

The Modus Operandi of Police Killers in Four Provinces of South Africa

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Abstract

For the purposes of the research, all police officials who have survived an attack between 1996 and 1999 in the Western Cape, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, were summoned to voluntarily complete the questionnaire. The final result was a twenty percent response rate. KwaZulu-Natal completed 165, Gauteng 145, Western Cape 138 and the Eastern Cape completed 68 questionnaires. Only 478 of the 517 could be utilized for the final result. There were 39 questionnaires which could not be used for different reasons, mainly because they were not completed in full.

This research found that the attackers were more active since 1998. They tend to attack a little bit more during the months of October. They prefer to attack on Friday and Saturday between 20:00 and 23:59, and they concentrate more in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng Provinces. The attackers are on foot or using public transport. They shoot and stab their victims. They also use physical force to attack. They shoot, stab and use force more on male than on female police officials. The younger the attackers, the more they shoot, stab and use physical force. Usually they utilize handguns when executing the attacks. They ambush the police officials. They execute the majority of their attacks against police officials who are on duty. When the police are directly interacting with the public, that is when they attack, namely when they attend a complaint, when patrolling or investigating a crime. The attackers rob the male victims more times of their fire arms than the females.

It is recommended that the reasons why the attacks seem to be increasing, should be researched further. The way in which policing services are rendered during week-ends should be re-visited to prevent attacks. The reasons for more attacks in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng should be researched further. All the elements of the modus operandi should be used to develop prevention strategies.

1 Introduction

The endemic nature of police killings are no more questioned in South Africa. With a population of about 42 million people, serviced by about 127 000 police officials, of whom an average of more than 200 per annum are being killed, clearly illustrates the point. This report on the modus operandi of police killers, is based on

the quantitative empirical research of the Multi-disciplinary Committee for the investigation of the Attacks and Murder of Police Officials in South Africa. The data gathering for this research were conducted in four provinces only, namely Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal - as determined by the Minister of Safety and Security. The questionnaire comprised 84 questions and those questions relating to the modus operandi of the offenders, are reflected in the report. All officers who have survived an attack were summoned to participate in the research. The result was a convenient sample of 20 percent.

This report will highlight the findings based on the five questions regarding the *modus operandi* of the perpetrators. On applicable places in the questionnaire the respondents were also given the opportunity to react freely. These comments will also be inserted. The major limitation of this research is of course that the victims were the ones reporting on the modus operandi of the offenders. The fact that the respondents were all trained police officials, compensated for possible misinformation.

2 Biographical Particulars of the Respondents

Only 432 (90,4%) of the respondents claimed to have had a docket opened regarding the incident(s) they were reporting about. Nine (1,9%) did not respond to this question, leaving 37 (7,7%) who said there were no docket opened. It should also be noted that only 372 (77,8%) reported the incident. Twelve (2,5%) said they thought it was not important enough to report it and 27 (5,6%) argued that, as experiencing an attack is, for them 'part of the job' they did not bother to report it. Two (0,4%) indicated that they were intimidated/threatened and another two (0,4%) said they were too afraid to report the incident.

Regarding gender, there were 446 (93,3%) male and 25 (5,2%) female police officials who have completed the questionnaire. Seven (1,5%) did not want to indicate their gender. Concerning their age, the majority of the victims, namely 365 (76,35%) were between 21 and 35 years old. Only 9 (1,9%) were under 20 years of age. A mere 28 (5,9%) were between 41 and 50 years old and only one each were 51 to 60 and 61 and older. Half of the respondents, namely 242 (50,6%) had had the rank of sergeant when this research was being conducted. The other two main groups were the 141 (29,9%) constables and 68 (14,2%) inspectors. There were only 13 (2,7%) with the rank of captain and 4 (0,8%) superintendents in the research group.

The major group of respondents came from the Uniform Branches of the SAPS, namely 212 (44,4%). Some 83 (17,4%) represented the crime prevention units at station level. Fifty five (11,5%) represented the detectives at station level, thirty six (7,5%) the public order policing units and 19 (2,1%) special units. One hundred and eighty two (38,1%) of the victims claimed to have been in a patrol van when they were attacked and 65 (13,6%) said they were in an unmarked police vehicle (sedan). Ninety-nine (20,7%) were on foot, 26 (5,4%) were travelling in their own private vehicles, whilst only 6 (1,3%) were using a bus and 3 (0,6%) were in a train. Fourteen (2,9%) reported that the incident occurred when they were in a taxi.

3 Biographical Particulars of the Perpetrators

According to the data, 315 (65,9%) of the attackers were male and 143 (29,9%) female. In eight incidents the respondents did not complete this question. Because South Africa is still very sensitive to race issues, a question about the race of the perpetrators was also included in the questionnaire. Concerning the race of the attackers, the research found that 390 (81,6%) were Black, 38 (7,9%) were White, and 23 (4,8%) Colored. Eleven did not respond to the question about race.

Significant differences were registered regarding gender (of the victim) and the race of the attackers.

Table 1 - Gender Versus Race of Attacker(s)					
Gender	Race of Attacker(s)				
	Unknown	Black	White	Colored	Total
Male	12	372	37	21	442
Female	4	18	1	2	25
TOTAL	16	390	38	23	467

Chi Square 13,671 Df 3 Prob ,003

Male police officials are more attacked by Black, White and Colored attackers than is the case with women. This may be an indication that the attackers are still focussing more on the male-ness of their victims. This may be linked to a perception about maleness and femaleness which is still deep rooted in South African society.

Regarding the age of the attackers, the one single group with the highest frequency, namely 338 (70,7%) were under 20 years of age. In the age group of 21 to 25 there were 26 (5,4%), in the group of 26 to 30 they were 24 (5%) followed by 35 (7,3%) in the age group of 36 to 40 years old. Between the ages of 41 and 50, the respondents only marked two (0,4%) and only one between 36 and 40 years of age. It should be noted that these ages could not be determined beyond any doubt. The answers are based on the guesswork of the responding police officials. However, should they be correct that the majority of the attackers are under 20 years of age, this should be seen as a very disturbing trend. Usually people in this age group are still supposed to be in school (at least the under 18 age group). When linked to the fact that attacks are violent occurrences, one can understand the involvement of younger people who are more inclined to violence. However, the fact that the younger people are more involved with attacking the police who are also symbols of law and order, is a disturbing phenomenon in the new democracy South Africa.

Ninety-eight (20,5%) of the respondents remembered the clothing of the attackers to be wearing civilian clothes and eighty-one (16,9%) were wearing distinctive clothing (like that of a gang, e.g.. the Americans).

The figure for gang related clothing, very close to one fifth of the respondents, supports the age distribution of the attackers. One hundred and two (21,3%) of the police officials who responded, filled in Unknown. One hundred and seven (22,4%) indicated the attackers wore traditional clothing. This is a disturbing trend, because traditionally traditional people supports law and order. Some 59 (12,3%) indicated that the attackers wore police uniforms. That as many as 59 police officials were attacked by people wearing uniforms of the police, is a further trend that needs to be looked at. The availability of such clothing to outsiders, or the possibility that perpetrators can get hold of police uniforms with the knowledge of police officials, should be investigated closely.

The respondents were also asked to indicate whether or not the attackers were intoxicated. They responded as follows: The majority of the police officials, namely 330 (69%) who completed the questionnaires were convinced that the majority of the attackers were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Only 18 (3,8%) said they were not under the influence. This phenomenon may *inter alia* be linked to the fact that many youngsters are not working.

The attackers were, in the majority of the instances, either on foot or they were using public transport. One hundred and three (21,5%) of the respondents said they were on foot and 101 (21,1%) said they utilized public transport. Seven (1,5%) each said they were using a state vehicle, their own vehicles or other transport. Two hundred and forty three (50,8%), however, indicated that they were not mobile at the time of the attack.

Concerning the injuries the attackers sustained during the incident, the research yielded the following results:

Table 2 - Injuries of the Attackers		
Injury	Frequency	Percent
None	107	22.4
Slightly	249	52.1
Serious	20	4.2
Critical	13	2.7
Died	75	15.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>464</i>	<i>97.1</i>
System	14	2.9
TOTAL	478	100.0

Table 2 clearly shows that just more than half of the respondents, namely 249 (52,1%) said the perpetrators were injured only lightly. Twenty (4,2%) said they were injured seriously and 13 (2,7%) indicated critical injuries to the attacker. Seventy five (15,7%) said the attacker died as a result of the incident. Fourteen (2,9%) did not

respond to this question. The fact that nearly half of the attackers only received slight injuries, speaks about the restraint of the police officials during the attacks.

4 *Modus Operandi*

The questionnaire contained some questions which could uncover some elements of the *modus operandi* of the attackers. For the purposes of this report these aspects will be analyzed with reference to *When* (year, month, day, date, time), *Where* (province, locality, neighborhood, dominant inhabitants, place), *What* (means of attack, weapon used to execute the attack), *How* (ambushed, bullet proof, transport, clothing, alcohol) and *Duties* (position, situation, type, armed, weapon type armed with). This part of the report will be rounded off by attending to the motives of the attackers (*Why*).

4.1 *When*

The respondents furnished data regarding the year, month, day, date, and time of the attacks - as follows:

Table 3 - Year of Attack		
Year	Frequency	Percent
Forgot	44	9.2
1996	67	14.0
1997	67	14.0
1998	113	23.6
1999	167	34.7
<i>Total</i>	<i>458</i>	<i>95.8</i>
Missing Values	20	4.2
TOTAL	478	100.0

Regarding the year in which the attacks occurred, for both 1996 and 1997 there were 67 (14%) of the respondents who indicated these years, with a marked increase to 113 (23,6%) to 1998 as well as an increase to 167 (34,9%) for 1999. There seems to be no apparent reason for this increase. The month of October was the one month with 48 (10%) incidents. Concerning the days of the week, Fridays and Saturdays seems to be the most 'dangerous' days a total of 127 (26,5%) taking place on these days. The research could not find any specific day of the month on which the attacks occurred more often.

Table 4 - Time of Attack		
Time Slot	Frequency	Percent
Forgot	74	15.5
00:00 - 01:59	32	6.7
02:00 - 03:59	28	5.9
04:00 - 05:59	15	3.1
06:00 - 07:59	19	4.0
08:00 - 09:59	20	4.2
10:00 - 11:59	40	8.4
12:00 - 13:59	28	5.9
14:00 - 15:59	26	5.4
16:00 - 17:59	28	5.9
18:00 - 19:59	46	9.6
20:00 - 21:59	78	16.3
22:00 - 21:59	34	7.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>468</i>	<i>97.9</i>
Missing Values	10	2.1
TOTAL	478	100.0

Concerning the time of day the attacks take place, this table shows that it seems to be more so between 20:00 and 21:59. As could be expected, a statistically significant correlation was registered between the day and time of the attack. This is especially true regarding the attacks on Fridays between 20:00 and 21:59 (Chi-square 151,681 Df 84 Prob ,000). These findings boil down to the fact that the majority of the attacks occurred during week-ends at night. Of course this is the 'best' time for younger people to 'hang out'.

5.2 Where

To assist with the study of the modus operandi of the perpetrators, the respondents were also asked to provide detail about the province where they were attacked as well as the neighborhood, the dominant inhabitants of the area, the place and where it occurred. The detail of their answers are as follows:

Table 5 - Province where the Attack Occurred		
Province	Frequency	Percent
Western Cape	54	11.3
Eastern Cape	135	28.2
KwaZulu-Natal	180	37.7
Free State	4	.8
Gauteng Province	96	20.1
Northern Province	2	.4
<i>Total</i>	<i>471</i>	<i>98.5</i>
Missing Values	7	1.5
TOTAL	478	100.0

Table 5 highlights the fact that the majority of the respondents were from KwaZulu-Natal, followed by the Eastern Cape and Gauteng. Why it is so high in KwaZulu-Natal could be related to the fact that the ANC and Inkhatha are still at logger heads in that province. However, given the dominant motive for attacks, such a political motive could not hold ground. The same argument could also not be offered in the case of Gauteng, because not political rivalry exists in that province.

Regarding the population distribution, the research showed that the majority of the attacks, that is 306 (64%) occurred in the areas where Blacks are the dominant inhabitants, followed by 52 (10.9%) attacks in the dominantly Colored areas and with only 51 (10.7%) in the white and 18 (3,8%) Asian dominated areas. This can be ascribed to the fact that the transformation of neighborhoods have been slow in post apartheid South Africa. Neighborhoods are still dominated by certain race groups.

Wherever the neighborhood, streets seem to be the most dangerous areas, as 163 (34,1%) said that they were attacked in the street. Public places is second with 49 (10,3%) attacks occurring there. Forty five (9,4%) of the attacks occurred on police premises. Considering that there are a total of 673 police stations (Freislich 2001) in these four provinces, it boils down to seven percent of the attacks occurred at police stations. This shows some measure of how easily the levels of aggression against the police are being activated - they are even attacked at their work place.

5.3 What

What the attackers did or utilized during the attack could also be determined with this research.

Table 6 - Means of Attack		
Means of Attack	Frequency	Percent
Shot	252	52.7
Stabbed	59	12.3
Physical Force	58	12.1
Run Over by Vehicle	23	4.8
Bomb Attack	6	1.3
Burned	3	.6
Stoned	16	3.3
Other	53	11.1
<i>Total</i>	<i>470</i>	<i>98.3</i>
Missing Values	8	1.7
TOTAL	478	100.0

Clearly Table 6 shows that the greater majority of the police officials, namely 252 (52,7%) were shot at. The group with the next highest frequency, is those that have been stabbed and attacked by means of physical force, that is 59 (12,3%) each. Twenty three (4,8%) were run over by a vehicle. The deadly intentions of the attackers are clear from the fact that 359 (75%) attacked their victims with deadly means (shoot, stab, run over by vehicle, bombing, burning, stoning).

The research also found significant differences between the race of the attacker and the means of attack.

Table 7 - Race versus Means of Attack					
Means of Attack	Race of Attacker(s)				
	Unknown	Black	White	Colored	Total
Shot	5	213	25	5	248
Stabbed	3	50	2	4	59
Physical Force	4	48	2	4	58
Run Over by Vehicle	3	17	1	2	23
Bomb Attack	-	3	1	2	6
Burned	-	3	-	-	3
Stoned	-	8	4	4	16
Other	1	48	3	1	53
TOTAL	16	390	38	22	466

Chi Square 57,772 Df 21 Prob 0,000

From the above it is clear that the Blacks were more inclined to use deadly means (shooting, stabbing, run over by vehicle, bombing, burning and stoning) that was the case with the Whites or Coloreds. Because the attacks are clearly an interracial phenomenon in South Africa, this clear tendency to use extreme force against their own, needs to be researched in depth before any inroads against this crime could be expected.

Table 8 - Age of Perpetrators versus Means to Attack							
Means of Attack	Age of Perpetrator (Approximate)						
	Unknown	Under 20	21-25	26-30	31-35	41-50	Total
Shot	22	204	4	3	14	1	248
Stabbed	8	31	3	7	10	-	59
Physical Force	3	39	4	7	5	-	58
Run Over by Vehicle	3	8	9	1	1	1	23
Bomb Attack	1	1	2	1	1	-	6
Burned	1	2	-	-	-	-	3
Stoned	2	11	2	-	1	-	16
Other	1	42	2	5	3	-	53
TOTAL	41	338	26	24	35	2	466

Chi Square 127,644 Df 35 Prob 0,000

Table 8 indicates that it were the younger persons who used shooting, stabbing and physical force as a means to attack the police officials.

As could be expected, the research also found that the majority of the attackers, namely 174 (36,4%) used a handgun, followed by 53 (11,1%) who used a a gun and another 10 (2,1%) who were attacked by a homemade gun. This means that as much as 237 (49,58%) were attacked with fire arms. This clearly shows the intention to kill.

5.4 How

Some elements of the *modus operandi* included whether or not they have ambushed the police officials, what type of transport were utilized by the victim and perpetrator, their clothing, the role of alcohol and the use of body armor or not, by the victims.

The research indicated that 111 (23,2%) of the police officials who have survived the attack, were convinced that they were ambushed. Ambushing clearly shows intention from the part of the attacker. Seven (1,5%) did not respond to this question, leaving 302 (63,2%) who stated that they were not ambushed.

According to the respondents, the greatest number of them, namely 307 (64,2%) were not wearing bullet proof clothing during the attack. Only 98 (20,5%) did wear body armor when the attack occurred. Half of the respondents, 242 (50,6%) were in uniform when the attack occurred. Of course, wearing a uniform, made them clearly visible as police officials. Two hundred and four (42,7%) were wearing civilian clothing. This is an indication that, although they wore civilian clothes, they were known to be police officials.

The respondents were also asked to indicate why they did not wear bullet proof clothing. One hundred and seven (22,4%) indicated that it was not compulsory to do so, due to the type of duty they were performing, or because they were off duty. Another 61 (12,76%) indicated specifically that their type of duty did not require wearing body armor. Ninety six (20,1%) said it was not available, 10 (2,1%) said it is too heavy, 17 (3,6%) said it is not practical, 26 (5,4%) indicated that it hampered their movement, 9 (1,9%) said it does not give adequate protection. Ten (2,1%) did not respond to this question. The one fifth who claimed that body armor was not available is a disturbing comment from the respondents. It smells like a management problem which needs urgent attention.

The respondents were also asked to indicate the type of clothing worn by the attackers. Eighty one (16,9%) of the attackers wore distinctive clothing during the attack which could distinguish them e.g. as members of a gang like the Americans. One hundred and seven (22,4%) wore traditional clothing, 98 (20,5%) were in civilian clothing, and 59 (12,3%) were in SAPS uniforms (Table 29). These seem to be indications that gangs' and traditional persons' lack of tolerance of the police are more or less on the same levels. The 12,3 percent of the perpetrators who had police uniforms on during the attacks, needs further investigation. It would be equally disturbing to learn that police uniforms are that easy to buy or get hold of by means of corruption, than it would be to learn that these perpetrators were in actual fact police officials.

The streets being the most prevalent place to attack the, one can understand that as many as 103 (21,5%) of the victims were on foot and a nearly equal figure, 101 (21,1%) were utilizing public transport. Only 7 (1,5%) each used state vehicles, their own vehicles or other transport. More male officials were attacked by attackers who were on foot, using public transport, state vehicles and their own transport, than was the case with women.

The weapon(s) used by the perpetrator, are reflected in the next table:

The one weapon which was used the most by the perpetrators, were handguns. They utilized these in 174 (36,4%) of the attacks. The research also found statistically significant differences between gender and the weapon utilized by the perpetrators:

Table 9 - Gender Versus Weapon of Perpetrator			
Weapon Used	Male	Female	Total
Official Fire Arm	42	1	43
Handgun	165	9	174
Rifle	52	1	53
Handmade Gun	7	3	10
Sharp Instrument	14	2	16
Knife	36	1	37
Stone	20	2	22
Dog	-	1	1
Vehicle	7	-	7
Physical Force	29	2	31
Other Means	56	3	59
TOTAL	441	25	466

Chi-square 35,589 Df 13 Prob 0,001

Table 9 indicates that men were more attacked with hand handguns, rifles, official fire arms, knives and physical force than were the case with women. More Black victims, that is 333 (70,85%) than any other race group were armed during the attack than any other race group. This finding is statistically speaking, highly significant (Chi-square 21,805 Df 3 Prob 0,00).

To complicate the matters even further, as much as twenty two (4,6%) of the respondents said they, as the victims, were under the influence of alcohol or drugs during the attack.

5.5 Duties

The majority of these respondents, namely 357 (74,7%) were attacked whilst on duty. Those who were attacked whilst off duty were only 112 (23,4%). Nine (1,9%) did not respond to the question. Attending to a complaint was registered by 93 (19,5%) of the respondents as the type of duty they were performing when they were attacked. That they were attacked whilst on vehicle patrol, was reported by 58 (12,1%) of the respondents. Searching a suspect was reported by 26 (5,4%). Forty one (8,6%) indicated the attacks occurred when they were investigating a crime. When one adds up all the types of services where the police interact directly with the public, it amounts to 298 (62,34%) of the attacks. This finding may give direction to training police officials to be more alert during these type of services to the public. Where applicable, 105 (22%) of the respondents said they did handcuff the suspects - who incidentally attacked them - but 173 (36,2%) didn't do it. The vast majority, namely 389 (81,4%) were armed when they were attacked. Only 82 (17,2%) were not armed, and seven (1,5%) did not answer. The high number of officials who were armed is, of course

related to the fact that they were on duty during the attack. The vast majority of the armed officials were male: that is 375 (79,61%) and only 14 (2,97%) of the female officials, were armed during the attack. These differences in carrying weapons during the attack, can be ascribed to the gender differences: males more than females carry their weapons when they are attacked. Overall, it is clear that the attackers are not deterred by the fact that the police officials are armed.

Table 10 - Victim Armed versus Degree of Injury Inflicted					
Armed	Degree of Injury				
	Critical	Serious	Slightly	None	Total
Yes	38	98	73	179	388
No	20	25	13	24	82
TOTAL	58	123	86	203	470

Chi Square 17,177 Df 3 Prob 0,001

The above table shows that those victims who were armed during the attack were more prone to being seriously, slightly and critically injured than those who were not armed. This can be due to the fact that the attackers used more force during the attack because the victims were armed. The victims indicated that the majority of them, that is 350 (73,2%) of the victims were carrying their 9 mm pistols when they were attacked. Only 40 (8,4%) were carrying the R5 or R1 rifles and seven (1,7%) carried their private guns.

6 Findings

The following can be listed as the findings of this research:

- Attackers are becoming more active since 1998.
- There is a slight increase of attacks during October.
- Usually they attack on Friday and Saturday between 20:00 and 23:59.
- There are more attacks executed in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng Provinces.
- The attackers are on foot or using public transport.
- The attackers use shooting, stabbing and physical force to attack.
- They shoot, stab and use force more on male than on female police officials.
- The younger the attackers, the more they shoot, stab and use physical force.
- Usually they utilize handguns when executing the attacks.
- They ambush the police officials.
- They execute the attacks against police officials who are on duty.
- When the police are directly interacting with the public, they are most vulnerable.
- They attack them when they attend a complaint, when patrolling or investigating crime.
- The attacks are motivated by escaping arrest because the victim is a police official.

- The attackers rob the male victims more times of their fire arms than the females.

7 Recommendations

Based on the list of above findings, the following recommendations seems logical:

- Why the attacks seem to be increasing, should be researched further.
- Services rendered during week-ends should be re-visited to prevent attacks.
- The reasons for more attacks in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng should be researched further.
- All the elements of the *modus operandi* should be used to develop prevention strategies.

8 Concluding Remarks

These findings indicate a continuing disrespect for the law enforcement officers of South Africa. This is disturbing - especially because one could argue that the *modus operandi* and motives for attacks enhances this perception of anomie (without respect for the law) by the attackers. Decisive measures are needed. Sooner than later.

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