

**Vehicle Hijacking in South Africa:
An Examination of Victimisation Patterns and an Evaluation of Current
Prevention/Interventionist Strategies
with Specific Reference to Gauteng Province, South Africa ⁽¹⁾**

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Abstract

In the 1990s the hijacking of vehicles has become the crime of prominence in some countries notably South Africa and the United States of America. It is a crime, which in recent years has not only increased dramatically but has also been associated with higher levels of violence in its perpetration. Furthermore, there has been widespread media coverage and interest in it, particularly where high profile public persons or business people, specifically foreign and international, have been killed during a hijack or attempted hijack.

This paper first attempts to contextualise the scope, extent, modus operandi and offender profile of perpetrators of vehicle hijackings in Gauteng Province (the province with the highest incidence of this crime in South Africa). Secondly it examines the various preventative and interventionist strategies being implemented by the South African Police Service (SAPS) in its efforts to combat and curb this particular crime. Thirdly, it investigates and assesses the measures being taken via the Service Development Improvement Programme (SDIP) and the policy initiatives as identified in successive Annual Police Plans (Aims & Objectives) of the SAPS to combat the priority crime of vehicle hijacking. These measures include the Special Anti-Vehicle Hijacking Units set up in the Greater Johannesburg Metropole and the Special Highway Patrol Unit, as well as the establishment of a Trauma/Victim Centres specifically for vehicle hijack victims at selected police stations in Johannesburg.

Due to the excessively violent nature of the crime of vehicle hijacking in South Africa – emotional trauma, physical injuries, rape (in Gauteng victims have also been sodomised during the hijack) and even death – the need has arisen for more advanced and extensive support services to vehicle hijack victims than have hitherto been offered. The establishment of dedicated hijacking victim trauma centres at police stations in high risk areas during 1999 were a belated acknowledgement by the authorities – even though a number of NGO service organisations have been offering such trauma counselling services for some time – that such victim services need to be established, improved (best practices) and extended.

Introduction

“The growth in these types of crime [vehicle theft and hijacking] has significantly contributed to increased levels of fear of crime. [and] ...inhibits freedom of movement and economic activity and is highly costly in terms of loss of property and psycho-social damage caused by trauma and fear (National Crime Prevention Strategy, 1996: 41).”

“The hijacking of passenger vehicles, including LDVs [Light Delivery Vehicles] and minibuses, and trucks with freight in South Africa is a daily threat faced by citizens and the transport industry of South Africa.”⁽²⁾

In the 1990s the hijacking of vehicles has become the crime of prominence in some countries notably South Africa and the United States of America. It is a crime, which in recent years has not only increased dramatically but has also been associated with higher levels of violence in its perpetration. Furthermore, there has been widespread media coverage and interest in it, particularly where high profile public persons or business people, specifically foreign and international, have been killed during a hijack or attempted hijack.

Vehicle hijacking is one of the most feared crimes in South Africa and members of the public who perceive themselves to be specific targets (white, wealthy, owners of expensive motor cars etc.) have high levels of insecurity. One of the reasons for this is the apparent randomness, unexpectedness, unpredictability and levels of violence associated with the actual crime of vehicle hijacking.

Definitional Problems

The crime itself has definitional problems and for the purposes of this paper our definition is a wide one inclusive of both carjacking and truck hijacking (the hijacking of cargo in transit).

The term “hijacking” specifically refers to the illegal seizure of control of a vehicle (car or aeroplane), whereas “vehicle hijacking” means not only to seize control but in fact to rob the owner/ driver of the vehicle. Traditionally hijacking has been associated with the activities of terrorists who often seize control of the vehicle but then also take passengers hostage using them as a means for extortion or ensuring compliance with their demands (more often than not political in nature).

Vehicle hijacking can be divided into two broad categories, namely *carjacking and truck or transit cargo hijacking*. Each has its own definitive characteristics and are themselves made up of sub-categories or trend/modus operandi differences.

“Carjacking” can be defined as the robbery of a motor vehicle (not exclusively cars since trucks are also stolen for the vehicle itself and not just the cargo) usually when the vehicle is occupied or being driven and where force or threat is largely used to accomplish the theft.

Carjacking itself has a number of different categories, namely:

1. theft of vehicle for own use;
2. theft of vehicle for own resale (small operator);
3. theft of vehicle on order (specific make, colour and type) by syndicate operators;
4. theft of vehicle for illegal export (smuggle) out of the country (linked to the above category);
5. theft of vehicle for insurance scam purposes;

6. theft of vehicle for vehicle parts ('chopshop' option);
7. theft of vehicle merely to indulge in so-called 'joyriding';
8. theft of vehicle for temporary transport use;
9. theft of vehicle for use in robberies as getaway cars (abandoned after use);
10. theft of vehicle for use as ambush or roadblock vehicle in cash-in-transit heists.

"Truck or transito cargo hijacking" this refers specifically to the hijacking of the truck and the theft of its cargo. Often in such hijacks the vehicle is abandoned after the cargo has been removed and stolen. This type of vehicle hijacking also occurs when the vehicle is occupied and in transit to its destination. Violence or threats of violence are here also an important component.

Location of Vehicle Hijackings

The location and modus operandi for each type of vehicle hijacking is also as varied as the categories. However, in general for carjacking the following trends have been identified. Carjacking occurs most frequently at:

- selected street intersections/traffic lights
- in the driveways or entrance gates to private residences
- offramps from city highways
- car parks at shopping malls
- along certain highways
- at sporting, cultural or recreational functions where vehicles congregate for any one reason
- in heavy peak traffic

Extent and Provincial Distribution of Vehicle Hijacking in South Africa

The extent of the crime of vehicle hijacking and its provincial distribution in South Africa can be gauged from the following tables: (Please note that the statistics are only available from the period January 1996 to 1999 due to the fact that the codes for vehicle hijacking in the Crime Administration System (CAS) were only instituted in the main policing regions from July 1995 onwards and in the former TBVC states and self-governing territories from 1 January 1996. Therefore no comparative statistics are available for the years prior to this date. These statistics were previously and still are included in the consolidated crime statistics for robberies with aggravated circumstances. Statistics for January-June 2000 have not yet been released while the Minister for Safety & Security has also put an embargo on them because of certain problems surrounding their validity, e.g. incorrect coding or interpretation of a crime).

Carjacking in South Africa by Province: 1996-1999								
Province	1996	Rate*	1997	Rate	1998	Rate	1999	Rate
Eastern Cape	648	10.3	607	9.5	744	11,4	722	10.9
Free State	173	6.6	147	5.5	160	5.9	184	6.6
Gauteng	7,612	104.2	7,906	105.9	9,213	120.8	9,167	117.6
KwaZulu-Natal	2,721	32.5	2,709	31.7	3,143	36.0	3,258	36.6
Mpumalanga	683	24.6	638	22.4	678	23.2	716	23.9
Northwest	536	16.1	479	14.1	566	16.3	718	20.2
Northern Cape	14	1.7	11	1.3	18	2.1	9	1.0
Northern Prov	185	3.8	192	3.8	190	3.7	169	3.2
Western Cape	288	7.3	322	8.0	399	9.8	504	12.1
RSA Total	12,860	31.9	13,011	31.6	15 111	35.9	15,447	35.9

Source: Crime Information Management Centre (CIMC), SAPS, HQ, Pretoria
* Rate per 100,000 of the population (1996 census @ 40 million)

Hijacking of Trucks in South Africa by Province: 1996 -1999								
Province	1996	Rate	1997	Rate	1998	Rate	1999	Rate
Eastern Cape	189	3.0	180	2.8	163	2.5	200	3.0
Free State	121	4.6	100	3.7	124	4.6	106	3.8
Gauteng	2,287	31.3	2,699	36.2	3,678	48.2	3,421	43.9
KwaZulu-Natal	605	7.2	884	10.3	1,168	13.4	1,178	13.2
Mpumalanga	282	10.1	236	8.3	300	10.3	302	10.1
Northwest	88	2.6	88	2.6	137	3.9	95	2.7
Northern Cape	6	0.7	4	0.5	6	0.7	6	0.7
Northern Prov	64	1.3	62	1.2	136	2.6	92	1.7
Western Cape	52	1.3	43	1.1	61	1.5	106	2.5
RSA Total	3,694	9.2	4,298	10.4	5 773	13.7	5,506	12.8

Source: Crime Information Management Centre (CIMC), SAPS, HQ, Pretoria

Between 1996 and 1999 car hijacking increased by 20.1%, i.e. from 12,860 to 15,447 and constitute 16% of the crime category robbery with aggravating circumstances. ⁽³⁾

From the above tables it can be seen that for carjacking the leading province by far is Gauteng (with a total of 33,898 for the period 1996-1999), followed by KwaZulu-Natal (11,831) and then a distant Eastern Cape (2,721) and Mpumalanga (2,715). For the period 1996 to 1999 a total of 56,429 carjackings occurred (i.e. Gauteng experienced 60% of the total number of car hijackings in South Africa). Of further significance in these figures is the rate per 100,000 of the population where Gauteng has the extreme high rate of an average of 112 carjackings per 100,000 people with KwaZulu-Natal only with an average rate of 34. (The average annual national rate per 100,000 was 34.)

Similarly for the hijacking of trucks where Gauteng again is the province leading the way with the highest number at a total of 12,085 for the period 1996-1999, followed by KwaZulu-Natal with 3,835. For the whole of South Africa for the period 1996 to 1999 a total of 19,271 truck hijackings occurred.

Gauteng, although in area size is the smallest of South Africa's nine provinces is the most densely populated as well as being the financial centre and economic (both industrial and mining) heartland of the country. KwaZulu-Natal is also the second in terms of industrial concentration as well as being on the main transport route to the biggest harbour in terms of volume in Africa, namely Durban.

From the above statistics it would appear that carjacking is still on the increase. This is in line with international trends, especially the USA where the statistics also indicate that a constant increase on an annual basis since the early 1990s has occurred.

Contributing Factors to the Crime of Vehicle Hijacking

Research and analysis has established that the following have been among the most important contributing factors to organised vehicle-related crimes:

- organised crime syndicates pay gangs to hijack vehicles;
- the lucrative income obtained from selling hijacked vehicles;
- seemingly ineffective justice system which often creates the impression that perpetrators are free to do as they wish without reprisal;
- the difficult task of policing crimes of this nature as when policing one area/precinct the perpetrators simply shifts operations to another area;
- the occurrence of this crime tendency can, inter alia, be ascribed to the availability of illegal and stolen firearms and ammunition and the socio-economic situation prevailing in the country. The latter prompts people to commit crime in order to obtain a livelihood;
- analysis of dockets and cases by the Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) of the SAPS has also indicated that the increase in carjackings have, in part, occurred due to the improvement of anti-theft devices installed in motor vehicles. Individuals committing these crimes find it easier to hijack vehicles rather than trying to circumvent the anti-theft devices;
- in South Africa, vehicle hijacking and theft syndicates characterise the inter-relatedness of criminal activities. Vehicle theft/robbery is linked to the illegal arms trade, drug trafficking and vehicle smuggling, as well as money laundering. The extent of vehicle theft in South Africa is accentuated by the fact that various vehicle theft syndicates are currently operating in, or from within South Africa. South Africa is undoubtedly the major source of stolen vehicles in Africa. The SAPS has recovered vehicles, which had been stolen in South Africa from as far a field as Cyprus, Greece, Portugal and Australia. Vehicles have also been recovered from various states in Africa, south of the Sahara, and vehicles stolen in South Africa are increasingly being bartered for illegal drugs, especially Mandrax, in countries such as Lesotho, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Zambia;
- the fact that practically every province in South Africa and each neighbouring country have a different registration system, minimises the chances of apprehension, thus making the task of the vehicle syndicates that much easier;
- lucrative markets for hijacking vehicles exist. As a result robbed and stolen vehicles and freight of hijacked trucks are easily sold on the black market. So-called 'Chop shops' (backyard garages where vehicles are dismantled for the parts) are selling stolen vehicle parts

on a large scale. This can be attributed to the lack of identification on the parts. It can be assumed that a decline in the incidence of vehicle hijacking will occur once the market for stolen parts has been eradicated or severely restricted. This can be achieved by the introduction of a parts marking systems and supporting legislation, facilitating the identification of major removable parts of a vehicle by means of the vehicle identification number;

- precautionary measures applied by some people and/or companies are poor or non-existent;
- one of the biggest problems being experienced in curbing vehicle hijacking and theft and the export of such vehicles, is the system of container shipment. Due to a lack of manpower, the physical checking of every container being shipped out of the country is impossible. While several stolen cars have been recovered during spot-checks carried out on such cargo, the possibility exists that many more have slipped through undetected. In some cases the risks taken to smuggle vehicles out in this manner are worth taking
- Finally, in recent years the employ of professional/organised or self-employed (i.e. for a “donation” they will look after your parked car) car guards by companies, CBD Business Watches, and even Tourism Boards (e.g. Durban) to provide constant patrolling and guarding of parked cars and car parks, in particular at large shopping complexes, has led to the reduction of vehicle theft at these locations. This in turn has had a knock-on effect where car thieves have turned to vehicle hijacking as a car theft modus operandi and provision of a ready source of stolen vehicles.

Contributing factors to the hijacking of trucks and freight in transit are the following:

- The working conditions and wages, as well as the fact that in many instances the truck drivers are not involved in managing and decision-making may possibly tempt them and/or assistants to assist in many of the hijackings. The temptation of making a quick profit should also be kept in mind. The drivers and their assistants are not paid well and they have to work long hours. This enables syndicates etc. to pay the drivers to co-operate — this varies from the supply of information, to actually pretending that a truck has been robbed, whereas in fact, the property was off-loaded at syndicates’ warehouses.
- Many companies do not screen their truck drivers properly before entrusting them with a vehicle and freight of enormous value.

Victims and Vehicle Hijacking

Modus Operandi

The following modus operandi ⁽⁴⁾ have been observed by the analysts at Robbery Desk: Crime Information Management Centre of the SAPS for passenger vehicle hijackings:

- hijackers confront their victims while they are still inside their residential premises. Victims will then be overpowered, robbed of household goods (often forced through threats or physical torture to reveal keys to a safe) and their vehicles hijacked in which the burglars will make a getaway;
- victim will be hijacked when stopping in their driveways to open/close gates or garage doors (on way in or out leaving for work or returning home) or while waiting for electronic gates to open;
- Victim will be hijacked while stationary at any traffic sign/lights or road intersection (see also Conradie’s “street corner” modus operandi below);

- The hijackers use minibuses to force victims off the road (see also Meyerson's two techniques described below);
- Victims are hijacked while stationary next to the road and answering their cellphones (new legislation forbids holding a cellphone in your hand while driving);
- Victims are also hijacked while dropping off or collecting children from school;
- Victims are hijacked at petrol stations, truckstops, car washes and ATM machines;
- Victims are hijacked when they are delivering goods (sometimes lured to a specific location);
- Victims are hijacked when stopping for an object lying in a road. The hijackers will make use of stones or dummies looking like humans to obstruct the road and make drivers stop;
- Hijackers throw stone or brick from a bridge over a highway and a victim gets hijacked when stopping to inspect damage caused (see Meyerson's description below).

Additional typologies for hijacking have also been identified from research undertaken by the authors of this paper namely:

- Victims are hijacked when stopping to offer assistance to a traveller on the side of the road with an apparently "broken-down" (mechanical problems or a flat tyre) vehicle.
- Victim gets hijacked when stopping after a deliberate fender bashing/bumping incident (to check damage done to their own car).
- Hitchhikers sometimes hijack the car after being given a lift.
- Hijackers who respond to advertisements by private individuals to sell their vehicles in, for instance, the **Junk Mail** offer to buy the car but first want to take it for a test drive and then when a suitable distance away from the owner's residence force the owner out of the car.
- Hijackers who pose as police or traffic officers stop the target vehicle for an inspection and then hijack the stopped car.
- Prostitutes have also been suspected of being in cahoots with hijacking syndicates and luring truckers to certain areas.⁽⁵⁾

Among the modus operandi identified by other researchers are the following: In 1997 Prof. Herman Conradie of the Institute for Criminology, Department of Criminology at the University of South Africa (UNISA) conducted interviews with ten convicted car hijackers. The respondents revealed that their preferred modus operandi was to pretend that they wanted to buy a car and then to take it for a test drive. During the test drive the salesman would be threatened with a firearm and the car taken. This method enabled the hijackers to ask questions and to establish whether an immobiliser, alarm or tracker system had been installed without arousing the suspicions of the seller. An alternative method used by the hijackers interviewed by Conradie was for the hijackers to overpower the security guards at car dealer's open parking sale lots. It appeared from the interviews that even this technique was only considered once it had been established that the guard was an old man who could easily be overpowered. Conradie was also able to identify the lesser use of another modus operandi, namely "street corner" hijacking where the hijackers loiter at a selected street corner or hawk goods thereby hiding the firearm under the hawker goods box where it is easily accessible for use when a suitable vehicle approaches the street corner. If such a vehicle stops to buy goods the vehicle is hijacked. This type of hijacking is dependent upon opportunity.⁽⁶⁾

Meyerson (1995) also identified two main techniques used by car hijackers, namely “bump and attack”; and “vehicle on vehicle” hijack. In the first the hijackers bump the selected vehicle on purpose at a stop sign, traffic light or freeway exit, or cause a minor collision. When the potential victim instinctively stops and gets out of the vehicle to inspect the damage, the vehicle is taken at gunpoint from them and the hijackers speed off leaving the victim behind. The second technique identified by Meyerson takes place while the potential victim’s vehicle is moving, and one, two or three vehicles move up alongside, behind or in front of the victim’s car. The hijacker will attempt to get the victim’s attention by leaning out of the window and displaying a weapon. In this way the victim will be forced to pull off the road. Alternatively the hijackers will use the vehicles to force the victim’s car off the road (Meyerson, 1995: 108).

In terms of the hijacking of trucks and cargo-in-transit this occurs most frequently at either the factory or depot from where the cargo is being transported or at isolated spots along open highways. A favourite ploy of these hijackers is to trick a truck to stop and then to hijack the truck once the driver has stopped (e.g. for a emergency or road accident or at false road works sign). Truck hijackings have also occurred at petrol stations or truck sleepover points. Other modus operandi ⁽⁷⁾ for truck hijackings are the following:

- Trucks and freight are often hijacked by perpetrators using a blue (police) light on their vehicles.
- Hijackers often wear police or traffic officer uniforms.
- Hijackers use police identification certificates/cards.
- In many cases hijackers have used a marked SAPS vehicle in pulling a truck over and hijacking it.
- Hijackers obstruct the road with an ambulance (which itself has been hijacked for this purpose).
- Truck drivers are forced off the road by another vehicle.
- Trucks are hijacked when drivers stop to rest or relieve themselves.
- Hijackings have also occurred when truck drivers have stopped to fasten cargo belts of the truck.
- Hijackings also occur where truckers stop to pick up prostitutes or fill up with fuel
- Trucks are hijacked when stationary at traffic signs/lights or at intersections

Victimisation

A victim whose vehicle is being hijacked can expect to be treated in one of the following ways:

1. A certain group of car hijackers, who are known as “nuisance hijackers”, are interested only in hijacking the vehicle and valuable articles, and the potential victim is merely removed from the vehicle. These car hijackers do not intend to harm the victim unless they are provoked or threatened.
2. The vehicle is hijacked and the victim kept in the vehicle for an undetermined period of time, robbed and then pushed from the vehicle.
3. The victim is pushed from the vehicle and is then shot before the hijackers speed off.
4. The victim is shot in cold blood inside the vehicle, often directly through the window, then kicked or pushed from the vehicle before the hijackers speed off.
5. The victim is shot inside the vehicle and kept inside the vehicle (either dead or injured) and then dispose of it at a later stage (see Meyerson, 1995: 109).

Furthermore, it has been found from the analysis of a number of vehicle hijacking cases in South Africa that in a majority of vehicle hijacking instances a firearm and more specifically a handgun was used – largely for threatening or pointing at a victim. Moreover, that if circumstances develop the hijackers also do not hesitate to use these weapons to harm a victim. In truck hijacking it would appear that the use of firearms and violence is proportionately less than with vehicle hijackings. Here it is assumed that this is so because passenger vehicle drivers are largely the owners of the vehicles and are more likely to offer resistance whereas in the case of truck drivers the majority are employees of a truck owner/company, are not well paid and are reluctant to endanger their lives protecting an asset not theirs.

In research conducted by Dr Linda Davis ⁽⁸⁾ of the Department of Criminology at the University of Pretoria on the consequences for victims of vehicle hijacking it was found that victims were subjected not only to verbal abuse but were also threatened with a firearm (93% — percentages have been rounded off) and a knife (7%) while 51% were exposed to physical violence (pushed around, shaken, pulled from the vehicle or thrown to the ground. Fifteen percent were shot, 10% severely assaulted while 9% were struck (mostly against the head) with the butt of the firearm. Others had their jewellery forcibly wrenched off them or their cellphones taken. The physical injuries sustained by the respondents varied from gunshot wounds, bruises, abrasions, cuts to the head to permanent damage to shoulders, back or limbs (one was shot in the back and paralysed for life). Eighty-five percent of the respondents admitted that the hijacking that they had experienced had affected them emotionally very severely — most being confronted with strong feelings of shock, disbelief, confusion, helplessness as well as of powerlessness and loss of control during the hijacking. Post-hijacking emotions centred on fear, anxiety, anger, bitterness, a heightened fright response and depression. Fifty-five percent reported that they were scared to go out and drive alone fearing a recurrence of the hijacking incident. Moreover, 66% reported that they felt anger especially at being victims of this crime and the fact that the criminal justice system would appear to be ineffective and unable to prevent its occurrence. Forty-five percent of the respondents also felt bitter towards the hijackers in particular ascribing to them the fact that they (hijackers) attach no value to property or life. Furthermore, 19% of the respondents felt shame relating to the feeling that they should have done more to prevent the hijacking, for not noticing the warning signals, or for not being in control of the situation even though acknowledging that it was unrealistic to try to oppose an armed vehicle hijacker. Resulting behavioural problems included social withdrawal, avoidance of places and situations associated with crime or not wanting to drive again immediately or on their own. Those that were hijacked at their homes (in the driveway or street close by) reported feeling anxious every time they approached their home. According to Davis (2000: 8), “a double element of fear applies in most hijacking cases, namely fear of loss of property and the fear of dying and/or of being injured.” In addition to this is the fact that it is a crime mostly committed by strangers. Fear is not the only social consequence of hijacking since there is also the loss of feelings of safety and security experienced by most victims. Overall the research conducted by Davis confirms the high levels of violence associated with this crime and the intense trauma and victimisation experienced by victims.

Throughout the hijacking process intense violation of a person’s privacy, integrity, feelings of safety and physical wellbeing occur. Most victims (see Davis, 2000: 5-8) experience high levels of trauma and many suffer from post-stress trauma (PST), their emotional and physical health suffers accordingly.

Unfortunately there has been little official recognition that hijack victims are severely traumatised by the experience in particular the high levels of fear associated with this experience. Up until very recently they were treated merely as "ordinary" victims of crime in that they had been a victim of a property crime, i.e. theft of a motor vehicle and not of a serious violent crime.

The Crime Information Analysis Centre (CIAC) of the SAPS, by inserting a specific code for vehicle hijacking in the Crime Administration System (CAS) code list, as well as putting it into the category of “Robbery with aggravating circumstances” has assisted in vehicle hijacking gaining more recognition as

to the serious nature of this crime. Furthermore from their analysis of vehicle hijackings it was found that in 80% of the cases a firearm was used as an instrument or tool of threat (pointing at the victim, cocking it, etc. besides actually firing it) ⁽⁹⁾ (This conclusion was confirmed in the interviews conducted with convicted hijackers undertaken by R. Zinn, See later section)

One of the problems of assisting victims of hijacking has so far been the inadequate understanding of the type of victimisation they undergo. This is largely based on the fact that very little in-depth research (besides the few mentioned above) in South Africa has been undertaken not only of victims themselves but also of the perpetrators. It is in fact important to know about the perpetrators themselves, how they perform the hijack, use of firearms, modus operandi, target selection etc. since all these indicate certain patterns of victimisation. Accordingly the information below looks at the profile of a perpetrator and examines their modus operandi to indicate the types and impact of victimisation that does occur in motor vehicle hijackings in South Africa.

Research ⁽¹⁰⁾ undertaken recently in Gauteng which evaluated sentenced motor vehicle hijackers as a source of crime intelligence interviews were conducted with convicted perpetrators to probe motives, modus operandi, target selection, when is a victim shot, etc., and revealed some interesting perspectives on victims, trends in their victimisation and the possible impact of such hijackings.

Victimisation Patterns

Profile of a Motor Vehicle Hijacker

From various interviews with perpetrators, other survey research and analysis of specific reported cases it has generally been found that the perpetrators are usually young men armed with firearms who most often threaten or kill the driver and/or passengers. The murder of drivers who resist or appear to object is a frequent occurrence. The use of violence is also a common thread in vehicle hijackings or attempts at hijacking. Most vehicle hijackings appear to be well organised and planned and not merely a spur of the moment or spontaneous act. The selection of the type and model of passenger cars would also seem to indicate that specific makes are popular or on order by syndicates.

This profile has been largely confirmed by research in other countries, specifically in the USA. In America it was found that vehicle hijackers seldom work alone. An accomplice usually provides the initial transportation or assists in the robbery (Burke & O'Rear, 1993: 18). In a national survey conducted by the American Department of Justice it was established that most of the offenders were aged between 21 and 29 years old (Rand, 1997).

In the interviews with convicted hijackers conducted by Zinn (2000) the biggest age grouping identified among the respondents was the 26-29 years group although 80% of the respondents actually fell within the 22-33 years group.

Moreover, the perpetrators were hardened criminals, respondents on average had committed twenty crimes before being arrested for the first time and in their career had committed 105 crimes, i.e. were multiple crime offenders, and had been committing crimes for at least five years — 60% of which were violent crimes. The obvious Implication for victims being the high probability of suffering violence during a vehicle hijacking since the hijacker would appear to have little compunction to use violence i.e. extreme readiness to use force to achieve their aims.

Forty-seven percent of the respondents were unemployed or in their specific cases self-employed (i.e. in the business of vehicle-hijacking usually on order for a car theft syndicate or other client). The assumption here is that being “unemployed” such persons tend to be desperate to survive and see no other option in the South African economy but to turn to crime.

Reasons for Hijacking

Among the reasons given by the respondents for turning to vehicle hijacking were the following:

- Main reason is that vehicle hijacking is more lucrative than burglary.
- Risk of being caught less than with other crimes.
- Availability of a firearm obtained in a previous burglary which was then used to commit the hijacking.
- Became a member of a professional motor car theft syndicate hijacking motor vehicles on order for clients.
- The crime of hijacking is quicker to execute and to get away than ordinary vehicle theft (e.g. have to wait for motor vehicle owner to park the car and leave and then break into the car and immobilise alarm systems which all takes time increasing chances of being caught).

Preferred Day for Hijacking

More vehicle hijackings were perpetrated on a Friday because respondents highlighted the fact that more money gets transported on that day (for cash-in-transit hijacks) and that generally members of the public carry more money for the weekend or are paid on that day.

Preferred Time of Hijacking

Surprisingly respondents said that they perpetrate most of their car hijackings not late at night or in isolated spots but at peak traffic times – morning and afternoon – and in busy traffic. The latter because they are usually looking for specific cars which they can only find in heavy traffic and also because they want the target car boxed in so that it cannot speed away when approached.

Those that perpetrate hijackings in private residence driveways prefer to do this early in the morning when most are still asleep (an obvious preventative measure here would be not to go to work too early) or late at night when there is likely to be no witnesses (here one should contact your private security company to be at your gate if coming home late from a function).

Location of Hijacking

- 23% of respondents indicated that they perpetrated their vehicle hijackings in a driveway of a private residence;
- 11% at a t-junction;
- 7% at a stop street;
- 7% at a fourway stop;
- 7% at a taxi rank;
- 7% at an overnight truck stop.

In the cases of the t-junction, stop street, fourway stop, taxi rank and truck stop hijackings (25% of the cases) the respondents indicated that they perpetrated the vehicle hijack only when the vehicle has come to a standstill and the hijackers are then able to approach and threaten the driver. Fifty-six percent of the respondents indicated that their hijackings were carried out in exclusive neighbourhood areas (i.e. rich and wealthy residents who own expensive motor cars which are then identified and ordered by syndicates and clients).

Reasons Why Specific Motor Vehicles Hijacked

- In 44% of the replies it was indicated that prior to the hijacking the hijackers have already received an order for a specific make and model of a car.
- In 11% of the cases they have been asked to steal a specific motor vehicle. ⁽¹¹⁾
- In 14% they are looking for a specific type of cargo (truck hijacking).
- The make and model of hijacked vehicle targeted is easily sold – there is a ready market and high demand for type of vehicle.

Choice of Victims

The perspectives of the convicted hijackers interviewed on this aspect of modus operandi has a direct bearing on the patterns of victimisation experienced by victims of vehicle hijacking and they are important for that reason since this will also have an impact on the victim assistance response.

Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated they had no preference since the victim came with the car (the car being the primary selection determining target). However, 30% indicated they had specifically selected white drivers. The reasons given for this varied from the following:

- race hatred;
- envy of good jobs and material wealth;
- whites are rich and own expensive cars;
- whites live outside of black townships so they won't enter those areas to search or identify their stolen cars;
- whites stole land and cattle of their (hijackers) forefathers so blacks can now steal from them.

Respondents also indicated that for the above reasons if there were two cars exactly the same they would only go for the car being driven by a white person.

In terms of gender 88% of the respondents indicated that this does not influence their choice of which vehicle to hijack. (There was a recent case in March 2000 of a seven-month pregnant woman being shot through her stomach and injuring her unborn baby which had to be born in an emergency caesarean operation as well as undergoing a number of corrective surgery operations to repair damage to hip and pelvis – indication that they will do anything to ensure you comply with their instructions and to achieve their aim of obtaining their vehicle of choice.) However, 11% did indicate they would not by choice hijack women.

Treatment of Victims by Hijackers and Use of a Firearm

The patterns illustrated here have a direct bearing on the trauma experienced by vehicle hijack victims in particular the use of firearms as a particular means of threat and to enforce compliance with hijacker's instructions and demands.

All respondents indicated that they always used a **firearm** in their hijackings and that they usually pointed such firearm at the driver ordering them to follow instructions. Ninety-six percent of the respondents had used a pistol in their hijackings as the preferred weapon of choice.

Furthermore the weapon was also cocked as the hijackers approached the vehicle since this action is designed to get the driver's attention as well as to indicate that the hijackers are serious and intend to shoot — are ready to — if their instructions are not followed. Also that at night the victim can hear the sound of the firearm being cocked since it is often difficult to see the firearm in the hand of the hijacker in the dark.

The main reasons for always using a firearm in a vehicle hijacking were listed as follows:

- to get the drivers to follow their instructions – carefully, promptly and as quickly as possible;
- to instil fear by the overt use of threat;
- to intimidate them;
- that they would offer no resistance;
- to protect the hijacker himself from being attacked or injured; and
- finally to gain full control of the situation immediately.

It was revealed by the hijackers that it was doubly important for them that in the first few moments of the hijack they needed to enforce the position that they are in control of the situation and to determine whether a victim will resist or take out a weapon. For this reason the instructions given by them were also important, as well as the victims reactions or following of those instructions.

Instructions

The direct instructions most commonly given were the following:

- the victim to immediately raise their hands without making any sudden movements;
- to slide out from under the seatbelt – specifically not to touch or try to unclip (loosen) it – and get out of the vehicle (this would not be such an issue in North America since most late model vehicles have it as standard equipment that if the door opened the seatbelts automatically shift up and away).

One of the main reasons given by respondents as to why victims are shot is in their trying to unclip seatbelts. From the hijackers angle of view from where they stand they cannot see what the victim is doing and the action of unclipping is often interpreted as searching for a firearm. So too far any hand movement down to the floor, to the side or into a jacket pocket. Consequently a hijacker would be more inclined to shoot a victim if such movements are made or if the above instructions are not followed and carried out immediately.

Interestingly a number of the respondents indicated that they don't always want to shoot a victim for a number of reasons:

- the sound of a gunshot attracts witnesses;
- shooting a victim leaves blood in the car and the hijacker will first have to wash and clean out the inside of the vehicle before disposing of it to a buyer or the syndicate; and
- it takes time to get a body out of the car impeding a speedy getaway

Post-hijack Treatment of the Victim by Hijackers

The victim is treated in a number of ways after the hijack has been successfully completed, namely:

- In 44% of the hijacking situations the victim was left behind at the scene of the hijacking after they had been threatened with the firearm, got out of the car, searched and had their cellphones (if they had one) taken and their wallets, purses and jewellery stolen. In a number of these cases the victims were either told to walk or run away or to lie down on their stomachs. Some were also tied up and left at the scene.

- In 26% of the respondent's cases victims were taken with — sometimes in the luggage compartment (boot) of the car — some were later dropped off on a highway or in an open piece of isolated veldt. In addition, some of the woman victims were first raped before being released.
- In some of the hostage hijackings a victim might be locked in the boot of the vehicle and later subjected to multiple rape or sodomised and only then killed by the hijackers to avoid them (the hijackers) being identified (to leave no witnesses) (These particular hijackers were caught by other means, for example credit cards or victim cellphones were coincidentally found in their possession when being arrested for other crimes or being pulled off the road for inspection.).

The attitudes, behaviour, modus operandi, use of firearms and treatment of victims of vehicle hijacking by the hijackers highlight a number of victimisation patterns. These are all useful not only in formulating preventative measures and interventionist strategies but also in broadening the understanding of the impact a vehicle hijacking has on traumatising a victim of those who need to give and provide victim assistance to those victims who after all have been treated in a specific way and need to receive specialised victim assistance.

Combating Vehicle Hijackings

The following have been some of the measures implemented in recent years by the SAPS to combat the crimes of vehicle hijacking:

- cordoning off certain areas and search operations;
- roadblocks;
- analysing crime tendencies;
- identifying “hotspots” (i.e. places where frequent hijackings occur);
- observation at identified “hot spot” areas;
- intensified patrols for greater visibility (in particular the deployment of the BMW highway patrols);
- increased public awareness;
- utilisation of Business Watch car guards in parking areas of large shopping centres;
- joint operations by the SAPS and other departments such as SANDF and Traffic;
- Integrating databases such as the National Transport Information System (NATIS) and the SAPS Stolen Vehicle Register making them available (in an electronic format) at border crossing points so that the particulars of every vehicle passing out of South Africa can be checked;
- Improved border controls and patrolling of those borders where it is known that stolen vehicles cross;
- Initiating additional crossborder co-operative projects with policing counterparts in neighbouring states;
- Making use of Interpol to track transnational movement of stolen vehicles.

Community co-operation in terms of safety consciousness and the reporting of suspect vehicles (for example the Vodacom/702 cellphone watch), also contribute to combating these crimes. Partnerships have also been established between the SAPS and Business Against Crime (BAC) with regard to the hardening of the targets and the installation of tracking devices and networks to trace vehicles. The media was also constantly utilised to circulate information of hijacked or stolen vehicles.

Vehicle hijacking project teams, in conjunction with Murder and Robbery Units, were established in those provinces experiencing the highest rate of vehicle hijackings for the gathering of intelligence on syndicates, identification of premises used by the syndicates, infiltration of syndicates and to act as 'reaction' units on reported cases of hijacking of motor cars, heavy vehicles and freight. Special Operations focusing specifically on vehicle hijacking were also instituted.⁽¹²⁾

Other initiatives and measures to combat the crime of hijacking involved such measures as:

- the infiltration of suspected vehicle hijacking gangs and syndicates;
- the analysis of modus operandi and trends;
- encouraging the installation of tracker devices in new vehicles.

Dealing with Vehicle Hijacking as a Priority Crime

In 1995 the nine provinces were asked to formulate and select their own priority crimes in order to assist the National Commissioner in setting the new Annual Police Plan (Aims and Objectives) of the SAPS. The Gauteng Province submitted vehicle hijacking as its number one priority crime. Accordingly this was incorporated into the 1996/1997 Annual Police Plan and became one of the eight listed National Priority Crimes.⁽¹³⁾ In addition, it was linked to one of the other national crime priorities namely: The use of firearms in serious violent crimes.

In the light of the above a number of specific initiatives were launched to combat vehicle hijacking. A special Anti-Hijacking Unit was established. However, this unit tended to focus on the hijacking of trucks and cargo-in-transit on the highways nationally.

However, since the majority of vehicle hijackings occur in the Gauteng province a special Highway Patrol Unit was established whose members were Specially selected and had to undergo a rigorous programme of specialised training. The establishment of this unit was made possible by a special donation of 100 high speed BMW cars by BMW (SA) to the SAPS. This donation in itself caused endless problems and redtape delays but eventually the unit was operational by the end of 1996.

They patrolled the main highways of the Gauteng Province and soon made an impact by apprehending a number of hijackers fleeing the scene in high speed car chases. However, their success was dependent upon receiving information of a hijacking in progress or that the hijackers choose to make their getaway along the highways.

Their operations did have an impact albeit in causing a reduction of hijacking activities along the highways but also in the transference of those activities to other areas causing a change in hijackers' modus operandi.

As a result special multi-disciplinary anti-hijacking units were established in Johannesburg – one at Johannesburg Central Police Station and one at the Bramley Police Station in the north-eastern suburbs of Johannesburg. The Bramley Unit, established in late 1998, has been particularly successful with its multi-disciplinary approach of weekly analysis of reported crime in their policing area, establishing trends, modus operandi and by identifying "hot spots" and finally by constant patrolling and follow-up investigations. Their work was also supplemented by the roadblocks set up at flashpoint areas by the local police.

The success of the Bramley pilot unit led to the establishment of a Gauteng Anti-Hijacking Unit which was the first such unit comprising of police investigators and prosecutors dedicated solely to the investigation of vehicle hijacking cases. Their work was also supplemented by the roadblocks set up at flashpoint areas by the local police.

In addition, in May 1999 the National Director for Public Prosecutions (NDPP) office established a Prosecution Task Force on Car Hijacking under the NDPP Investigative Directorate on Organised Crime & Public Safety. This Task Team's – a team of prosecutors, police officers and intelligence agents – primary jurisdiction, which united the anti-carhijacking efforts of the SAPS and prosecutors, was the Gauteng Province. However, it also handles all the vehicle hijacking prosecutions in Johannesburg, except Soweto. The unit had two levels, the core unit and the task force based at the Johannesburg Magistrate's Court (Keppler, 1999).

Previously all car hijacking cases in the city of Johannesburg had been spread out among dozens of police stations and magistrates courts but were now being redirected to the Johannesburg Magistrates Court, where two dedicated "hijack courts" were established. Before the launch of this initiative, there had been very little communication between investigating officers and prosecutors, resulting in lengthy delays and withdrawal of cases because of a lack of evidence, witnesses and co-operation. These problems were largely eliminated by the establishment of the Special Prosecuting Task team. In its first year of operations the conviction rate of vehicle hijackers increased by more than 50% (*The Star*, 5/5/2000).

You might well ask what has this all got to do with victim assistance to hijacking victims. However, vehicle hijacking is one of the most feared crimes in South Africa and these successes have not only led to a slight reduction in hijacking levels in the first six months of 2000 but it also goes some way towards reassuring the public that something is being done about the problem.

Victim Assistance

As mentioned above there has been slow recognition by the authorities of the extreme victimisation and trauma suffered by vehicle hijack victims. Most victims when reporting the crime were merely advised – if they felt the need – to consult their own medical doctor or to seek further private counselling. Not all victims can afford or have access to such services. Those who know about the services of Trauma Clinics such as those at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) in central Johannesburg (Braamfontein), or the Psychology Dept. at RAU make use of those specialised trauma counselling services.

There are also Trauma Clinics attached to the major provincial hospitals in the Gauteng area but these are designed to deal with immediate physical injuries and not long-term counselling specifically for survivors of a vehicle hijacking.

In recognition of the general vacuum of victim services per se in the SAPS the Annual Police Plan for 1997/1998 had made the development of a Victim Empowerment and Assistance programme a priority.

The policy was rewritten and the training restructured in order, for the first time, to incorporate victim assistance services in the duties of every police official at a police station. This ranged from statement taking, treatment of victims with empathy, providing a separate room for interviews with the victim.

In addition, in 1997 one police station from each of the 43 policing areas was selected for the establishment of a dedicated Victim's Service or Trauma Centre. In effect what was physically being provided was a separate room, nicely furnished and painted out, equipped with ablution facilities and clean clothes so that a victim (e.g. of rape) could have a shower and get a change of clothing, be interviewed in private, be examined, if necessary, by a doctor and receive immediate attention.

However, not all these new victim's centres were manned all the time by a counsellor or a social worker. Most were in any case volunteers and not trained police personnel.

Furthermore, what often happened was that victims were merely advised about service providers listed in the register of such kept at the police station (the new Victim Empowerment Policy obliged Station Commanders to list all local service providers who were prepared to offer such services) and then referred them to the relevant medical doctor or social welfare officer/counsellor.

Unfortunately for hijack victims the emphasis in the new policy and the pilot Victim Service/Trauma Centres was largely on the victims of rape and of domestic violence. Furthermore, there remains an inadequate understanding of vehicle hijacking per se, its emotional impact on and of the trauma and suffering experienced by hijacking victims.

In order to rectify this situation, in May 1999 the Booyens Police Station was selected, as part of the Service Delivery Improvement Programme (SDIP) which in itself was designed to create “pockets of excellence” using “Best Practices” at selected police stations countrywide, to establish a new Victim’s Trauma Centre specifically dedicated for vehicle hijack victims.

The Booyens Police Station Commander established a special task team to organise the station’s response to hijacking in their area.⁽¹⁴⁾ Team members were specially trained to handle and deal with hijack victims on the scene and to then take them directly to the Hijack Victim Trauma Centre at the police station. Additionally one female officer was specially trained to take them through the process, provide an initial counselling or debriefing session and then accompany them to either a medical doctor or a professional counsellor if the victim so wished. This officer was also delegated to do the follow-up and inform the victim of progress being made in the investigation of their case. Moreover, if needed to assist in arranging or contacting/making appointments or meetings with other service providers or counsellors.

Furthermore, this officer organised contact sessions with victims of hijackers and their families with other victims of hijackers so that they can talk to each other about their experiences and share other coping mechanism they might have developed.

While it is still too early to say whether all this will help people to avoid being hijacked or to adequately cope and deal with the experience, it can, however, be stated that it has, for the first time within the SAPS, provided a victim assistance programme dedicated specifically to dealing with the victims of vehicle hijackings (as opposed to the usual focus at the SAPS trauma/victim centres on rape and domestic violence victims).

In this sense the Booyens Police Station Pilot Project for a trauma centre for hijacking victims provides a model for a support and counselling network specifically since the police are in the frontline of being the first people such victims would come into contact with immediately after experiencing a hijacking.

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Endnotes

1. Unless otherwise stated this paper is based on an analysis and collation of trends and modus operandi as extracted from cases of vehicle hijackings as reported in the media over a period of five years and the reports submitted by the specialised units, provinces and national divisions from which the principal author, A. Minnaar, compiled the 1996/1997 SAPS Annual Report.
2. Information Fax. 13 July 2000. Robbery Desk, Crime Information Management Centre, Crime Intelligence, Head Office, SAPS.
3. Institute for Security Studies. *Nedbank/ISS Crime Index*. 4(1), January-February 2000, p. 1-2.
4. Information Fax. 13 July 2000. Robbery Desk, Crime Information Management Centre, Crime Intelligence, Head Office, SAPS.
5. See news report Prostitutes may be in cahoots with hijacking syndicates – police. *City Press*, 13 June 1999
6. Unpublished report: *Motorkapings*. E-mailed by Prof. Conradie to co-author A. Minnaar, October 1998.
7. Information Fax. 13 July 2000. Robbery Desk, Crime Information Management Centre, Crime Intelligence, Head Office, SAPS.
8. See Davis, L. 2000. *The consequences of vehicle hijacking*. Department of Criminology, University of Pretoria. This research was undertaken by means of a mailed questionnaire to 110 victims of vehicle hijacking and dealt with the costs and consequences of this crime for individual victims and examined the following issues: financial costs; physical costs; psychological consequences; emotional reactions; cognitive reactions; biological reactions; behavioural reactions; social consequences; costs to community; and international reaction.
9. Information Fax. 13 July 2000. Robbery Desk, Crime Information Management Centre, Crime Intelligence, Head Office, SAPS.
10. Undertaken by co-author Rudolph Zinn during May, June & July 2000 with 30 convicted motor vehicle hijackers in the six biggest prisons in Gauteng - Zonderwater, Baviaanspoort, Leeuwkop, Pretoria Central, Modderbee and Diepkloof. The interviews were on a semi-structured basis and the answers were written up. The questionnaire consisted of 122 questions, which included a combination of multiple choice answers, closed and so-called open-ended questions. The open-ended questions were in particular structured to obtain more in-depth information concerning the actual hijacking perpetrated by the respondents. The information concerning choice of victims, use of firearms, target selection and modus operandi is drawn from these interviews.
11. For example the client (requester) is owed money by the selected victim (repayment of a debt); or by an owner themselves as part of an insurance scam; or merely by a buyer looking for a specific model and make of car etc.)
12. One of the first of such intensified operations to combat this crime tendency was **Operation Omega**, which was initiated as a pilot project on 3 December 1995 and officially launched in the Gauteng Province on 29 January 1996. Operation Omega consisted of the following actions initiated by the Crime Information Management Centre (CIMC):
 - particulars contained in 4,000 dockets were processed by computer;
 - particulars regarding 2,500 persons connected to 21 possible crime codes were circulated;
 - particulars of a further 13,000 known criminals, totalling 138,000 data paragraphs were also added to the data base;
 - 55 profiles of suspects were compiled and given to special investigation teams;
 - All of the above information was analysed, filtered and combined by the database and made available for further investigation.

13. The eight listed priority crimes were the following:

- Hijacking and other related crimes;
- Taxi-violence;
- Police corruption;
- Possession and trafficking of illegal weapons;
- Narcotic-related offenses;
- Serious economic offenses;
- Declared political massacres; and
- Bank robberies.

(Annual Plan of the South African Police Service 1996/97: 10)

14. Due primarily to SAPS budgetary constraints the station commander took the initiative and was able to establish the new Hijack Victim's Trauma Centre at the Booyens Police Station by innovatively involving the local community. In this manner a new room extension was built at the police station; it was painted; furnished; and stocked with toiletries and clean clothing. All of this was done through donations and assistance from local businesses and members of the community.