

RE-ESTABLISHING A RAILWAY POLICING CAPACITY

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South African Police Service

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-Abstract-

An efficient integrated transport system is a vital component for South Africa as it continues to become increasingly integrated socially, politically, and economically. Recognised is the role of provincial and national railways as gateways, both into remote and urban communities and between provinces. This paper examines the dissolution of the South African Railway Police Force (SARPF) and transfer of police officials. The paper approaches this issue primarily, although not exclusively, through the prism of restructuring, and if had had the intended effect. It briefly describes the background and changes in the demand for and role of the Rapid Rail Police Unit (RRPU) in the Western Cape Province, as well as the subsequent developments in the railway environment. The method used in collecting data was semi-structured interviews. The non-probability sampling based on the purposive method was used to select the twenty (20) participants comprised of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa Protection and Security Services (PRASA PSS), the SAPS officials, as well as commuters.

A summary of the main data categories and the sub-categories is presented in the form of themes. Three themes emerged from the final synthesis of the findings, namely: (1) RRPU not structured as a specialised unit; (2) there is need for detective and crime intelligence capacity within the Railway police; and (3) there is a need

for structuring of a detective and crime intelligence capacity. Amongst other aspects, a fundamental change in the way the Railway Police functions needed a paradigm shift, as well as, extraordinarily effective management and operating from a basis of knowledge of what works and what does not within the railway environment. It was concluded that there is a need for a detective and crime intelligence capacity to guide future strategic decisions by the South African Police Service (SAPS) Top Management regarding policing railway environment.

Key Words: Crime, Railway Police, Victimization

JEL Classification: K42

1. INTRODUCTION

Metrorail is one of the three divisions of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA), the state-owned enterprise which is responsible for most passenger rail services in South Africa. It is also one of the most troublesome forms of public transport. Though thousands of commuters use the Metrorail trains across six of the country's large cities to go about their daily business, many of them have endless complaints about the trains and the service. In Cape Town there are 172 stations and 1,167 of the yellow, silver and black carriages, familiar to commuters (Gontsana, 2013:np). Personal safety and security are essential criteria for measuring the quality of public transport, and research has consistently demonstrated that crime and fear of crime affect levels of patronage (Cozens & van der Linde, 2015:73-92). The public's experience of the public transport environment is often transient and temporary in nature, a setting that is given negligible consideration and taken for granted, except as a means to an end (Uzzell & Brown, 2007:2). Research indicates that, rail commuters consistently perceive their risks from crime to be significantly higher than official statistics suggest, discouraging many from using rail transport (Acuña-Rivera, Uzzell & Brown, 2011, 2014; Cozens, Neale, Whitaker & Hillier, 2003; Cozens & van der Linde, 2015).

2. BACKGROUND

The South African Railway and Harbours Police Force (SAR & HPF), which was commonly referred to as the South African Railway Police (SARP) was a dedicated, highly trained specialised force in the railway environment with the necessary resources and specialities to adequately prevent crime in the railway environment. Owing to a political decision, it was during 1986 that the government decided to

dissolve the force and transfer its resources to the South African Police (SAP) and later the South African Police Service (SAPS).

The purpose for the dissolution and transfer of the resources was to employ the resources in aid of the broader responsibility of the SAP and to avert the political onslaught in the country (Bezuidenhout, 2009:27-28). After the Railway Police was dissolved, the environment was left to be policed by under-resourced Mobile Police Units and not properly trained security officials with limited powers to safeguard the property of the Rail Company and its commuters. Owing to the decrease of policing and police visibility in the environment, crime in the environment rose to unacceptable levels. When the seriousness of the situation was brought to the attention of Parliament, the relevant parliamentary committee ordered the police to re-establish or reorganise a dedicated policing capacity in the rail environment to attend to the crime situation which affected the business of the Rail Company and the safety of the commuters (Bezuidenhout, 2009; Maluleke, 2010).

3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The Western Cape's Metrorail is a South African public transport system: underdeveloped yet crucial to the economy, at the mercy of thieves, and unfamiliar to a wealthy minority while a crucial part of life to many. However, the prevalence of crime in the railway environment has had a negative impact not only on national economic growth, investor confidence and tourism, but also on the safety and security of its citizens and residents (Gxuluwe, 2016:2). Four types of crime on public transport at the micro-level within South African railway environment have been identified: incivilities and crimes against passengers, attacks on staff, fare evasion and vandalism. O'Regan (2004) as cited by Maluleke (2010:4-5) highlights that many South African rail commuters who use the rail system as part of their daily public transport are exposed to various frightening criminal activities, such as mugging, rape, robbery, murder and arson. These crimes can be largely attributed to the inadequate safety and security provisions. Before the re-establishment of a dedicated Railway Police in the Western Cape, the crime prevention units deployed in the railway environment could not address the crime problem because of among others, the officials of the units saw crime prevention as a function which only required their physical presence on the trains and rail sections. Despite the establishment of the RRP, crime is still prevalent and the fear of victimisation is still in existence and has been shown to affect commuters' desire to use the railway system.

4. RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

4.1 Nature of research

For the purpose of this paper, the research was conducted within the qualitative design approach. The qualitative research paradigm was used to represent the generic research approach in social research according to which research takes as its departure point the insider's perspective on social accomplishment. The primary purpose of using this approach was to describe and understand rather than to explain human behaviour. The authors of this paper have also, followed to a broad methodological approach to the study of social action. This approach shares a certain set of principles or a common logic (Babbie & Mouton, 2008:270) as outlined below.

4.2 Sampling, sample size and selection

The research population for the RRP in the Western Cape Province, up to the period, March 2013, consisted of 455 officials. The officials of the unit were deployed at four unit points, namely, Cape Town, Philippi, Bellville, Retreat and the unit also has a Provincial Command Office in Cape Town (SAPS Annual Report, 2005-2006, 2006:104). The non-probability sampling based on the purposive method was used to select the twenty (20) participants comprised of the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa Protection and Security Services (PRASA PSS), the SAPS officials, as well as commuters. Samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. Morse (2000); Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003); Bowen (2008) and Guest (2006) provide reasons for this.

There is a point of diminishing return to a qualitative sample, as the study goes on more data does not necessarily lead to more information. This is because one occurrence of a piece of data, or a code, is all that is necessary to ensure that it becomes part of the analysis framework. Frequencies and analyses are rarely important in qualitative research, as one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic (Potgieter, Weise, Wachter, Wiesel & Stratford, 2017:1-5). This is because qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not making generalised hypothesis statements (Bowen, 2008; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Guest, 2006; Morse, 2000; Ritchie et al., 2003; Wray, Markovic & Manderson, 2007). Initially, for the purpose of this paper, the interviews were planned with additional 10 participants, but no

more new information or themes emerged from the data hence only 20 participants were interviewed (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012: 190-197).

4.3 Data collection

The method used in collecting data was semi-structured interviews. As part of the different types of research interviews, this research methods utilised open-ended questions thereby allowing for open-ended answers as well with the emphasis on the elaboration of the points of interest by the interviewee (Denscombe, 2007:175). The questions in the semi-structured interview schedule were derived from extensive reading of the literature which generated specific topics of interest to the research project so as to find a solution to the research question. Basically, this data collection tool allows for an in-depth provision of information especially that which relates to the individual's opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences (Holliday, 2007; Morse & Richards, 2002).

4.4 Procedure in the data collection

The twenty (20) selected research participants were contacted through telephone calls and e-mail. The participants were given some advance notice of the areas to be discussed during the interview, but not specific questions. With this approach, it was envisaged that it was going to allow the participants to reflect and not to be caught off-guard during the interview session. Before the commencement of the interview, the interviewees were reminded of the purpose of the study again and of the time involved. Any other issues such as definitions were clarified at the outset (Homan, 1991: 140-150).

4.5 Data analysis

Once the data was collected from the sample, it was put through a process of transcription, coding and analysis (Barbour, 2007; Flick, 2007, 2014; Miles, Huberman, Michael & Saldaña, 2014). Though in qualitative analysis there are no set rules as eluded by Barbour, in this research study, the information from the interviews was transcribed and sorted into categories (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006). Informed by authors such as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, 2011), the authors of this paper selectively analysed aspects of the human actions and events that illustrated recurring themes from the interviews. The authors attempted to go beyond descriptive analysis and add a theoretical dimension. The interviews were transcribed and concepts were coded. The concepts were categorised into higher order concepts and then, through Axial (or theoretical) coding, connections were discovered between the thematic concepts. Data were interpreted from a

constructivist framework. The participants were encouraged to participate in the data interpretation, and to check that data interpretation were accurate and in accordance with their experiences.

The data analysis unfolded as a continuous process, starting from the initial meeting with the educator as a potential participant. Other potential participants were eliminated from the research due to the lack of depth of their experience compared to that of the chosen participant, as was revealed during the informal conversations authors had leading up to the start of the research process. All interviews were transcribed and then studied several times in conjunction with the corresponding non-verbal clues given by the participants. Field notes provided further guidance during the data-analysis process, supporting the process of dividing the data into identifiable themes. During the process, the results were verified continuously by means of audio and visual recordings of the interviews, which proved very helpful as a means of ensuring data quality. This also provided the opportunity to follow a process by which the different themes could be compared and relations between the different themes could be studied, so as to become aware of patterns that could be categorised. In this way, the data could be synthesised in new ways, to make interpretation substantive within the unique research context.

Three processes were followed to ensure effective data control. First, the participants verified the data results to prevent misinterpretation of meaning or misrepresentation of the content or context of the collected data. Second, data results were compared with existing literature, to identify similarities or discrepancies that might call for further verification, including the possibility of further research in future. Last, data verification took place by following a process whereby data results were monitored by a leading supervisor, the first author in this article. Two of the three authors are highly experienced in qualitative research methodology, while the first, who conducted the interviews, was less experienced. The broad questions asked in the interviews were as follows:

- Tell me about your experience of Railway Police in the Western Cape?
- What can be done to improve the challenges constraining the functioning of the Railway Police in the Western Cape?

The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each and were audio-taped, then transcribed for data analysis. All the participants were interviewed once and each

interview continued until all questions, including probing questions, were asked and answered. A summary of the main data categories and the sub-categories is presented in the form of themes. Three themes emerged from the final synthesis of the findings, namely: (1) RRPU not structured as a specialised unit; (2) there is need for detective and crime intelligence capacity within the Railway Police; and (3) there is a need for structuring of a detective and crime intelligence capacity. The content was further analysed and used in the writing up of the summary. However, expressions such as 'yah', 'ehm', 'mmmh', 'ahm' and repeated words were removed in writing the research findings. The last step in the data analysis process was verifying the data such as re-checking of the interviews, transcripts and the codes. The idea, Denscombe (2007) argues, is to ensure credibility, validity, reliability and objectivity.

5. EMERGING THEMES AND DISCUSSIONS

5.1 Emerging theme 1: Rapid Rail Police Unit not structured as a specialised unit

When asked if the RRPU was structured as a specialised unit, it emerged from the findings that the majority of the participants concurred that the SARPF was a fully-fledged specialised police force in the railway environment. Therefore, the re-establishment of the RRPU was also expected to be same like its predecessor. Functional or RRPU was expected to comprise of specialised units that report to a single authority, usually the Provincial Command. The Provincial Command clusters those with similar knowledge in the same place. Taking the above-mentioned into consideration, the research question for the purpose of this paper is whether the Western Cape RRPU has been structured as a specialised uniformed unit as the former SARPF or is just an ordinary crime prevention unit in the railway environment.

This implies that if a unit is classified as a specialised unit in the SAPS, it should have been declared as such, its functions clearly outlined and it should have a specialised training curriculum. The SAPS Training Manual for Basic and Specialised Training Overview (SAPS Basic Training Overview, 2016) lists the Uniformed Specialised Units in the SAPS with their specific mandates, recruitment process and training curriculum. The units on the list of specialised units are, Basic Police Development, the Public Order Police (POP), K9 Dog Handlers, Tactical Response Teams (TRT), National Intervention Unit and the Special Task Force

(STF). The RRPU has not been listed as a specialized uniformed unit in the mentioned Training Manual.

One participant who was a commander RRPU in the Western Cape during 2004 said:

“The RRPU in the Western Cape, as it currently is, is not a specialised unit as it does not comply with the requirements of being classified as a specialised unit...When the unit was established as a pilot project in the Western Cape Province during 2004, plans were in place to craft a specialised mandate and training curriculum, develop a Detective and Crime Intelligence Capacity, a Dog Unit and Crowd Management Capacity, a Community Service Centre (CSC) on identified train stations and a train carriage with facilities for the police on the trains was also part of the plan...These plans did not materialise during the time when I was the commander of the unit and I am also aware that these were never implemented” (Participant 1).

During a presentation to the Standing Committee on Community Safety: Western Cape, Brigadier Jaco Bothma, the Acting Commander of the RRPU, a member of the Committee indicated that she was under the impression that the RRPU was a specialized unit, and was surprised that it did not operate as a specialised unit. The member of the Committee recommended that, in order for the RRPU in the province to properly execute its mandate, the unit should function as a proper specialised unit with all the capabilities and be properly resourced to police the SA rail environment (Cape Argus, 2016, May 12:1). According to Bezuidenhout (2009:25-26), Mr. Bart Grové, said “The Transport Service was proud of this small but versatile and formidable force which through specialisation on many terrains in the environment kept in step with the requirements of the time ... beyond challenge was confirmed.” One participant confirmed the assertion made by Grove as cited in Bezuidenhout and said:

“As a specialised force, the former SARPF had patrol officers for the trains, platforms and other railway premises. It had its own crime investigating unit, a dog unit for crowd management, a detective capacity and a security branch to obtain pro-active information on planned sabotages of the Railway system in the country and a Mobile Train Unit” (Participant 13).

The goal of specialisation is to put all the human and informational resources necessary for a single activity in one place. This maximizes performance by facilitating ‘sharing of valuable expertise by the organisation toward offering optimal and efficient service to the public. Therefore, as it was in the case of the dissolved RRPU, the participants were of the view that an expectation was created by the SAPS Top Management, to re-establish the RRPU in the province as a specialised unit in order the Railway Police to reach its greatest potential and prevents over-utilisation of limited resources. The findings, therefore, indicated that the RRPU in the Western Cape Province, in its operations did not operate as a specialised unit. If the Railway Police had properly crafted performance management system that promoted the visibility of individual skills as a specialised unit, functional structure would have made it easier for officials to coach others and improved the performance of the Railway Police.

5.2 Emerging theme 2: The need for detective and crime intelligence capacity

When asked which strategic resources needed to maximise the performance of the Railway Police in the Western Cape, it emerged from the findings that the majority of the participants were of the view that the detective and crime intelligence capacity are valuable and desired resources within the RRPU. There was a consensus among the participants that finding a better balance between these two functions can improve resource utilisation. It can also contribute to concerns of efficient service and inadequate capacity within the railway environment by providing a transitional service to a sub-population of vulnerable sections such as the women and children, disabled persons as well as the elderly that cannot be effectively cared for elsewhere. One participant emphasised this point and said:

“Despite the fact that the RRPU in the province is not a specialised unit in the railway environment, the unit urgently need a detective and crime intelligence capacity to enhance its effectiveness” (Participant 9).

This sentiment was also shared by the majority of the participants who took part in this research. Brigadier Jaco Bothma, the Acting Commander of the RRPU, during a briefing of the Western Cape Standing Committee on Community Safety said that they don’t have our own intelligence and investigative capacity, as the unit utilises the capacities at provincial level. According to Bezuidenhout (2009:57), crime can be prevented through visible policing, detective services and crime intelligence service. The following are the contributions of detectives and intelligence capacity to the prevention of crime:-

- Detective Service: Contribute to the successful prosecution of crime by investigating and gathering all the related evidence in criminal cases.
- Crime Intelligence: Contribute to the neutralising of crime by gathering, collating and analysing intelligence information, which will lead to an actionable policing activity. To provide crime intelligence information to operations with a view of detecting crimes against persons, institutions and their property, and crimes being planned against the State, crimes aimed at disrupting the public order and crimes aimed at destabilising democracy.

The above sentiment was also re-iterated by the two participants who said:

“The RRPV must have its own investigation- and crime intelligence capacity because when the unit was established as a pilot project during 2014, it was structured to have its own crime intelligence and investigation capacity. The fact that the RRPV functions in a specific environment which needs specific specialties, it should have its own specialized investigation unit” (Participant 18).

“The former South African Railway Police had their own Crime intelligence and investigation units who obtained information on crime in the environment and investigated the cases in the environment and when the investigation is completed or suspects are arrested, they would register the case with the SAP and hand the suspect and the case to the SAP” (Participant 20).

5.3 Emerging theme 3: The need for structuring of a detective and crime intelligence capacity

When asked what factors hindered the performance of the Railway Police in the Western Cape, it emerged that the majority of participants were of the view that the criminal cases in the Railway Police environment were not properly investigated by the detectives of the neighbouring stations, and no serious attention was provided to the cases from the railway environment. One participant highlighted this and said:

“The unit should have its own crime detection and investigation capacity... We are running commuter trains to generate income and sharing some of the rail tracks with Transnet. We cannot wait for long periods on a crime scene

waiting for detectives to come from somewhere when the trains are queuing behind the accidents scene” (Participant 6).

Conflicting responses were also observed based on the following responses:

“We need our own crime detection team because the crimes emanating from the environment are not properly investigated by the investigators of the neighbouring stations, because they are not familiar with crime in the railway environment. Not having knowledge of the determinations of the Legal Succession Act, they investigate a case of common Malicious Damage to Property when a train and coaches have been intentionally damaged by fire” (Participant 9).

“The RRPV does not need an investigation capacity. There should just be closer cooperation with the detective units at the neighbouring police stations and the unit must only appoint a detective coordinator to monitor the progress of the investigation of cases registered from the railway policing environment” (Participant 14).

The responses above, indicated a tension existed between the Railway Police and the local police. This manifests itself on a day-to-day basis in routine and non-routine regarding collaborations by relevant stakeholders towards addressing railway environment related crime. These encounters present complex contingencies that cannot be taken into account as if-then provisions in rules and procedures, so formal expectations for officers’ choices among alternative courses of action are inevitably vague. Furthermore, only a small percentage of encounters can be directly observed by hierarchical superiors, who consequently have far less than perfect information about both the nature of the situations and how officers handle challenges within the railway environment.

It is a concern for the SAPS officials not to work together and, for the respective commanders failed to attend to these challenges. More so, the commanders failed to guide officers’ with adequate and proper decision making on how to respond to crime. Consequently, failing to manage officers’ behaviour, especially in such a complex and less predictable railway environment, showed lack of competent leadership. It is a task that falls first on the shoulders of commanders both from the

local police as well as within the Railway Police, to support their subordinates with adequate resources and skills in order to fulfil their constitutional mandate.

6. MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS AND A WAY FORWARD

From the responses provided above, it is clear that a fundamental change in the way the Railway Police functions needed a paradigm shift in order to equip the whole police workforce with leadership skills and knowledge. Only by being highly adaptable, extraordinarily effective and operating from the basis of a knowledge of what works and what does not within the railway environment, can the Railway Police change its tarnished reputation towards delivering on its mandate to protect the safety and liberty of all commuters in the railway environment. A failure to adapt and prepare for the future means there is a serious risk that the police service will falter under twin pressures of financial constraint and declining legitimacy. Based on the emerging themes, the participants highlighted the reluctance to share resources by the local police, especially if the crime has been committed within the railway environment. This indicated that the structure, status and culture of policing, and many efforts have not been made to identify ways to support all those working in the police to fulfil their duties. The lack of collaboration between the local police and the Railway Police, at best, yielded partial success. This could be due to failures of intent, diligence or commitment by all relevant role-players. The findings indicated that cultural and structural reform is one of the most difficult things to achieve in any single organisation such as the SAPS. This calls for the development of an ethical, professional servant-leadership in the SAPS. Not doing so will result in a failure to unlock the full potential of those working in policing that will, in turn, inhibit the police service's ability to meet the challenges of the future or provide the best service possible to the public.

7. CONCLUSION

The findings highlighted RRP (Rapid Rail Police Unit) functions like other SAPS units that require adequate resources to function efficiently. Though the RRP could not be considered as a specialised unit, the findings indicated that specialist knowledge and experience of the railway environment is essential in order to respond speedily to the railway incidents. Feelings of public safety are associated with increased public confidence in the police (HMIC, 2012) and so a key priority for Railway Police is to ensure that 'fear of crime' is low and all the victims of crime are attended by the SAPS. It was also highlighted in the findings that there was a lack of close relationships with relevant stakeholders such as the local police,

which puts the Railway Police in a disadvantage position to meet passengers' needs and keep people safe. The lack of cooperation between the SAPS officials is a significant concern for this paper, as the reason for the re-establishment of the RRPU was, among others, to address railway crime, improve police response and increase police visibility/patrolling in identified hot spots; increase police actions to address crime within the railway environment. It is also the mandate of the Railway Police to ensure public safety within the railway environment as well as to implement security measures in order to minimise disruption and anticipate potential victimisation of commuters. As part of the priorities for the specialised intervention sub-programme such as railway safety, the SAPS officials are expected to provide a rapid response capability for intervening whenever commuters are confronted with dangerous situations.

Specialised services such as investigation of crime as well as crime intelligence, are therefore, essential where normal railway policing requires additional specialist skills and support. This will ensure that incidents of criminality and victimisation of commuters are minimised, thereby increasing confidence on the capability of the Railway Police to reduce incidents of crime as well improve the protection of valuable or dangerous cargo. As such, one of the key aims of the RRPU is to provide a safe and secure railway, free from disruption and fear of crime. One way to reassure the public that it is safer to use this mode of public transport, is to make security measures more visible; provide with efficient and effective investigation of crime as well as intelligence in order to have the dual effect of both reassuring the public whilst deterring crime. The implications for the SAPS are that there is a need for the RRPU to set long-term targets for itself around reducing both crime and disruption, while increasing passenger confidence. This could be done once there is an increase in collaborations between the local police, RRPU and other relevant stakeholders. Though it was not the focus of this paper to address the issue of public-private partnership (PPP), based on the responses above, it is clear that lack of resources at the railway environment affected the performance of the Railway Police. Therefore, PPP is another possible option to be considered by the SAPS to minimise the challenges confronting the Railway Police.

The environment and crime mix the police deal with within the railway environment, is unique and the key to policing the rail network effectively, is in understanding environment served by all relevant stakeholders. It is essential for the local police commanders to bring together other government departments and stakeholders to address the railway environment challenges collectively, and to take

the comprehensive strategic partnership beyond the routine interactions and to unite against policing railway environment. Involving these stakeholders would go a long way ensuring that greater trust in the criminal justice system is restored. The shortage of resources within the Railway Police, has a negative impact on the response time to complaints and crime prevention initiatives. The responses highlighted from the emerged themes, exposed the relationship between policing performance and resourcing as well as lack of leadership. Of concern is that RRPU was re-established with the aim of increasing police visibility within the railway environment, with the objective of discouraging crime. However, with the current state of affairs, it can be deduced that crime prevention as well as crime detection by the Railway Police, will remain an objective difficult to attain because enabling factors are not in place.

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