Investigating the effectiveness and accuracy of crime statistics as a tool to monitor and evaluate crime in South Africa

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Abstract
Despite the use of crime statistics as a tool to measure, evaluate and monitor crime, there is an undisputed element of underreporting of crime to the authorities. It is against this backdrop that this article investigate crime statistics as an effective tool to measure, evaluate and monitor crime in South Africa. Therefore, the key question to be addressed by this article was whether crime statistics are an effective and accurate tool to measure, evaluate and monitor crime. The qualitative methodology allowed for detailed verbal descriptions of the participants' methods for gathering, analysing and operationalising crime statistics, which provided insight into the participants' daily lives. The population for this study was consumers or users of crime statistics for various reasons, especially for measuring crime rate or determining actions to be taken as a result of crime. To analyse data collected through interviews, contents analysis and a literature review, the researchers employed a qualitative research data analysis technique. The framework of theory of Planned Behaviour along with complimentary theories, was adopted to gain insights into the social norms and beliefs surrounding crime reporting. The study revealed that international best pratices in crime reporting should be adopted to build trust and enhance a more safer enviroment. It concluded that despite crime statistics not always being infallible tools to measure, monitor and evaluate crime, they are critically important in various ways. These include crime prediction, budget and resource allocation, improving community relations and initiative assessments.

Key words: Crime, Crime-Statistics, Law Enforcement Agencies, Investigation, South Africa

Introduction

Crime is a major concern in South Africa, and it requires a collaborative effort from various institutions to address the high prevalence of criminal activities. These institutions include law enforcement agencies, businesses, government departments, civil society, research institutions, and the academia. Crime statistics play a crucial role in measuring the effectiveness of crime prevention strategies, allocating resources, and informing policymaking decisions (Monyeki, 2021). Traditionally, crime statistics in South Africa were released annually in September by the Minister of Police, followed by the release of the South African Police Service (SAPS) Annual Report (Gould, Burger & Newham, 2016). However, due to increasing concerns from the political and civil society sectors, there has been a revision of this approach. The Minister of Police now releases crime statistics on a quarterly basis (Gould, Burger & Newham, 2016). Law enforcement agencies utilize crime statistics or crime reports to measure the prevalence (increase or decrease) of specific crime types or categories. As Pina-Sanchez et al., (2023) defines, crime statistics are systematic quantitative results about crime, as opposed to crime news or anecdotes. However, this definition implies that crimes committed but not reported or brought to the attention of the police are not counted, potentially leading to an inaccurate picture of the crime rate in a particular geographical area.

The issue of underreporting of crime is a significant concern. According to the Victims of Crime Survey conducted by Statistics South Africa, about 50% of households reported crimes to the police (Statistics South Africa, 2019). This low reporting rate can be attributed to factors such as a lack of trust in law enforcement agencies, fear of retaliation, or the perception that the crime was not serious enough to warrant reporting (Skogan, 1984; Tarling & Morris, 2010: Roberts, & Gordon, 2022).

To address this challenge, it is crucial to educate the public on the importance of reporting crimes, regardless of their perceived severity. The public needs to understand what constitutes a crime, the significance of reporting crimes, the usefulness of crime statistics, strategies for reducing crime, and ways to distance oneself from criminal activities (Republic SA, 2022). Notwithstanding, encouraging crime reporting can be achieved through various means, such as community outreach programs, public awareness campaigns, and fostering positive relationships between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve. Building trust and confidence in the justice system may lead individuals to be more inclined to report crimes, resulting in more accurate and comprehensive crime statistics (Marsh, et al., 2019). It is also essential to address factors that contribute to the underreporting of crime, including fear of retaliation, perceived ineffectiveness of law enforcement agencies, and a lack of understanding of the reporting process (Tarling & Morris, 2010). Therefore, implementing measures to protect and support individuals who report crimes, improving the responsiveness and efficiency of law enforcement agencies, as well as simplifying the reporting process will go a long way to encourage more people to come forward and report criminal activities (Nyanya, 2017).

Similarly, accurate and reliable crime statistics are crucial for various purposes, such as informing crime prevention strategies, effective allocation of resources, and monitoring the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. As emphasized by Gould et al. (2016), crime statistics play a vital role in understanding crime trends, identifying hotspots, and developing targeted interventions to address specific crime categories or in a specific geographic area. Furthermore, crime statistics also have value in academic research and policy analysis. Researchers and policymakers can use crime data to identify underlying factors contributing to criminal behavior, evaluate the impact of existing policies and programs, and propose evidence-based solutions to address the root causes of crime (Siegelaar & Ballard, 2023). Moreover, Qaakathekile (2019) points out that statistics are essential in ensuring updates on crime rates, assisting to understand crime and how to create a safer environment for society by reducing crime, as well as for reviewing the accountability of the government.

It suffices to say that addressing the underreporting of crime and enhancing the accuracy and reliability of crime statistics is a multifaceted challenge that requires a collaborative effort from various stakeholders, including law enforcement agencies, government institutions, civil society organizations, and the general public. Similarly, by promoting crime reporting through education, building trust in the justice system, and

addressing the factors that contribute to underreporting, South Africa can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of its crime landscape and develop effective strategies to combat criminal activities. It is against this backdrop that this article aims to investigate the effectiveness and accuracy of crime statistics as a tool to monitor crime in South Africa and identify the existing challenges of crime statistics. The article also suggests workable recommendations to improve the effectiveness of crime control in the country.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study is based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1991. The TPB is widely used to explain and predict various human behaviors, including crime reporting. According to the TPB, an individual's intention to report a crime is influenced by three main factors: behavioural beliefs, normative beliefs, and control beliefs (Ajzen, 1991). However, the theory has been criticized for oversimplifying decision-making processes and not considering unconscious or habitual behaviors (Sniehotta, Presseau, & Araújo-Soares, 2014). In the context of crime reporting, the TPB assumes that individuals go through a rational decision-making process, considering the perceived benefits and risks, social norms, and their perception of control over the behavior. However, research suggests that crime reporting behavior may also be influenced by other factors such as emotional responses, personal experiences, and situational factors (Tolsma, Blaauw, & Grotenhuis, 2012).

Furthermore, the TPB's assumption of a direct relationship between intentions and behaviors has been questioned. Studies have shown that intentions do not always lead to actual behavior due to other factors or barriers (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Despite these criticisms, the TPB has been applied in various studies to understand crime reporting behavior and has provided valuable insights. For example, Tarling and Morris (2010) found that the perceived seriousness of the crime, beliefs about the effectiveness of the police, and fear of reprisal were significant predictors of crime reporting intentions, confirming the TPB's components of behavioural and control beliefs.

To complement the theory of Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in addressing emotional and situational factors influencing crime reporting, Social Learning Theory, as articulated by Akers and Jensen (2017), posits that behaviour is learned through observation and imitation. This suggests that individuals may be influenced by the behaviour and attitudes of peers or community members as to whether or not to report crimes. If reporting crimes is viewed as ineffective or stigmatized within a community, individuals may be discouraged from doing so. In addition, Hipp & Wo (2015), support TPB by emphasizing the role of social cohesion and mutual trust in their Collective Efficacy Theory of Crime. Collective efficacy compliments TPB's theory based on trust on community support in the sense that it can helps individuals to feel more empowered to report crimes. These theories illuminate the interplay of social, emotional, and situational factors when it comes to crime reporting in South Africa. Therefore, TPB in conjunction with Social Learning and Collective Efficacy Theories, will assist law enforcement agencies like the SAPS in understanding how to effectively encourage the South African public to report crimes. This integrated approach will help to inform the design of more effective interventions and policies aimed at enhancing community safety.

Methodology

The authors adopt a qualitative research approach through a phenomenological lens to understand the phenomenon as narrated by those who are involved daily with crime statistics. These included law enforcement members like South African Police Services (SAPS), research institutions, academia, government agencies such as Traffic Police, Statistics South Africa, (Mabasa, Olutola & Adjorlolo, 2021). The research design was exploratory, which allows the researchers to listen to and understand the participants regarding their ideals and personal experiences. The researchers aim to solicit a 'lived' experience from these participants in so far as crime statistics are effective tool to evaluate and monitor crime. Nine participants were accessed and interviewed from SAPS on crime statistics as it relates to the subject of the study. The participants were purposively selected based on their positions and nature of their

duties and experience on crime statistics and the perceived relevance of their input in articulating issues of crime statistics. While the selection of nine participants aimed to represent the views from each of South Africa's nine provinces, this sample size may not adequately capture the diversity of crime statistics users. Due to challenges related to funding, mobility, and accessing participants from provinces such as Mpumalanga, Western Cape, Eastern Cape, and North West—many of whom reside and work in Gauteng—the study relied on this smaller group. As a result, the findings may not reflect the broader s and geographic landscape of users. To address potential biases, the researchers incorporated triangulation, corroborating their findings with relevant existing literature.

The researchers used interviews to collect data with the purpose to solicit the views of participants on the subject under investigation. A thematic data analysis strategy was used to analyze the data collected. To locate and organise the findings of this study and to ensure the achievement of the objectives, data presentation and discussions are based on themes and sub-themes that emerged during fieldwork and data analysis. The themes and their sub-categories are hereunder presented, including verbatim narratives as provided by the participants interviewed. These verbatim narratives are supported or triangulated against the literature review in order to give a robust and unbiased analysis.

Understanding of Crime Statistics

Sub-category-   conceptualization of Crime Statistics

In order to better comprehend crime statistics and their importance, which are gathered at the levels such as police stations, Component Crime Registrar and StatsSA, the participants expressed their respective views of crime statistics. In their reflection of understanding crime statistics, participants indicated a clear understanding of the phenomenon. They also emphasised how crime statistics are collected, interpreted and presented to construct an image of crime. In order to maintain the length of the article reasonable, the authors could not provide an overall verbatim account of all participants, but selective account as deemed fit.

Participant 1: **'***Crime statistics is a concept that simply means you gather information about a specific type of a crime; it is about occurrence and frequency of a number of a specific crime that happens in a policing area. It is a measure that gives you an idea of what kinds of crimes are happening in a specific area, keeping an idea of where and when.'*

Participant 2: '*Crime statistics are all the crimes that had been reported to the police by the people, victims and registered by the police. This will be the crimes that had occurred within the borders of South Africa. They would recover a particular period or statistically called a reference period.'*

Participant 3: '*Crime statistics in South Africa are the statistics collected by the South African Police Service and they reflect the number of criminal cases open within, by members of the public mostly and in some cases where they have come across crimes themselves. Therefore, they open their own dockets and that gets counted so it is collected by a crime management information system.'*

Participant 6: '*Crime statistics is released by the police to reflect crimes that are recorded and reported to them. Therefore, those are the ones that they pickup daily through cases reported to them.'*

Participant 5: '*Crime statistics are numbers of crime reported on the stations,every month or every one daily basis, we register cases. Those cases are statistics and they are the ones that we use to determine the stats of the crimeor the crime comparison within the stations.'*

Participant 9: '*Crime statistics are numbers of crime reported and captured.'*

It is indicative from the foregoing that general understanding of crime statistics from the participant's veiwpoint is in support of the conceptual definitions as provided by Qaakathekile. According to Qaakathekile (2020), crime statistics represent the number of crimes charges or counts and not the number of registered case dockets, because a case docket can contain a single count of a particular offence or multiple counts of an offence or several offences.

Sub-category- Importance of Crime Statistics
Participant 1: '*Crime statistics are very important in a way that they give a station management (from local to national) an idea of where and what kind of crimes are happening at specific places within the area and that should direct the station manager on how to utilise its resources depending on the type of crime because some crimes are very violent and serious while other crimes are not. Which means there are crimes that need the management to interact directly while other do not really demand the direct interaction of the management.'*
'*They are very important because they provide an official record crime that has been reported or observed by the South African Police or law enforcement. They are the ones that determines and helps the station to see their crime picture how they perform.*
Participant 2: ' '*They are very important because they provide the public, policy makers, government and private sector with information regarding the crime levels and trends in the country whether its increasing or decreasing and this can be used for planning and monitoring how far we are from achieving our goal.'*
Participant 6: "*Crime data are significant because they can show where additional resources are needed as well as where fewer resources are needed. They offer one of the best gauges of the current state of affairs and the degree of safety in a certain location. They are a crucial indicator since they show where and how to distribute resources*".

The above evident from the study by (De Kock, 2016; Monyeki, 2021), which states that 'without statistics it would be impossible to create appropriate law enforcement budgets'

Crime Statistics in South Africa

In the work of Qaakathekile (2020:12), crime statistics in South Africa represent the number of crimes charges or counts, rather than the number of registered case dockets (SAPS, 2023). This distinction is crucial because a single case docket can contain multiple counts of an offense or several different offenses. For instance, if a person is arrested for burglary and assault during a single incident, it would be recorded as one case docket but with two separate crime counts – one for burglary and one for assault. Therefore, crime statistics would reflect these as two separate crime incidents, even though they originated from the same case docket. This approach helps provide a more accurate representation of the actual number of crimes committed, rather than simply counting the number of case dockets, which could potentially underestimate the true extent of criminal activity. Thus, the statistics can capture the full scope of offenses, including instances where multiple crimes are committed within a single incident or case. This method allows for a more detailed analysis of crime trends, patterns, and the prevalence of specific types of offenses. Consequently, crime statistics based on counts or charges are considered a more reliable and comprehensive measure for understanding the crime situation in South Africa, as they provide a clearer picture of the actual number of criminal incidents and their respective types.

Crime statistics or crime information as released by the Ministry of Police are based on the so-called seventeen community-reported serious crimes. These community-reported serious crimes are categorised as contact crimes, contact-related crimes, property-related crimes, other crimes and crimes dependent on police action for detection (Lehohla, 2015). Crime types that fall within contact crimes category are murder, attempted murder, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm, common assault, robbery with aggravating circumstances and sexual offences (SAPS, 2019). Contact-related crimes include arson and malicious damage to property and the likes (Lehohla, 2015).

Property-related crimes include burglary at non-residential premises, burglary at residential premises, theft of motor vehicle and motor cycle, theft out of/or from motor vehicle and stock theft (Lehohla, 2015). Other serious crimes include all theft not mentioned elsewhere, commercial crime and shoplifting. The types of crimes that fall under crimes that depend on police action for detection includes illegal possession of firearms, ammunition, drug-related crimes, driving under the influence of alcohol and drugs, sexual offences detected as a result of police action. The crime statistics as released by the Ministry of Police will

either indicate an increase or decrease in a particular crime category (Lehohla, 2015). This tells us that statistics are highly essential in keeping us updated on crime rates, helping with our understanding of crime, how to create a safer environment for society through the reductions of crime, as well as review the accountability of the government (Niyazi, et al., 2022).

The crime statistics are a reflection of all crime incidents reported to the police at various police stations across the country or crime incidents as detected by police during the course of their duties. However, a crime could have been committed, but not reported to the police, and such crime incidents may not be reflected on the crime statistics.

The Table 1 below reflects a ten-year period of the five crime categories (17 Community-Reported Serious Crimes) as recorded by the South African Police Service.

The Table 1 below depicts an average of 14% increase on contact crimes, sexual offences, contact-related crimes and crime dependent on police action for detection during the past ten years. It also shows that property- related crimes are on average decrease of 2% during the ten-year period. It indicates that, crime dependent on police action for detection should always be on the increase. It indicates the total number of the 17 community- reported serious crimes for the period of ten years to be at 8.7% increase. This reflects various strategies and operations undertaken by police to detect and prevent crime. However, in-spite of the negative side of the high rate of reported crimes, on the other hand is encouraging to see community members reporting crime to police.

According to Moreau (2019), many factors influence police-reported crime statistics, such as reporting of crime incident to the attention of police. This is because, the choice of a person to report a criminal incidence to the police has a significant influence on the total number of crimes that the police eventually record. Moreover, Greenland and Cotter (2018) postulate that certain crimes, such as drunk driving or drug offences can be significantly affected by enforcement practices, with some police services devoting more resources to these specific types of crime. In response to minor offences like mischief and disturbing the peace, certain police agencies may also depend on local by-laws or provincial statutes. More generally, social and economic issues can affect the amount of crime that occurs at various community levels.

Table 1.
Ten -year period community reported serious crimes: South Africa

Crime Category	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	Count Difference	% Change
Total Contact Crimes (Crimes Against A Person)	608 724	611 574	616 973	623 223	608 321	601 366	617 210	621 282	535 217	607 163	71 946	13,4%
Total Sexual Offences	60 888	56 680	53 617	51 895	49 660	50 108	52 420	53 293	46 214	52 694	6 480	14,0%
Total Contact Related Crimes	124 691	123 441	125 789	124 804	120 730	115 361	117 172	112 244	102 269	117 505	15 236	14,9%
Total Property Related Crimes	558 334	558 228	553 487	543 524	540 653	507 975	495 161	469 224	369 745	362 274	-7 471	-2,0%

Total Other Serious Crimes	517 252	510 748	499 698	479 075	469 276	438 113	444 447	426 569	354 566	393 821	39 255	11,1%
Total 17 Community-Reported Serious Crimes	1 809 001	1 803 991	1 795 947	1 770 626	1 738 980	1 662 815	1 673 990	1 629319	1 361 797	1 480 763	118 966	8,7%
Total Crimes Dependant On Police Action For Detection	296 734	350 403	356 919	355 926	390 021	433 966	339 281	290 176	177 095	204 990	27 895	15,8%

Source: (SAPS Annual Report 2021/2022, p. 135 – 136; Compiled by the Authors).

Crime Statistics as A Tool to Measure Crime

This theme forms the nucleus of this article which is to investigate the effectiveness of crime statistics as a tool to measure, evaluate and monitor crime.

Sub-category- Accuracy of Police Crime Statistics

All participants suggested that the accuracy of police crime statistics depends on the nature of crime, for instance, murder. When it comes to murder, the police crime statistics are accurate because a body has been found, but when it comes to rape, for instance, they are not accurate because some rape cases are not reported.

Participant 3: *'It depends on the category. Therefore, murder or hijackings are quite relatively accurate.' 'It depends on the type of the crime as there are different categories of crime probably high rated like murder since you will be dealing with the body as the piece of evidence, but other crimes like rape, which is very under reported, they are not that accurate.' 'Police statistics cannot be accurate on all crimes. Murder is the only crime with accurate tendency because there is a body that serves as a proof to the crime. The participant suggests that murder is the most reliable crime statistic because for most part you have a body that corresponds to the case, so murder is the most accurate crime statistic, but for the others, because of under reporting and because of how crimes are interpreted by the police officers or by citizens are not accurate.'*

Participant 4: *Depending on the category, yes. Murder and hijackings are therefore fairly accurate. "It depends on the nature of the offense. Certain crimes, like murder, are likely high-rated since the body will be used as evidence, but other crimes, like rape, which is incredibly underreported, are not that accurate." Not all crimes are accurately reflected in police statistics.*

The above result is related to the study by Abdulkareem, et. al.(2021), aguing that the spate of kidnapping and trafficking young South Africans has become a reoccuring crime in the country.

Participant 8: *Because not all crimes are reported to the police, police crime statistics are not reliable. Police only have access to crime reports. Since there is a body as proof, murder is an accurate crime.*

Participant 7: *'Police crime statistics are not accurate reason been not all crimes are reported. The police rely only on reported crime. A crime that is accurate is murder as there is a body as evidence.'*

These results are consistent with the research conducted by Asongu and Acha-anyi (2019), which found that murder is the most common and accurate crime in South Africa.

Bosilong (2013) states that even though police crime statistics are not accurate because of their reliance on reported crimes, which leave out unreported crimes, they remain the most precise and reliable statistics that can be used for planning as compared to other methods of measuring crime, such as surveys on victims, hospital and insurance records. De Kock (2016) agrees with Bosilong (2013) and further suggests that crime statistics do not necessarily reflect poor police performance, neither can a drop in crime statistics be seen as being the direct result of improved police performance.

Nonetheless, the article by Khosa and Abdulkareem (2024) delves into the role of municipalities in crime prevention efforts in South Africa. It discusses the notable progress made in this area, while also acknowledging the obstacles faced by local governments when it comes to addressing crime within their communities.The authors trace the development of municipal involvement in crime prevention strategies, starting from the post-apartheid era when the concept of community policing was introduced. They explore the implementation of various initiatives, such as the establishment of community safety forums, neighborhood watch programs, and partnerships between law enforcement agencies and local authorities. Furthermore, the article examines the legal and policy frameworks that have been established to support and require municipalities' participation in crime prevention activities. It recognizes the positive impact of these efforts in certain areas, including improved community-police relations and increased public awareness about safety concerns. It is this concern of safety that Abdulkareem, et al. (2021), raised in their article that the incidents of child labour and trafficking of young persons in South Africa has been on the rise in recent times. Hence, the call on government and security agencies such as Metro police, Traffic police and SAPS to collaborate in steming the tides of the menace (Abdulkareem, 2021). However, Bhorat,

et al. concour with Khosa and Abdulkareem in their critical analysis of the persisting challenges, including, inequality, limited resources, lack of coordination between different stakeholders, and the complex socio-economic factors that contribute to crime in many communities. They emphasize the need for a more integrated and collaborative approach, involving all levels of government, civil society organizations, and the private sector.

Findings of the Study

As the objective of this article was to investigate the effectiveness of crime statistics as a tool to measure, evaluate and monitor crime, the general view of the participants was that despite crime statistics not an effective and accurate tool to measure, evaluate and monitor crime, they are valuable in many ways. These include among others predicting crime, budget and resource allocation and improving community-police relations. The study revealed that most of the crime categories, such as contact crimes, especially sexual offences, are not always reported to the police. Therefore, the crime statistics only reflect those reported to the police. This reflects the skewness and incorrect crime picture as provided by the official crime statistics released by the Ministry of police. The failure to report crime to the police is mainly associated with lack of trust on the justice system, in particular the police. Other factors relating to under-reporting has to do with the socio- economic factors, as South Africa has the most unequal society. Thus, access to police facilities become a challenge, especially in rural areas of the country. Also, access to the justice system is expensive when taking into consideration the rate of unemployment, poverty and inequality. Hence, failure by the police to resolve most of the cases results in members of the public losing interest and trust in reporting cases.

To enhance crime statistics and improve crime reporting in South Africa, it is essential to adopt international best practices. This approach will allow transparency, accessibility as well greater community engagement. For instance, countries like Sweden and the Netherland utilize online platforms for easy reporting and incorporate community feedback to build trust (Lofgren, 2024); (Government of the Netherland, 2024). However, South Africa, faces significant challenges such as fear of retaliation and stigma which contribute to a lack of trust in the policing system and often hinder crime reporting. While international methodologies prioritize victim support and anonymized reporting, South Africa's strategies may require more robust community engagement and education to address these challenges. The findings revealed that integrating successful international practices could improve crime reporting in South Africa as it will encourage a greater public participation and enhance a safer environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study showed that crime statistics are crucial for measuring, monitoring, and evaluating crime. However, their effectiveness and accuracy need to be strengthened in order to improve crime control. Reporting crime, no matter how minor, is crucial for improving the accuracy and reliability of crime statistics. These statistics serve as vital tools for monitoring and evaluating crime trends in a country. The authors of the article rightly emphasize the importance of community members promptly reporting criminal incidents to the authorities as part of their civic duty. Accurate crime statistics not only provide law enforcement agencies with a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing crime landscape, but also enable policymakers to formulate effective strategies and allocate resources efficiently to combat criminal activities. However, indicated that encouraging community members to report crimes is a complex challenge that requires a concerted effort from both the government and the public. One primary obstacle to crime reporting is the lack of trust and confidence in law enforcement agencies. In communities where the police are perceived as unresponsive, corrupt, or even complicit in criminal activities, residents may be hesitant to come forward with information, fearing retaliation or a lack of meaningful action.

To address this issue, the South African government must invest in enhancing the capabilities and resources of law enforcement agencies. This includes providing adequate funding for training programs, modern equipment, and personnel to ensure prompt and effective responses to reported crimes. The law

enforcements agencies commitment to public safety and their ability to handle cases professionally and efficiently, will enhance SAPS trust to rebuild and foster a positive relationship with the communities they serve. Furthermore, community outreach and education campaigns play a crucial role in promoting crime reporting. Law enforcement agencies should actively engage with local communities, organizing workshops, town hall meetings, and awareness programs to educate residents about the importance of reporting crimes and the available channels for doing so. There is the need to demystify the reporting process and address misconceptions, so as to encourage a culture of active civic participation in crime prevention efforts.

At the same time, it is essential to address the underlying socioeconomic factors that may contribute to the reluctance to report crimes. Poverty, lack of access to education, and limited economic opportunities often create an environment of distrust and disillusionment, making individuals less inclined to cooperate with authorities. Investing in community development programs, educational initiatives, and job creation efforts can also promote civic responsibility, and empowerment that will increase crime reporting. Moreover, the government should consider implementing measures to protect and support individuals who come forward with crime reports. Whistleblower protection laws, witness relocation programs, and confidential reporting mechanisms can provide reassurance to those who may fear retaliation for cooperating with law enforcement agencies. This will make the saying "police is your friend" trustworthy and real.

To this end, improving crime reporting requires a collaborative effort between law enforcement agencies, the government, and the community. This can be achieved by building trust, allocating adequate resources, and a shared responsibility where communities can become active partners in the fight against crime. When residents feel empowered and confident in the ability of the authorities to address their concerns effectively, they will be more likely to report criminal activities.

Actionable Steps

It is based on the findings, and recommendations that the following five actionable steps are provided for policymakers, law enforcement, and community groups to enhance their impact on crime reporting and community safety. This will lead to more accurate and reliable crime statistics, which are crucial for monitoring and evaluating crime in the country. The key steps include to;

1. Develop initiatives that will enhance open communication between law enforcement and community members. This is because community engagement through regular town hall meetings, workshops and outreach programs will help in building trust and encourage residents to report crimes without fear of stigma or retaliation.
2. Create secure and anonymous platforms for reporting crimes, similar to successful practices or strategies in other countries. This will help in reducing the fear of retaliation, and stigma and make it easier for victims and witnesses to come forward.
3. Equip law enforcement personnel with training on cultural competency, trauma-informed practices, and effective communication strategies. This will improve interactions with diverse communities and help to build trust.
4. Law enforcement agencies need to adopt and maximize the utilization of mobile apps and online platforms that allow for quick and easy crime reporting. If this method is adopted, they should incorporate features for community feedback that will enhance transparency and accountability.
5. Increase awareness and accessibility of victim support services needed for crime reporting. This would be achieved by providing resources for counseling, legal assistance, and advocacy so as to empower victims and encourage them to report crimes, knowing they have the necessary support of the authority.

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