FACT SHEET:

Explaining the official crime statistics for 2012/13

19 September 2013 – release 13h00

This factsheet offers a brief overview and analysis of the key crime trends for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 as recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS).

Unfortunately the crime statistics were presented in very vague manner this year. The SAPS only released percentage increases and decreases but no exact figures or ratios. Without these, we cannot verify the percentages given by the minister and the national commissioner of police. By 13h00 the statistics were not available on the website, as promised by the Minister of Police.

In the first section we show which crimes have increased and decreased. The second section offers reasons for why some crimes have increased and others have decreased. Finally, we look at the category of crimes that are dependent on police action – such as the possession of drugs and firearms.

Crimes that increased

Overall contact crimes reduced by 4,2%. However, for the first time in many years we see an increase this year in key serious violent crimes.

Most significantly, for the first time in six years there is an increase in the numbers of murders and in the rate of murder. The rate of murder refers to the number of people who are murdered per 100 000 of the population. Using the rate allows one to compare areas of high population density with areas of lower population density.

- Incidents of murder increased by 650 cases, a 4,2% increase. According to Stats SA 2012 mid-year estimates the ratio would have increased by 0,8 which means it’s a 2,8% increase in the murder rate (ratio increase). It is difficult to identify where SAPS got their 0.6% increase from, without having access to their raw data and calculations.
• Attempted murder rates increased by 6.5% in the past year.
• Sexual offences rates decreased marginally by 0.4%.

It may be tempting to blame the police for the increase in violence crimes. But since most murders (around 65%), attempted murders and rapes, occur between people who know each other, the police can do very little to prevent this kind of violence. These crimes are often referred to by the police as ‘inter-personal’ violent crimes. Between 15% and 20% of murders and attempted murders are the result of aggravated robbery while inter-group conflicts and vigilantism make up the rest.

Murder is an important indicator both because it is the most accurate of all crime categories, and because it is internationally seen to be an indicator of how stable a country is.

Since 1995/96, the murder rate has decreased substantially from 68.1 murders per 100 000 of the population to 30.3 per 100 000 in 2011/2012. This is a 56% decrease in the past 16 years. Very significant decreases in murder were recorded in 2009/10 of -8.5% and again in in 2010/11 of -6.6%.

The current increase in murder is concerning. There are a number of factors that can lead to changes in the murder rate, and these may differ from province to province and even between localities. Understanding the factors that lead to increases at a very localised level is necessary if we are to identify the interventions that are needed to reduce murder.

There has also been an increase in all kinds of robbery and car hijacking over the past year. These crimes are referred to by the police as violent property crimes. Total aggravated robbery increased by 1.2%.

Most sub categories of aggravated robbery increased:

• Street/public robbery (which is about 57% of aggravated robbery) was not reported on. The Institute for Security Studies will calculate the rate once more information is available.
• House robbery (which is about 17% of aggravated robbery) increased by 3.6%
• Carjacking (which is 9% of aggravated robbery) increased by 5.4%
• Truck hijacking (which is one per cent of aggravated robbery) increased by 14.9%
• Business robbery (which is 16% of aggravated robbery) decreased marginally by 0.6%

Most property related crimes increased as follows:

• Residential burglary by 3.3%
• Business burglary by 1.7%
• Theft out of and from motor vehicle by 3.6%
• Commercial crime (which include crimes such as cybercrime and corruption) increased marginally by 0.6% in the past year.
• Although stock-theft showed a decreased by 6.5%
While the police cannot be expected to prevent violent inter-personal crimes, good policing can lead to a reduction in most kinds of robbery. Increases in these crimes suggest that the police are struggling to effectively identify and apprehend the relatively small number of people who commit these crimes.

Street-robbery primarily affects poorer people and typically occurs as they travel to and from work, school, shopping or while visiting people. This crime most often happens in quiet streets or overgrown areas as people make their way to or from taxi ranks or bus and train stations.

Street robbery decreased at an average rate of 7,2% per annum between 2004/05 and 2008/09. An even larger annual average decrease of 10,4% was recorded in 2009/10 and 2010/11. This changed in 2011/12 when street robbery only decreased by a marginal 2%.

In the years when street robbery was decreasing TRIO robberies (carjacking, house robbery and business robbery) increased substantially. By 2008/9 business robbery had increased by 319% since 2004/5, house robbery by 96% and hijacking by 20%. These crimes drive fear and insecurity as they affect victims in their homes, vehicles and places of work.

SAPS management have explained that improved visible policing reduced street robberies but had the negative effect of pushing robbers to targeting houses, businesses and vehicles instead. Yet when the police worked hard to improve security in the run-up to the FIFA World Cup, TRIO crimes stabilised. In 2009/10 there was a marginal decrease of 1,5%, for the first time in five years. During the 2010, these crimes decreased by a very significant 11,8%.

But in 2011/12 TRIO robberies the decrease was much smaller (1,3%) which suggested that the police were starting to struggle in containing these crimes.

During this time there was massive upheaval in the SAPS Crime Intelligence Division as its Head Lt-General Richard Mdluli was investigated for various serious crimes including murder and corruption and as a result faced internal disciplinary hearings and criminal charges. Political interference resulted in the investigations being halted and the charges withdrawn. The morale of this division plummeted as many police officials lost trust and respect in police leadership. This may be one of the reasons why we have seen an increase in these crimes this year.

**Crimes that decreased**

This year there has been a reduction in some types of inter-personal violent crime, particularly assault. Assault includes domestic violence. Since these kinds of crimes are not reported, and may also not be recorded by the police, the reduction does not necessarily mean that there are fewer assaults taking place.

- Assault with the intent to cause grievous bodily harm decreased by 6,6%
- Common assault decreased by 7,9%
- Sexual offences rate decreased marginally by 0,4%
- Rapes (about 75% of sexual offences) decreased by 0,4%
- Sexual assault (about 11% of sexual offences) decreased by 6,2%
• Common robbery decreased by 2,2%
• Business robbery decreased by 0,6%
• Cash-in-transit robbery decreased by 20,3% (from 261 cases in 2011/12)
• Bank robbery decreased by 80,0% (from 35 cases in 2011/12)
• ATM bombings decreased by 18,0% (from 261 cases in 2011/12)

Arson and malicious damage to property, crimes that are often committed at the same time as assault, also decreased, as did theft.

• Arson decreased by 8,7%
• Malicious damage to property decreased by 4,1%
• Theft of motor vehicles decreased by 4,4%
• Theft ‘other’ decreased by 7,0%
• Shoplifting decreased marginally by 3,9%

The decrease in shoplifting is marginal at 3,9% compared to the 9,5% decrease recorded in 2011/12.

Stock theft has decreased this year by 6,5%. This could be because of the implementation of the Rural Safety Strategy. Since last year there was a small increase of 1,4% in stock theft. While this crime has only averaged around 30 000 cases per annum over the past five years, its impact on food security is significant. For traditional small farmers, especially those with cattle and goats, stock theft can cause serious tensions and even manifest in vigilantism and violent conflict which in turn results in murders, attempted murders and arson.

The theft of motor vehicles and motorcycles decreased by 4,4% during 2012/2013. This is by far the smallest decrease recorded since 2006/07 (the year of the security guard strike). In the three years before 2012/13 an average annual decrease of 9,2% was recorded. Like carjacking and truck hijacking, organised crime syndicates are responsible for most motor vehicle theft.

**Explaining crime in the past year**

The most recent crime statistics show that between the beginning of April 2012 and the end of March 2013 South Africa experienced one of the worst years in the last decade from a crime reduction point of view.

Looking back we saw that in the eight years between 2002 and 2011 overall levels of crime decreased. Crime decreased even further during 2009/10 when the football Confederation Cup year was held and 2010/11 when South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup. Since 2011 there was a slowing of the reduction of several types of violent crime and others (such as business and house robberies) stabilised at relatively high levels.

Factors that influence crime and violence include high levels of inequality and poverty; the normalisation of violence in homes, neighbourhoods and schools; as well as instability in police management and the deterioration of police crime intelligence.
The government has used crime statistics as a measure of police performance. This means that if crime goes up the police are criticised and if they go down the police are praised. But since there are a large number of crimes that the police cannot be expected to prevent, this approach means that we tend to look for solutions in the wrong places. For most types of crimes the police, courts and prisons only step in once the crime has been committed. At that stage it is very important for the criminal justice system to work effectively and efficiently. But we need to look elsewhere if we want to reduce much of the violence in our society in the long term.

Most murders, assaults and rapes take place between people who know each other and live in the same neighbourhood. This kind of violence takes place for a number of reasons including because we accept violence as a normal and reasonable way to solve problems, at home, at school and in neighbourhoods. Poor self-esteem and unequal gender-relations make it worse. These kinds of crime are rarely premeditated and are often exacerbated by alcohol and other substance abuse. In such cases the best the police can do is to react swiftly and professionally.

The most effective ways of preventing such violence typically do not involve the police, but do require long-term and the detrimental effect of apartheid social engineering on families, schools and neighbourhoods remains stubbornly persistent. It is clear that we need to do more, particularly in communities most affected by interpersonal violence to reduce the risk factors for violence, but supporting parents; offering counselling to those affected by violence; ensuring that basic services are delivered and that violence is not accepted as normal.

Good policing can have a positive effect on some kinds of crime such as organised crime and robbery. This requires the collection and effective use of crime intelligence, strategically targeted patrols, roadblocks, and visible policing along with dedicated investigations to bring perpetrators to court.

These are some of the crimes that could be reduce by good policing practices:

- Murders and attempted murders that take place during aggravated robbery or inter-group conflict (such as gang or taxi violence), and vigilantism. These type of murders typically make between 35% and 45% of all murders and attempted murders.
- All kinds of robbery such as street robberies, vehicle and truck hijacking, residential and non-residential robberies.
- Residential and business burglaries.
- Certain types of theft such as those committed by organised crime syndicates such as theft of motor vehicle and motorcycles; stock theft; theft of non-ferrous metal such as copper cable, illegal mining, and poaching.
- Crimes detected as a result of police action

Crimes such as the illegal possession of firearms and ammunition, drug-related crime and driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs are detected during police action such as roadblocks and search and seizure operations. This means that these crimes will increase if there is an increase in police activity.
In 2012/2013 the figures for both the illegal possession of firearms and driving under the influence remained stable. With regard to firearms related offences, the annual case load has remained at 14 450 per year for the past five years since 2008/2009.

Driving under the influence of alcohol showed by far the smallest increase during 2012/2013 compared to any other 12-month period over the past decade.

Drug related crime on the other hand increased by a substantial 13,5% It was the single largest annual increase in the past decade. This indicates concerted police action against drug crimes. However, it is not an indication of the amount of drugs being used or sold. If the police are having a positive impact in removing drugs then the best indicator is that the street price should increase because demand will start to outstrip supply.

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 please visit the Crime and Justice Information and Analysis Hub at www.issafrica.org/crimehub