participants and the duration ranged from 30-40 minutes, this was reliant on how much information the participants were eager to share.

5.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data as it organises and describes data in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). At the heart of thematic analysis, the familiarisation of data by the researcher is important. Data familiarisation was possible because the researcher personally conducted audio-recorded interviews and transcribed them. This process allowed the researcher to familiarise themselves with the data for expedited and insightful analysis.

Method of data analysis

Data from the interviews were analysed using thematic coding. Coding was completed after one of the authors conducted an initial review of the data to identify resonating themes. Thereafter, a thorough analysis of the interview transcript was conducted to collate relevant data in line with the identified themes.

In terms of validity, one major indicator that is often applied in qualitative research that the authors considered, is credibility, that is, an indicator that the findings adequately represent the positions of participants (see Rajakaruna, Henry, Cutler & Fairman, 2017; & Shenton, 2004). Methods used in ascertaining the credibility of the findings of the current study include participants' voluntary participation and honesty, encouragement to be sincere about the issues raised, assurance of anonymity and confidentiality of information supplied as well as the assurance that the research is strictly for academic purpose.

Data comprised from all the semi-structured interviews with all the participants, such as the south African police officers involved in the deterrence of trio crimes and which community members and which data was later transcribed by the researcher. During this process, the initial thoughts and ideas were noted down as this is considered an essential stage in analysis. The transcribed data was then read and re-read several times, and, in addition, the recordings were listened to several times to ensure the accuracy of the transcription. This process of repeated reading and the use of recordings to listen to the interviews results in data immersion and recording, which, according to Babbie (2010: 65), refers to the researcher's closeness with the data.

Further coding also took place at this stage to ensure that no codes had been missed in earlier stages. Once a clear idea of the various themes, and how they fitted together, then themes emerged. This phase involves defining and naming the themes, with each theme clearly defined and accompanied by a detailed analysis. The final stage (the report production) involved choosing examples of transcripts to illustrate elements of the themes Babbie (2010: 65).

Recommendations

The researcher would like to recommend that the South African police service department, recruit more people who will be trained to specialize in vehicle hijacking, since Alexandra Township has only 16 detectives handling the vehicle hijacking investigations in the whole of Alexandra, which is not enough. Due to the lack of resources, hijacking is reported and there is frequently no vehicle available to attend to that scene, as all vehicles are out and not available at that current time, which results in late arrival of the South African police service members at the scene. The researcher recommends the implementation of mobile police stations and increased resources (personnel and vehicles). Alexandra is over populated and congested, having only one police station to serve Alexandra (from 1st to 22th avenue), East bank, West bank, Tsutsumani, River park, Sjwetla and Extension 1 to 10. In addition, the mobile police stations should have a direct number where vehicle hijacking could quickly be responded to.

The researcher recommends that the South African police service members in the Alexandra policing area foster and support effective planning and collaborative problem-solving partnerships. Good prevention requires the optimal use of their limited resources, and effective partnerships can allow increased efficiency and the ability to achieve decrease of vehicle hijacking in the Alexandra policing area. More importantly, the complexity of prevention often requires initiatives and interventions that go well beyond the scope of the

mandate and resources of any one organization. This reality places importance on good planning and coordination and requires effective partnerships.

Conclusion

The researcher took into consideration the selected participant's views on the current South African Police Service strategies used in combating vehicle hijacking; the barriers in combating vehicle hijacking; and the contributing factors that hinder progress and effectiveness in combating vehicle hijacking were addressed.

This study demonstrated that it has become increasingly important for the selected participants in this study to prioritize vehicle hijacking and to implement strategies which will contribute to combating it in the Alexandra policing area. The study explored, described and analyses the perceptions of the participants. However, their knowledge of vehicle hijacking in Alexandra policing area was found to be considerably similar. In support of the significance of this study, the South African police service members in Alexandra township have initiated and concluded that vehicle hijacking investigations should be done in collaboration with Community Police Forum's, Community Leaders and community members, to combat this crime effectively.

References

- [1] Babbie, E. 2010. *The Practice of social research*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- [2] Barker, R.L. 2003. *The social work dictionaries*. Washington, dc: national association of social worker press (Naswp).
- [3] Bartol, C. R and Bartol, A.M.2008.*Criminal behavior, a psychological approach*, eighth edition. Pearson education. Inc. upper saddle river, New Jersey.
- [4] Bayley, D.H. 1990. *The state of the art in community policing: an international perspective*. Australia: Australia institute of justice [on-line]. Available online from http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/publications/proceedings/05/bayley.pdf. [Accessed: 12/06/2016].
- [5] Bless, C. Higson-Smith, C. & Sithole, and S.L. 2013. *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective*. 4th ed. Cape Town: Juta education.
- [6] Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2013. *Successful qualitative research*. Sage California.
- [7] Brennan, S. And Dauvergne, M. 2011. *Police-reported crime statistics in Canada, 2010*. Statistic Canada. July 21, 2011
- [8] Brian R. S. *vehicle theft trends United States*. International association of automobile theft investigators. Available online at: file:///c:/users/20161542/downloads/03_3%20-%20brian%20salata%20-%20usa%20-%20vehicle%20crime%20trends.pdf. Accessed on 17/01/2018.
- [9] Burger J.2007.*strategic perspective on crime and policing in South Africa*. Van schaik. pretoria.0001
- [10] *Carjacking-Don't Be a Victim*, us department of state, bureau of diplomatic security. (August 2002)
- [11] Carter, D.L. & Sapp, A.D. 1998. *Police science: towards a new paradigm – national criminal justice*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/228922.pdf>. [Accessed: 20/07/2017].
- [12] Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) *pioneers in criminology ix-- journal of criminal law and criminology volume 46 | issue 4 article 2 1956*

- [13] Christiaan Bezuidenhout. 2011. A southern African perspective on fundamental criminology. Pearson education: Cape Town.
- [14] Cohen, B. & Felson, R. 1979. Routine Activities Theory. Uci Web files. California: University of California.
- [15] Cordner, A. 1997. Reducing fear of crime. California: Wadsworth.
- [16] Cornish, L. & Clarke, R.V.G. 1986. Routine activities and rational choice. London: library of congress.
- [17] Creswell, J.W. 2007. qualitative inquiry and research design: choosing among five approaches. Sage publications. Thousand oaks, California.
- [18] Davis L. 2013. Carjacking: insights from South Africa to a new crime problem. Australian and New Zealand journal of criminology 26(2): 173–191
- [19] De Guchteneire, P. S.A. code of conduct social science research UNESCO. Available from:
<http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/multimedia/hq/shs/pdf/socialsciencecode.pdf>.
Accessed: 15/01/18.
- [20] De Vos, A. S. Strydom, H. Fouche, C. D. & Delpont, C. S. L. 2011. Research at grass roots, 4ed. van schaik. Pretoria.
- [21] Denscombe, M. 2002. Ground rules for research: a 10-point guide for social research. Philadelphia: open University press
- [22] Department of Criminology, university of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0001, South Africa.
- [23] Ehlers, T. & Lazenby, K. (Eds.). 2010. Strategic management – southern African concepts and cases. 3rd ed. Pretoria: van schaik.
- [24] Eisenberg. T. & Glasscock, B. 2001. looking inward with problem-oriented policing. F.b.i. bulletin, 70(7), 1-5.
- [25] Ferreira, B. 1996. The use and effectiveness of community policing in a democracy. Prod. National institute of justice. Washington, D.C.
- [26] Frank P. Williams Iii. Marilyn D. McShane. 2004. Criminological theory. 4th Ed. Pearson education, Inc., upper saddle river, New Jersey.
- [27] Gill, C. E. 2014. "Community-oriented policing to reduce crime, disorder and fear and increase satisfaction and legitimacy among citizens: a systematic review." journal of experimental criminology: retrieved from on January 18, 2018
- [28] Goldstein, H. 1987. Perception of crime risk and routine. [Online]. Available from: www.jrc.sagepub.com/content/33/2/147. [Accessed: 20/11/2017].
- [29] Greene, I.R. & Mastrofski, S.D. 1998. What can police do to reduce crime, disorder and fear? ([Online]. available from: www.cebc.org/wp-content/publications/weisburd04.pdf [accessed: 16/11/2017].
- [30] Hennik, M. Hutter, I. & Bailey, A. 2011. Qualitative research methods. Sage publications, California.
- [31] Hornby, A.S. 2000. oxford advanced learners dictionary of current English. 6th Ed. New York: university of oxford.