

Implementing a community policing strategy in crime prevention: A case study of Lomanyaneng, Mahikeng, and Mmabatho police stations

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Abstract

Community policing is a style of policing that ensures better, responsive, efficient, and effective service delivery to the community (Yero, Othman, Samah, D'Silva, & Sulaiman, 2012, p. 53). The 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa advocates for community policing as a style of policing that improves cooperation between the police and the community in crime combating. The National Development Plan: Vision 2030 also provides for the need to facilitate closer cooperation and partnerships between the police and the community. This article examines the implementation of a community policing strategy in crime prevention in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality, particularly at three police stations, namely Mahikeng, Lomanyaneng, and Mmabatho police stations. The aim of this study was to establish the current role of community policing in crime prevention in the selected area. This study also investigated the challenges and successes of the implementation of community policing strategies in crime prevention. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the community should be involved in crime prevention operations during the planning and operational stages; however, this should be done without compromising the covert nature of policing. Furthermore, there should be a sound relationship between the police and the local community as this will enable the police and the community to trust each other and to form a strong coalition against crime in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality.

Keywords: Community policing; crime prevention; community policing forum; community policing partnership; Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality.

Introduction

Minnaar (2010, p. 182) purports that the poor public image of the police and a lack of trust by the community require a drastic change in the way that the community is policed by a transformed South African Police Service (SAPS) in democratic South Africa. This study explored whether collaboration between the SAPS and local communities may contribute to the reduction of crime. This included the exploration of an integrated approach, where all stakeholders work together in combating crime. Furthermore, it sought to determine whether the approach of community policing is effective or not and to find ways to improve collaboration between the SAPS, the community, and other relevant stakeholders.

Crimes occur in and affect local communities. Community members are often the first people to witness or to respond to crime incidents, even before the police are alerted. This makes community participation in crime prevention and crime detection important. Moreover, the study identified challenges that hinder the implementation of community policing strategies in crime prevention and suggests ways to address the identified challenges. Dubal (2012, p. 35) maintains that for community policing to work, there should be mutual trust between the police and the community. Community policing also requires transparency by the police and the community. Furthermore, this study makes recommendations to improve relations between the communities of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality and the local police.

Literature Review

Community Policing: A Conceptual Clarification

Jacobs (2020, p. 46) defines community policing as a proactive measure to policing that requires a concerted approach between the police, community, and other relevant stakeholders to effectively fight crime in a particular area.

The Origin of Community Policing

Community policing is arguably the single most extended model in policing worldwide and is used as the depiction of either current operations or for the goal of reforms (Casey, 2010, p. 2). According to Rauch (2000, p. 124) and Dubal (2012, p. 35), the concept of community policing was first picked up in the 1980s from international police networks, which subsequently led to the introduction of community policing in the early 1990s in South Africa by the Interim Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 200 of 1993). The Interim Constitution promotes police accountability, cooperation, and monitoring of efficiency and effectiveness of the police service through community-orientated policing. According to Morebodi (2015, p. i), the approach of community policing was first adopted post-1994 by the South African government in order to make policing more community orientated.

Public Perception of Policing

The decline in public trust in the SAPS is fuelled by fear and mistrust of the police. This perception negatively affects relations between the community and the police and it leads to a compromising situation of the credibility of the vast majority of honest and dedicated police officers who need the community's cooperation to

effectively carry out their difficult mandate (Burger, 2011, p. 13). Also, Casey (2010, p. 12) alludes that citizens must have some faith that efforts are genuine and that dialogue with police is possible before they will even consider participating in joint processes. Trust in the police is a desired outcome of community policing. Perkins (2016, p. 123) acknowledges that without community involvement, the police will not be effective in preventing crime, and that public confidence is essential to the success of any police agency.

Liu, Sun, and Liu (2018, p. 46) outline important factors regarding the attitude of police officers towards the community. First, police officers' perceptions of citizens affect their efficiency in gathering information and receiving support from the public. The tone and the manner in which the police communicate with citizens may affect how the public perceives them. Secondly, officers' attitudes toward the public may influence how citizens are treated during their interactions with the police. Unfavourable opinions could cause officers, for example, to give citations or tickets without sufficient explanation and to treat citizens in an unfriendly, hostile, or even brutal way. Thirdly, how officers perceive citizens could shape how they integrate the modern police occupational roles of service delivery and problem solving into their subjective attitudinal orientations.

The Role of Community Policing in Crime Prevention

The Constitution of 1996 and the SAPS Act (No. 68 of 1995) recognise community policing as a style of policing that is community orientated. The same fact was emphasised in the White Paper on Safety and Security of 2016, which outlines the main objective of community policing forums (CPFs) as one of the community policing strategies that facilitates community participation in crime prevention. This can be broken down as follows:

- Mutual responsibilities in respect of crime prevention programmes;
- Ensuring police accountability to the community;
- Joint identification and co-ownership of policing programmes; and
- Identifying policing projects with the police (South Africa, 2016, p. 43).

The Benefits of a Community Policing Strategy in Crime Prevention

The benefits of community policing include "improving police-community relationships and community perceptions on police; increasing community capacity to deal with issues; changing officer attitudes and behaviours; increasing perceptions of safety; and reducing crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour" (Mulugeta & Mekuriaw, 2017, p. 4). Whisen and Ferguson (2002, as cited by Balcha, 2014, p. 22) summarised the benefits of community policing as follows:

- Decreased potential for police-citizen conflict;
- Reduction in crime rates;
- A better flow of information between the police and the community; and
- Better implementation of crime prevention and crime control activities because both parties are working together towards a shared goal.

Saeed (2014, p. 4) supports this by indicating that community policing is proactive in nature and citizens' involvement in policing is therefore crucial in both the identification and devising of solutions to problems, and highlighted the following

as benefits:

- Enhanced public confidence in the police department;
- Reduction in societal violence;
- Police-public partnership;
- Peaceful co-existence in neighbourhoods;
- Savings in police time from avoided unnecessary arrests and trials;
- Speedy dispute resolution; and
- Diminishing the need for use of physical force by the police.

Challenges to Implementing Community Policing

Stevens and Yach (1995, as cited by Mabunda, 2014, p. 48) identify the following as factors that impede the implementation of an effective community policing strategy:

- The use of excessive force by members of the SAPS;
- Lack of leadership, accountability, trust, and resources;
- Bureaucracy; and
- A police culture characterised by low morale.

In addition, resistance to change proved to be one of the factors that hinder community policing as officers who resist change would not understand the concept and may resist it openly. Similarly, Mokhomole (2015, p. 22) identifies the following as challenges that may impede the implementation of community policing:

- Lack of trust between the police and the community;
- Poor communication between the police, community, and other government departments;
- Police lack of resources; and
- Inconsistent goals of both the police and the community.

Guzman and Kim (2017, p. 354) suggest that in order for community policing to succeed, the policing model should be aligned with the level of perceptions that the community holds of the police. The community's lack of cooperation and negative attitude may influence social and structural characteristics, which subsequently compromises the implementation of community policing. Perkins (2016, p. 122), however, proposes that police senior management and frontline officers should take into account the views of the community regarding what needs to change in order to best serve their needs and assuage their fear of crime. Mofokeng (2012, p. 89) highlights lack of training as an impeding factor to police performance and further points out that the judicial system in South Africa consists of quality assurance officers, senior presiding officers, presiding officers, senior prosecutors, and prosecutors, and that this group considers the SAPS general detectives as not adequately trained, which affects the performance of the greater criminal justice system negatively. This may affect the relationship between the police and the community as the conviction rate for cases will be very low.

Methodological Framework

A qualitative approach was adopted for this study. This approach encourages interaction between the researcher and the participants and it further allows the researcher to study and observe the research participants in their natural environment. The researchers believe that this approach captured the different

opinions of the community and the police regarding the role of prevention. Flick (2014, p. 112) describes research design as a method of collecting data that will assist the researcher in answering what the study seeks to answer. The purposive non-probability sampling technique was used, as the participants were selected based on their knowledge of the subject (Welman, Kruger, & Mitchell, 2005, p. 69).

The study focused on three police stations, namely Mahikeng, Lomanyaneng, and Mmabatho police stations, which fall under the cluster of Mahikeng in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality in the North West province. The police stations were selected because they were close to the researchers and convenient for the research. Each of the three police stations had a CPF and three sectors, as well as a CPF sub-forum in each sector.

A sample of eight participants was taken at each police station, which added up to 24 participants for this study and included visible policing officers and detectives across all ranks. A sample of the following participants was also taken:

- Executive members of the CPFs at each police station; and
- Members from the Provincial Secretariat for Police who are responsible for community policing.

The research used open-ended questions as it allowed the participants to answer the questions without any undue influence by the interviewer. In this study, the research utilised the one-on-one semi-structured interview technique that guided the type of information needed for the study. The advantage of the one-on-one interview is that it protects the participants from being influenced by other participants. It also makes it easier for the researcher(s) to be in control of the interview session and to set up appointments with the interviewees (Denscombe, 2007, p. 177). The interviews had the following aims:

- To establish the current role of community policing in crime prevention at the Lomanyaneng, Mahikeng, and Mmabatho police stations; and
- To determine challenges in the implementation of community policing at these three police stations.

The study followed Leedy and Ormrod's (2010, p. 150) data-collection steps, whereby the researchers personally obtained the primary data from the interviews, read through the comprehensive handwritten notes, broke down the large amounts of data into smaller, more manageable texts, and then categorised the data according to topics, themes, and sub-themes and conducted a preliminary analysis.

Discussion of Findings

Due to the limited scope of this article, only the most prominent findings made from the investigation are highlighted below.

Theme 1: Actual Belief That Community Policing is Playing a Role in Crime Prevention

The research question focused on whether the participants believed that community policing played a role in crime prevention in their area. The following were some of their responses, quoted verbatim:

"Yes, in my opinion the police would not win the war against crime without the help of the community" – P9.

"I am aware that the police and the CPF conduct regular crime awareness campaigns in our area" – P6.

"We have a decrease in crime and resolve of some cases as a result of community involvement" – P3.

"Yes, community policing is playing a role through community patrollers and ward counsellors" – P10.

"Yes, the community is alerting the police about criminal activities in the area and through community efforts and information the police were able to arrest and resolve complex cases" – P13 and P1.

"No, the concept is not fully implemented; only a few individuals participate in community policing and the broader part of the community is not taking part in crime prevention initiatives" – P12.

"No, community is not conversant with the concept of community policing" – P2.

"I cannot provide a definite answer due to their lack of visibility or perhaps of reporting about themselves and their efforts" – P11.

"The community expect[s] remuneration when assisting the police and they see themselves as equals to the police members" – P14.

"Some of the community members are not willing to participate in community policing; only those who experience crime in their areas are taking part" – P23.

It was established that 15 out of 24 participants were of the view that community policing played a role in crime prevention in their area. It was clear from the participants' responses that community policing played a role in crime prevention in the community of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. Certain participants expressed that the police were more visible in their area and the community was involved in crime prevention initiatives. Community involvement in policing recognises the interdependence and shared responsibility of the police and the community in ensuring their safety (Hlungwani, 2014, p. 4). However, some of the participants indicated that a lot still needs to be done as a larger part of the community is still not conversant with the concept of community policing. The researchers are of the view that the community of Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality needs to be educated about the significance of community involvement in crime prevention.

Sub-theme 1.1: Community policing structures supporting community policing.

The participants were asked if they knew of any community policing structures in their area that support community policing. The following were mentioned: neighbourhood watch, community patrollers, community safety forums, farmers' unions, CPFs and sub-structures, rural safety committees, youth desk, and business watch.

Sub-theme 1.2: The significance of community policing in crime prevention.

When asked whether they believed that community policing was important in crime prevention, the participants opined that the community is the eyes and the ears of the police and that a partnership between them could yield positive crime-reducing results. Below are some of their views:

"The community members are the ones who witness criminal activities and are in the better position to share information with the police and without the community and the CPF, the

police would not be aware of crimes happening in their policing precinct” – P11 and P7.
“In most cases, safety problems get resolved in our area for the reason that the community is involved” – P3.

“In my opinion, only through community policing, the community is able to hold SAPS accountable” – P9.

“Well, I believe that only through partnership with the community, the police will be able to reduce crime in our area; after all, we are the eyes and the ears of the police” – P6 and P24.

“The community members should be educated on how to self-police without going beyond the law” – P8.

“It is extremely important as it is a platform whereby the police are able to source first-hand information regarding crime trends” – P15.

“Yes, the community members know their area and are able to identify crime hotspots and through the involvement of relevant stakeholders, crime could be reduced” – P18 and P23.

Based on the above responses, scholars can safely argue that community policing is important in crime prevention, since the participants' responses were supported by the scientific literature. Mulugeta and Mekuriaw (2017, p. 4) suggest that community policing is important in crime prevention as it improves police-community relationships, increases police capacity, and increases perceptions of safety in the area. Based on the participants' responses and the literature review, community involvement is essential. Based on the participants' responses, the relations between the police and communities are not satisfactory in the areas of Lomanyaneng, Mmabatho, and Mahikeng and should be improved.

Theme 2: The Main Challenges in the Implementation of Community Policing at Lomanyaneng, Mahikeng, and Mmabatho Police Stations

When asked what factors hamper the effective implementation of community policing in their areas, the participants mostly mentioned a capacity gap, a lack of physical resources, and low budgets. Below are some of their views:

“Poor communication between the policing and the community, particularly from the side of the police” – P21.

“Due to the lack of transparency by the SAPS, the community do not trust the police with information” – P19.

“Dependency of the CPF on the SAPS for resources because CPF depends on the police for resources and this affects the implementation of their mandate” – P12.

“Lack of knowledge by the CPF in terms of their monitoring powers and the lack of commitment from some community members” – P4.

“The SAPS's lack of physical resources such as vehicles [and] infrastructure and police's poor response to community needs” – P13.

“Lack of skills by the SAPS to resolve community complaints and unprofessional conduct by some police officers” – P1.

“Poor support from the SAPS and Department of Community Safety on community policing matters” – P11.

“Lack of trust between the police and community and poor feedback to complainants on reported cases” – P22.

“Lack of cooperation and poor communication between the police and the community” – P8.

“Fears of victimisation because some members of the community are afraid to share information with the police as they would be victimised by the same police” – P17.

"Lack of funding on community policing related structures, as well as reluctance by some police members to engage with the community" – P14.

"Political interferences, lack of information, ignorance and the don't-care attitude" – P9.

"Lack of knowledge of the criminal justice system processes and vigilantism" – P3.

"The concept of community policing is foreign and it was implemented without proper research and the concept places strain on resources and the failure of proper implementation of sector policing" – P23.

The participants highlighted a number of challenges regarding the implementation of community policing in their area, such as lack of trust, resources, and education. Lack of trust has been identified by the researchers, scholars, and participants in this study as a major disadvantage in community policing. Scholars also highlighted the same challenges as impeding the successful implementation of community policing. According to Patrikakis et al. (2018, p. 1), lack of trust between the police and community is a major challenge in the implementation of community policing, while Mokhomole (2015, p. 22) believes that lack of trust in the police, poor communication, and lack of resources by the police are the main challenges to implementing community policing. The researchers are of the view that this particular challenge is experienced globally; not only by the community of the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. The researchers urge the police to be transparent to the community to enable the community to trust them. Trust is an essential factor in building relations, and the lack thereof may lead to broken relations.

Recommendations

The police in Lomanyaneng, Mmabatho, and Mahikeng should involve the local community in policing initiatives. This can be achieved by involving the community in crime prevention operations during the planning and operational stages. The benefit of this is that it will build trust between the police and the local community. The police should recognise the significance of the community in crime prevention because community members are often the first people to witness crimes and are in a better position to inform the police. The community are the eyes and the ears of the police and they should be treated as partners in the fight against crime.

Police corruption and lack of trust were highlighted as major gaps in the implementation of a community policing strategy. The North West Police Provincial Office should roll out anti-corruption workshops across all police stations in the province. This may help in sensitising the police about the danger of corruption and how it tarnishes their image. The police should take punitive measures against police officials who are found to be corrupt. There should be trust between the police and the community. The police should be transparent in delivering services to the public. The police station management of Lomanyaneng, Mmabatho, and Mahikeng should work together with their local communities and CPFs to develop ways to address the challenges that hamper the successful implementation of community policing in the area.

It is important that the level of trust of the South African community in the police be enhanced as the police are the entrance to the country's criminal justice system. If the level of the public's trust in the police is high, it will invariably safeguard public trust in the criminal justice system (Olutola & Bello, 2016, p. 232). This study concludes

that collaboration between the police and communities is the key to the successful implementation of a community policing strategy in crime prevention. It further concludes that this style of policing is important in reducing crime in the policing areas of Lomanyaneng, Mmabatho, and Mahikeng.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study revealed that community policing can be a viable strategy for crime prevention in the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality. However, a number of challenges were identified through the literature, the participants' responses, and the researchers' experience, which may hinder the implementation of community policing as a strategy in crime prevention. This study concludes that collaboration between the police and the community is important for the successful implementation of a community policing strategy in crime prevention. It further concludes that this style of policing is vital for reducing crime in the policing areas of Lomanyaneng, Mmabatho, and Mahikeng.

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