

CAN PUBLIC ROAD CLOSURES REDUCE CRIME EFFECTIVELY?

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1. Introduction

Crime causes tremendous upheaval and damage, often involving the loss of human life, serious injuries and great financial loss for many victims. It also causes fear, distress and insecurity. The UN International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS), based on the data of 50 countries, found that two out of three urban dwellers of large cities were touched by crime over a five year period and that African and Latin American cities are the most vulnerable (Van Dijk 2001:2). These surveys also found that the overall level of crime is higher in developing countries than in developed countries. In terms of crimes recorded by the SA police, crime increased by 25% (from 2.02 million to 2.52 million) between 1994/5 and 2001/02. Both police statistics and the 2003 SA national victim survey conducted by the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) also found that crime had decreased by about 2% between 1998 and 2003. Dealing with crime also costs the state and taxpayers billions of rands annually. The SA criminal justice budget was R30.4 billion in 2002/03 (of which R19.2 billion was allocated to the police; R6.9 billion to corrections and R4.3 billion to justice and constitutional development) (Leggett, Louw, Schönteich & Sekhonyane 2003:13; 38ff). Private citizens also spent billions of rands annually to protect their property and the private security industry has become a billion dollar industry.

According to the SA Constitution (Act 108 of 1996:7) every citizen has the right to freedom and security of the person which includes the right 'not to be deprived of freedom arbitrarily or without just cause' and 'to be free of all forms of violence from either public or private sources'.

During the 1970s and 1980s the private security industry became an important global roleplayer in the combating of crime, first in the commercial sector and later moving into residential areas doing security patrols, guarding residential property and suburbs. There are currently about 3 security officers for every police officer in SA and most southern African countries (Prinsloo & Naudé 2000:95). The growth in the security industry came about as a result of a global public realisation that the police are unable to combat crime effectively. In fact Legget et al (2003:26) point out that a number of international studies have found that the police do not significantly reduce crime in the normal course of their duties.

The government and the police also encourage citizens to take responsibility to protect themselves and their property from crime and to participate in activities such as neighbourhood watch and community/sector policing. The insurance industry also promotes private protection by offering lower premiums to home owners with a low crime risk profile, i.e. those living in security villages or those whose properties are extensively protected by physical security measures such as burglar bars and alarms.

2. A comparison of crimes rates in Africa

It is important to note that SA's crime rate is not that different from the eleven sub-Saharan

African countries which participated in the ICVS city surveys *). Since 1989 the ICVS has been conducted in 70 countries across the world using the same questionnaire and research methodology and it is currently regarded as the most reliable method to compare conventional crime rates between countries. Police recorded crime statistics are not suitable to compare cross country crime rates due to different legal definitions and recording techniques. The three African countries with the highest rates of violent crimes are (UN Africa crime database):

Robbery %		Assault/threat %	
Mozambique	7.6	Nigeria	71.3
South Africa	5.4	Tanzania	67.0
Namibia	5.0	Uganda	64.1
Rape %		Car hi-jacking (eight countries only) %	
South Africa	39.7	Zambia	6.0
Tanzania	23.6	Mozambique	5.2
Uganda	22.9	South Africa	5.0

It should be pointed out that the high incidence of rape in SA may partly be due to the fact that rape is regarded as a high priority crime by the authorities and feminist groups with the result that rape has received a lot of media attention since the mid 1990s, urging victims to report rape incidents. Kury (2002:2) also found that police recorded sexual offences in Germany have increased in the past ten years after a downward trend prior to that, due to the fact that sexual offences were discussed extensively in the media which heightened the public's sensitivity with regard to sexual offences and he is of the opinion that this factor may also have influenced the reporting rate in victim surveys.

The three countries with the highest rates for vehicle theft and burglary are:

Theft of a motor vehicle %		Burglary/housebreaking %	
Tanzania	7.6	Mozambique	12.6
South Africa	7.6	Zambia	10.8
Mozambique	7.5	Zimbabwe	10.2

3. Fear of crime

In the 1990s fear of crime became a global concern, even in countries whose crimes had decreased (eg the USA and the UK), and some criminologists maintain that we are now 'saturated with images of crime and fear of crime' (Garland & Sparks 2000:200). Fear of crime can be described as a general concern, anxiety, worry or subjective assessment of one's victimisation risk (Aromaa & Heiskanen 2002:121) and research indicates that fear is not always related to victimisation experiences. The ICVS surveys found that females and the elderly report higher rates of fear of crime than males although they have a significantly lower victimisation risk than males.

Fear of crime has many detrimental social consequences and worldwide it is regarded as a major

social problem as it influences people's behaviour patterns and restricts their movement. Some areas (eg city centres) may be avoided if they are perceived as dangerous, many women avoid going out at night, children's activities are restricted and some people may move away from certain areas which they regard as unsafe. Fear has also been found to intensify regional segregation of population groups and it can lead to an increase in gun ownership while it is also related to tougher punishment attitudes (ibid p120). Kury, Obergfell-Fuchs and Wurger (2002:38) also point out that fear of crime contributes to more severe anti-crime strategies and pressure on politicians to take strong punitive action and the public highlighting of fear of crime was a decisive motivation behind the establishment of community programmes to reduce crime.

People have also become more aware of their crime vulnerability and according to White and Haines (1996:8) the media play an important role in this regard. Moral panic generated by the media as a result of a biased focus on street crimes and unusual or more gruesome crime events often results in pressure being put on the state to take steps to control such crimes. Crime policies are then often implemented as a result of public pressure despite the fact that its effectiveness is not supported by criminological research. This has also resulted in crime becoming highly politicised and since the 1980s moral panic about law and order issues are effectively used by political parties during election times.

At the individual fear level fear of violence and fear of sexual offences are dominant although the level of fear varies across countries, between cities and rural areas and among large and small communities (Aromaa & Heiskanen 2002:121ff). Fear of burglary/housebreaking is also high in SA according to the 2003 national victim survey conducted by the ISS.

In terms of the ICVS city surveys conducted in eleven sub-Saharan African countries, South Africans seem to have very high levels of fear compared to the other countries which participated in the surveys (UN Africa crime database):

Table 1: Feelings of safety walking alone in own area after dark (%)

Country		Very safe	Fairly safe	A bit unsafe	Very unsafe	Uncertain
Botswana		11.4	31.9	32.3	24.1	0.3
Lesotho		11.0	15.5	16.4	56.7	0.3
Mozambique		3.4	29.9	33.7	30.8	2.1
Namibia		20.6	32.0	28.1	18.4	0.9
Nigeria		47.2	40.4	5.8	6.5	0.0
South Africa	1996	12.6	24.2	23.8	39.5	0.0
	2000	9.4	19.3	17.8	52.9	0.5
Swaziland		6.9	18.0	34.8	38.4	2.0
Tanzania		23.4	34.7	26.0	16.0	0.0
Uganda		24.9	55.5	15.8	3.6	0.1
Zambia		11.2	29.4	30.1	29.0	0.3
Zimbabwe		23.1	23.6	19.4	29.8	4.2

Lesotho and SA recorded the highest rates of fear in terms of feelings of being unsafe (57% and 53% respectively) with the other countries recording levels of 30% and less. The ISS national victim survey (using the same question) also found that in 2003, 58% of South Africans felt very unsafe at night while only 10% felt very safe. National opinion polls by the Human Sciences Research Council also found that in 1994 almost 75% of South Africans indicated that they felt very safe which decreased to 44% in 2000 (Schönteich 2000:9).

Apart from the reasons already discussed, South Africans' increased rate of fear may be related to the regime change that took place in 1994 when relatively inexperienced political activists, freedom fighters and released political prisoners took over the political leadership. This should be seen in the light of the fact that for many years South Africans were continually informed by the previous regime that anarchy will prevail should the liberation struggle succeed. The long standing culture of violence in the country as a result of the violence perpetrated during the apartheid era by the South African government and the members of the liberation struggle also contributed to high rates of fear amongst all civilians. It should also be noted that the 2003 SA national victim survey conducted by the ISS found that certain minorities (Indians and whites) reported higher rates of fear than the other race groups and public road closures appear to be popular in predominantly white suburbs. Some members of minority groups may also feel inadequately protected by the Constitution and political instability at regional level probably also contributes to high rates of fear. The fact that the Constitution sets out numerous rights to arrested, detained and accused persons while there are no specific rights for crime victims may also have contributed to citizens' feelings of fear and insecurity. The amnesty process just before the first democratic election in 1994 and the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1997 which granted amnesty to many brutal criminals as part of the reconciliation process may also have increased feelings of fear and insecurity, especially in the light of the fact that many of those who received amnesty continued with violent criminal activities.

4. Measures to reduce crime

Although various classification models to reduce crime have been developed, policy discussions

usually distinguishes between two kinds, namely **social** and **situational** models which correspond with the two main approaches to reduce **criminal motivation** and **crime opportunities** (Clarke 2001:18). He cites the following four approaches of which the first three seek to reduce **criminal motivation**, each with their own objectives and techniques (ibid 18):

- Child development
- Community development
- Social development
- Situational measures

Situational measures to reduce crime are focused on limiting **crime opportunities** by using a variety of physical security measures to ensure the safety of potential victims and the community. Graham and Bennet (1995:48) describe it as **target hardening** which also includes 'area level strategies such as fencing housing estates'.

This is in line with modern criminological thinking which advocates a multi-dimensional approach focusing on **individual, social** and **physical risk** factors to reduce crime which should be cost-effective in **social** and **monetary** terms. It is also of interest to note that Welsh, Farrington, Sherman & MacKenzie (2002:13) aver that crime prevention should be evaluated 'not by its intentions, but by its consequences'.

Since the mid 1990s many suburban communities in SA started closing off public roads, legally and illegally, allowing entry only by means of one or more accessed controlled roads manned by security guards or electronically controlled gates. In some instances the perimeter of the enclosed suburb is closed off by the erection of high walls, pallisade fencing and/or electric fencing although the majority of these suburbs seem to use existing walls and fences as a cost saving measure resulting in the boundaries of such enclosed suburbs being inadequately secured which makes the inhabitants vulnerable to crime risk.

5. The reliability of crime statistics collected by home owner associations

Crime statistics collected by home owner associations in support of the closure of public roads need to be treated with caution. The crime categories used are often very broad and in one Pretoria suburb the following categories were used:

- Theft and burglary
- Vehicle related crimes
- Other crimes
- Robbery and vehicle hi-jackings
- Rape and attempted murder

There was no breakdown of the ratio between the various crimes in terms of the number of households or in relation to the number of people per household. There was also no indication of where crimes such as theft, robbery, vehicle hi-jackings, rape, etc were experienced, i.e at or near the victim's home, in the neighbourhood or elsewhere in the city. In the light of these deficiencies such crime statistics should be treated with circumspection as they may be

unreliable or incorrect giving a distorted picture of crime in the area. Furthermore, these deficiencies make it impossible to monitor crime trends accurately after the road closure.

It should further be emphasised that victim surveys are highly specialised surveys which require a number of screener questions to prevent problems such as telescoping (a tendency to condense crime experiences into the research period) and well trained interviewers to overcome victim reluctance to report sensitive crimes such as rape, domestic violence and assault, which is mostly committed by family members and acquaintances. It must, however, be mentioned that even victim surveys are prone to response errors (Naudé 2000:9).

6. Can public road closures effectively reduce crime?

From a criminological perspective public road closures (and also large access controlled security villages) have a limited success rate (Naudé 2003:35ff). It can reduce some opportunistic or impulsive crimes, particularly theft, burglary/housebreaking, vandalism and street crimes (e.g. pick-pocketing and snatch-and-grab crimes) which are mostly committed by opportunistic and impulsive criminals who simply use the opportunity to commit crime while in an area. It has very little impact on the overall crime rate at city, regional or national level.

As occasional visitors must still be allowed into the enclosed area, eg family and friends, relatives and friends of domestic workers, municipal workers, telkom staff, construction workers, garden and repair and delivery services, there is still a high crime risk in such closed areas.

A number of criminological studies found that crimes such as theft, burglary/housebreaking and street crimes are frequently committed by individuals or visitors living, working or relaxing in the area, ie people who are legitimately in the area and there is often collusion between visitors and people who are legitimately in the area for criminal purposes.

Crimes against the person, such as rape, assault and murder are mostly committed by family members, other relatives, friends or acquaintances - thus people known to each other as was found by a number of national and international victims of crime studies (Van Kesteren, Mayhew & Nieuwbeerta (2000) and Naudé, Prinsloo & Snyman (2001). The first National Victims of Crime Survey conducted in 1998 by Statistics SA found that 80 percent of assaults and 75 percent of sexual offences were committed by a spouse/partner, family member or somebody known to the victim. See also the SAPS 2001 report. Mrs Marika de Klerk was murdered by a security guard working at the security estate where she lived. Victim surveys found that most crimes against the person occur at or near the victim's home or at places of entertainment visited by victims and their friends.

Robbery and car hi-jacking on the other hand are mostly committed by strangers comprising two or three criminals using a firearm in 50% of cases in the African victimisation surveys. Robbery mostly occurs elsewhere in the city where the victim lives or works although 28.6% of robbery incidents occur near the victim's home. In the case of car hi-jacking an average of 22.2% of incidents occurred at the victim's home and 22.6% near the victim's home (UN Africa crime database). These crimes are normally committed by well organised gangs who will not be deterred by public road closures.

Gang-related violence and crimes also normally occur in the areas where the gangsters live.

Crimes such as drug abuse, fraud and corruption can also not be controlled by access controlled public roads and security villages.

Professional and organised criminals as well as crime syndicates will not be deterred by access controlled public roads. They will merely gain access by pretending that they are in the area for legitimate purposes such as deliveries or repair work or they will simply scale boundary walls, cut fences or execute a hi-jacking or robbery just outside the access controlled point.

Physical security measures, if effectively implemented and manned (eg CCTV and well protected security villages) may also displace crime to areas outside the controlled area although research findings are conflicting. This may place everybody who moves into these uncontrolled areas at risk, including the inhabitants of the security controlled areas who cannot live in total isolation. The displacement of crime is illustrated by the fact that the installation of CCTV surveillance cameras in specific central business district areas displaced crime to the areas of the central business district not covered by CCTV cameras. The experience of Stellenbosch serves as an example where it was found that the cameras' success resulted in a dramatic increase in crime in areas immediately outside their reach (The Pretoria News, 20 March 2000:7).

Graham and Bennett (1995:69) also point out that although some physical security measures may be effective at the level of **individual** targets, 'there is very little evidence to show that it can be effective at the level of whole estates, cities, regions or countries' which seems to support the displacement of crime viewpoint. Opportunistic and impulsive criminals will merely continue with their criminal activities in the surrounding unprotected areas.

Despite the proliferation of security controlled public roads and security villages in South Africa's main metropolitan areas since 1994, there is no statistical evidence of a dramatic decrease in crime in these metropolises according to police crime statistics although the police did find that crime levelled off in 145 problem policing areas across the country (SAPS 2001 report).

As crime stabilised in such a large policing area it would seem that other factors probably played a role in this regard.

The argument that gated suburbs and security villages reduce the workload of the police is also flawed as the existing police are merely deployed in the surrounding areas.

It should also be pointed out that criminals continually adapt their modus operandi or crime techniques to overcome physical deterrents. It is averred, for example, that car hi-jacking is largely the result of the improved technology to protect vehicles and that the increase in cash in transit heists can be ascribed to the fact that it has become very difficult to rob bank cashiers although not all experts support this view.

7. Some consequences of public road closures

The larger the enclosed area or the security village, the more difficult it will be to control lawful and unlawful access which in turn increases the crime risk, especially when the borders of the security controlled area are the existing, often inadequate, boundary walls and fences - this is frequently the case.

Access controlled areas can also create false feelings of safety which can increase inhabitants' crime risk as they are inclined to become complacent resulting in a decrease in their vigilance, observation and surveillance of their environment.

Another serious problem is the fact that public road closures are problematic for emergency services such as the police, ambulances, fire brigade and private security services which can endanger life. The question is whose right to life is the most important: those who want to protect themselves and their property from crime or those who need emergency life saving services? Economically it can also have a negative effect on business operations in the enclosed area as it restricts the flow of people to the business area.

Tremendous inconvenience is also caused for the general public who are forced to use alternative routes which in turn causes congestion and high pollution (detrimental to the health of the home owners in these streets). Such traffic congestion can also increase the risk of pedestrian and vehicle accidents.

The potential for conflict among the various home-owners is also a reality as home-owners who do not support public road closures are often placed under tremendous psychological pressure. They are often accused of being selfish wanting the benefit of the extra security without paying for the service.

The restriction of access to public roads is probably also a violation of individuals' constitutional right to freedom of movement and is possibly also a transgression of the Development Facilitation Act of 1995 which advocates integrated and mixed-use settlements and precludes low density, segregated, fragmented and mono-functional development of land (Landman & Schönsteich 2002:82).

Legal aspects pertaining to the duties of security guards may also not always be adhered to by home owners associations. They should receive a written mandate from the property owners as to their duties. They are furthermore only allowed to search visitors or their property with their consent and such consent must be given voluntarily (orally or written) and prior to the infringement of the visitor's rights. Valid consent can only be given if the consenting person is fully aware of all the implications of the act he or she is consenting to. Visitors can lawfully refuse to have their person or property searched, unless the security guard has a '**reasonable suspicion**' that the visitor is in possession of stolen goods, drugs, arms and ammunition or explosives in which case a civil arrest can be made. In case of a false arrest the victim will be able to institute a legal claim for damages against the home owners. Some legal experts are also of the opinion that no member of the public who wants to use a public road can be denied access to the area and security guards who stop people and vehicles to access controlled public roads asking for their names and the nature of their business in the area are in all likelihood acting illegally.

Graham and Bennett (1995:68) also point out that 'the use of situational measures on their own can lead to a kind of 'fortress' mentality, as residents become increasingly security conscious' and withdraw from the social environment which in turn can lead to increased feelings of isolation and fear.

South Africa only recently moved away from apartheid and segregation and the different race groups are still struggling to socialise and interact with each other. It is therefore tragic that there is now a focus on social and economic segregation which can result in polarisation, social exclusivity and social disengagement. It can also lead to feelings of 'us' and 'them' which can create fear, suspicion and feelings of inequality. A build-up of such negative feelings can eventually manifest in violent crimes and the destruction of property by those who feel excluded and marginalised.

8. The effect of public road closures on property prices

A perception has been created that the value of property will increase in access controlled security areas and security villages as it reduces crime. Many estate agents and insurance companies also seem to propagate this view which can contribute to inflated property prices and a distortion of the property market. In the light of the tremendous escalation in the number of public road closures and security villages it may eventually even have a negative influence on SA's economy as a whole.

The sale of property in security controlled areas can also be negatively affected by the fact that home owners are often required to change the title deed of their property to ensure that future buyers continue with the pro rata payment of the operational costs of the security measure.

9. The importance of a comprehensive strategy to effectively reduce crime

Welsh et al (2002:14) emphasise that crime reduction programmes can not be conducted in a vacuum and there is an interdependency between the various social and physical security programmes. It is important that the authorities and community organisations also deal with the individual and social risk factors contributing to crime if South Africa is serious about reducing crime substantially. It is a reality that, apart from Brazil, South Africa is one of the most unequal societies in the world and the international ICVS surveys confirm that crime rates are high in highly unequal societies (Van Dijk 2001:5).

This view is also supported by Graham and Bennett (1995:7) when they state that the implementation of physical crime reduction measures are expensive, benefitting only a few and that developing countries will probably be better off focusing more on improving the many negative social and economic conditions contributing to crime in order to reduce crime.

10. Conclusion

Public road closures and security villages can only make a limited contribution to reducing certain crimes committed by mostly opportunistic criminals while there are many negative social and financial consequences that accompany such closures. It has very little effect on the overall crime rate at city, regional or national level. If South Africans are serious about reducing crime a concerted effort should be made to also deal with the many social risk factors contributing to crime. Communities can play a decisive role in this regard by becoming involved in social and community development programmes.

Every home-owner and citizen has the right to safeguard their person and property but the right to freedom of movement as guaranteed by the Constitution is also important. There are many

effective physical and other security measures that home-owners can use at the individual level for protection without the many negative consequences of public road closures.

*) The surveys in Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia were conducted by the author and her colleagues at the University of South Africa in collaboration with the UN while the other African surveys were conducted by the UN.

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