

Chapter 11

Crime

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This chapter reports on the survey results of various questions dealing with crime that were put to respondents of the November 1999 national survey. The questions revolved around general perceptions of the crime situation and their experience with crime during the preceding 12 months. The results are analysed in terms of various variables, notably province, population group, income, gender and age. It is important to note that the responses will be analysed in the order they were asked in the questionnaire. The core questions have remained the same over various HSRC surveys, allowing a measure of longitudinal analysis of national opinion on these issues. The November 1999 results will however be mostly compared with those from December 1998.

11.1 Perceptions of safety

The first question to probe attitudes towards crime issues was that of “How safe or unsafe do you personally feel on most days?” The responses show that national opinion is almost evenly balanced between those respondents who reported feeling safe or not safe. Some 44% said they felt either safe or very safe, slightly lower than the 47% of respondents who said they felt unsafe or very unsafe “on most days”. These figures show little change from December 1998 when the national aggregates for these categories were 43% and 49% respectively.

When analysed by other variables the results show some interesting points. In the first place, the survey showed that there was no difference between male and female respondents on their feelings of personal safety. Given the high levels of crime in the country, and extensive publicity around women being the victims of domestic violence and rape, a working hypothesis of this point would probably have expected women to hold higher levels of insecurity than men. But, as will be shown below, women are less likely to suffer from crime than men. Secondly, the age of respondents also generally made no meaningful differences to their attitudes on this point.

Differences are however important when variables of income, population group and province are analysed. Respondents with an income between R1 250 and R8 329 per month report somewhat higher levels of insecurity than those falling outside of these margins. In the case of those respondents earning between R4 160 and R8 329 it varies between 53% and 60%, against the national average of 47%. Not surprisingly respondents in the highest income bracket (above R16 660 per month) report the lowest levels of insecurity. This is arguably the result of these respondents being able to afford significant higher levels of private security protection than other South Africans. Population group differences are stark. Indians are the most insecure about their personal safety (69%), followed by whites (59%), Blacks (45%) and coloureds (41%).

Provincial differences are also important, as Table 11.1 illustrates. Respondents living in the Free State and Gauteng report much higher feelings of safety than those living in Mpumalanga (30%), Northern Cape (37%), Western Cape (40%) and the North West (41%). Two comments can be made on these figures. First, the extremely low figure of personal safety recorded by respondents in Mpumalanga seems unexpected — at least compared to Gauteng and Western Cape which SAPS figures generally record as having the highest crime rates of all provinces. Second, the Western Cape response, already low and matching its high crime rate, was recorded before the holiday season terror blasts. Subsequent polls might well show the impact of these blasts, especially if they continue sporadically during the year.

Table 11.1 Perceptions of safety by province, November 1999 (percentages)

Perceptions of safety	Province								
	EC	FS	GT	KN	MP	NC	NP	NW	WC
Safe	45	60	37	47	30	59	51	41	40
Neither	3	5	11	7	7	10	3	8	14
Unsafe	52	34	48	46	63	31	46	51	46

How compatible are the November 1999 responses with those recorded in the December 1998 survey? The surveys reveal rather wide swings in perceptions over the period than a consistency in rankings between the provinces. The swings could be affected by a number of factors — including changes in perceptions in police performance in the different provinces to the localised effects of crime in communities sampled by the survey.

11.2 Perceptions of government control over crime

Respondents were then asked for their opinion on the extent to which government had control or not over the crime situation. The responses show that just under one in ten persons (9%) believed that the government “has full control”; that five out of ten (49%) believed that the government had either “small” or “large” control and that just under four out of ten persons (35%) believed that the government was “not in control”. The remaining 7% of the sample said they did not know.

When compared with the December 1998 survey, these responses suggest a substantial improvement in perceptions by South Africans towards the government’s handling of crime. The December 1998 survey provided figures of 5% for “full control”; 41% for “small to large control” and 51% for no control at all. Corroboration of this point is also provided by the 10% fall in respondents pointing to crime as a major national priority, as reported in Chapter 3 of this report.

These positive assessments are reflected across all population groups, even though large majorities of whites and Indians still remain convinced that the government is not in control of the crime situation. The number of whites holding this attitude dropped from 88% to 75% while amongst Indians it dropped from 79% to 68%, and amongst blacks it dropped from 37% in December 1998 to 26% a year later.

The explanations for this improvement in attitudes probably hinge on voter perceptions of the actions of the new Minister for Safety and Security, Mr. Steve Tshwete. Since his appointment in June 1999, he has adopted a high profile, tough stance towards crime issues, which clearly finds favour with South Africans. Voters would seem to expect him to deliver either a holding down, if not a reduction, in crime rates.

Provincial variations in responses to this question remain important even allowing for the improvement in perceptions noted above. The majority of respondents in the Western Cape continue to believe the government has no control (dropping from 68% in December 1998 to 54% in November 1999) while respondents in the Free State remain the most positive towards the government on this score (increasing from 12% to 19% in the same period).

Table 11.2: Perceptions of government control by province, November 1999 (percentages)

Control	Province								
	EC	FS	GT	KN	MP	NC	NP	NW	WC
Full control	10	19	7	6	9	9	16	10	3
Some control	63	47	42	61	43	48	41	49	37
No control	24	29	47	21	44	33	34	33	54

11.3 Experiences of crime

The third question posed to respondents concerned their experiences with crime in the 12 months preceding the survey. Since the November 1999 survey was the first survey to ask this question, no longitudinal analysis is possible on this particular point. Future surveys will track victimisation rates in a consistent manner.

Respondents were asked whether they personally had been victims of crime during the last 12 months and, if so, how many times they had been a victim. The results show that one in five respondents reported being a victim during the time period. Table 11.3 presents the results on the basis of gender of respondents.

Table 11.3: Victimization experiences by gender, November 1999 (percentages)*

Frequency	Male	Female	Total
Not once	74	84	81
One	15	10	12
Twice	5	4	4
Three times	3	2	2
Four times	1	0.3	1
Five times	1	0.7	1

* Figures rounded except for rates below 1%. This account for columns not adding up to 100% in all cases.

When analysed by population group, distinct differences emerge between the four population groups. White and Indian respondents report substantially higher victimisation rates than black or coloured respondents. Victimization rates also generally rise with the income of respondents; the highest rate for persons reporting being a victim of crime once in the preceding 12 months was 24% for those earning between R4 160 and R16 659 per month persons falling between 35 and 54 years also experience the highest victimisation rates, at 14% for those reporting a single crime in the preceding year. Table 11.4 illustrates the experiences of respondents in the different population groups.

Table 11.4: Victimization experiences by population group, November 1999 (percentages)*

Frequency	Black	White	Coloureds	Indians
Not once	84	61	82	68
One	11	19	10	15
Twice	4	6	5	7
Three times	1	7	3	5
Four times	0,4	2	0,6	3
Five times	0,4	5	-	2

* Figures rounded, except for rates below 1%. This accounts for columns not adding up to 100% in all cases.

Respondents in the Free State and the Northern Province report the lowest victimisation rates, closely followed by the Northern Cape. On the other hand, those in Gauteng report the highest, followed by KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The table illustrates the variations between provinces.

Table 11.5: Victimization experiences by province, November 1999 (percentages)*

Frequency	Province								
	EC	FS	GT	KN	MP	NC	NP	NW	WC
Not once	81	91	74	76	83	87	90	86	78
One	13	6	16	12	12	6	6	10	11
Twice	3	3	5	8	2	5	3	2	5
Three times	2	1	3	1	2	2	0,3	2	4
Four times	-	-	1	1	0,2	0,3	0,3	-	2
Five times	1	0,2	1	1	-	-	-	0,7	2

* Figures rounded, except for rates below 1%. This accounts for columns not adding up to 100% in all cases.

11.4 Is there a consistent inter-provincial pattern to perceptions and experiences of crime?

This chapter has presented responses to three questions surveying perceptions of various crime issues. This final section concludes by ordering the responses to the questions on the basis of the provincial variable. The provinces are ranked according to the degree to which respondents in each province report the greatest negative perceptions of each of the three crime questions posed to them.

Table 11.6: Provincial rankings

Province	Feel unsafe		Feel govt. is not in control		Victimisation experiences	
	%	Rank	%	Rank	%	Rank
EC	51	2	24	8	19	4
FS	34	8	29	7	9	9
GT	49	4	47	2	26	1
KN	47	5	21	9	24	2
MP	61	1	44	3	17	5
NC	31	9	33	6	13	7
NP	44	7	34	4	10	8
NW	51	3	34	5	14	6
WC	46	6	54	1	22	3

The rankings are done to reflect on the extent to which actual experience of crime in the different provinces lead to consistent negative perceptions of personal safe and government control. The data suggests that there is no perfect match between actual experiences and perceptions in all nine provinces across the three issues.

For example, respondents in Mpumalanga have the highest “unsafe” ranking and another high ranking for lack of government control over crime; but they are a long way off being the province with the highest victimisation rate. Similarly, respondents in KwaZulu-Natal experience high crime rates (second on the ranking) but, in effect, report the most positive perceptions towards government control over crime.

But while there might be no close match between perceptions and experiences in every province, the data does show some broadly consistent patterns within provinces across each question. This is particularly the case with respect to Gauteng, Western Cape, the Free State and to a slightly lesser extent in the case of the Northern Cape, Northern Province and the North West.