

# The effectiveness of the Community Patroller programme in the fight against crime in Gauteng province

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## **ABSTRACT**

*This article aims to present the findings of the study conducted by the GDCS during the 2021/22 financial year. The aforementioned study sought to assess the effectiveness of the patroller programme. This was critical given the fact that the GDCS patroller programme was not evaluated since its formalization in 2006. A qualitative research method was used to collect data through semi-structured interviews with a sample size of 11 participants and 10 focus group interviews in the five corridors of the province. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. The participants included GDCS patroller programme coordinators, members of Community Policing Forums (CPF), South African Police Service (SAPS) Social Crime Prevention Coordinators and the Chairperson of the CPF Provincial Board. The participants indicated that the patroller programme is making a huge impact in the fight against crime. The patrollers stated that their visibility makes a difference because criminals do not commit crimes when they are visible. They also emphasized that there is improved visibility because they are deployed daily at crime hotspots. The participants asserted that when patrollers are visible, criminals are less likely to commit crimes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Community Patrollers, Crime, Community Policing Forum.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

This article assessed the effectiveness of the patroller programme which was implemented by the Gauteng Department of Community Safety (GDCS) in 2006. After the new dispensation in 1994, the ‘breakdown of community and related principles of social organisation, including the crime control arrangements’ characterising transitional societies, left a void that the Constitutional Rights and the police reform have yet to fill (Be´nit-Gbaffou, 2008:100). The longing for the old social (but not political) order of the township, particularly the one prevailing in the 1980s where street committees were powerful and vibrant, can find a way of expressing itself in the current government call for community participation in the production of security (Be´nit-Gbaffou, 2008:100). This can be done through the official enhancement of street patrollers, to supplement a police force considered insufficient (Be´nit-Gbaffou, 2008:100).

Community patrol is a voluntary group of people, going under various names such as community watch, neighbourhood watches, citizen patrol, etc. who actively patrol their communities assisting the police by fighting crimes in their areas (GDCS, 2008:1). The concept of Community Patroller relies on the greater involvement of citizens in crime prevention. It consists of groups of people who serve in a voluntary capacity to actively patrol their localities (Civilian Secretariat for Police Service 2020:29). The patrollers willingly give of their time and resources to improve the levels of safety and security within their localities. In addition, they assist law enforcement agencies and municipalities to create a safer environment (Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, 2020:29). The key feature of this approach is that community patrollers become engaged in providing safety, in partnership with law enforcement agencies (Civilian Secretariat for Police Service, 2020:29).

### **1.1 Aim of the Article**

This article aims to present the findings of a study to evaluate the effectiveness of the community patroller programme.

### **1.2 Research objectives**

The study sought to answer the following objectives:

- To determine the effectiveness of the community patroller programme in fighting crime,

- To determine the effectiveness of the community patroller programme in enhancing police visibility,
- To determine the challenges experienced during the implementation of the patroller programme, and
- To suggest measures that may lead to an improved effectiveness of the patroller programme.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature review was extracted from various sources drawn from the internet, GDCS reports and journal articles.

### **2.1 The effectiveness of the Gauteng patroller programme**

#### **2.1.1 Some successes of the patroller programme**

In Roodepoort, west of Johannesburg, patrollers helped foil a rape incident in Florida Park while in Mamelodi township in the Tshwane area, they assisted in the recovery of stolen goods (Times Live, 2020). In Ekurhuleni, a wanted suspect who robbed people visiting a mall was arrested (Times Live, 2020). One of the patrollers who helped foil the rape incident, Comfort Nkola, said when the victim screamed, they immediately realized there was a problem (Times Live, 2020). “We then cornered the suspects and helped the lady,” he said. The father of five from Florida started working as a patroller in December 2019. “Many people know me in my community. I always help liaise with the police to keep our community safe. When any incident occurred, people will call me to come and help,” he said (Times Live, 2020). The Department of Community Safety indicated patrollers were instrumental in the recovery of stolen vehicles, the identification of wanted suspects and ensuring the safety of pedestrians in hazardous places (Times Live, 2020).

#### **2.1.2 Impact of the community patroller programme**

The impact of community patrollers could be measured by using the official records of their activities and criminal incidents, solved by or with their involvement, such as drug-related incidents detected, as well as arrests and raids carried out successfully (Prinsloo & Morrison, 2001: 50). The study by Camacho-Collados and Liberatore (2015: 25), also stresses that community patrollers augment police resources especially in the current climate of scarce resources and tight government budget allocations. According to Van Craen and Skogan (2015: 130), the community patrolling initiative has increased the police response rate to crime scenes (Van Craen & Skogan, 2015: 129). As they timeously engage with communities during the patrol and enhance the communication between the police and the community about the potential crime occurrences and perpetrators which helps to deter some planned criminal incidents from occurring (Van Craen & Skogan, 2015: 129). It also assists in enhancing the trust of the police and the communities in attempting to halt the crime rates (Van Craen & Skogan, 2015: 129).

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach followed to collect information in order to achieve the purpose of the research. The researcher used in-depth and focus group interviews to source information from the participants. Purposive sampling was followed to select participants. Thereafter, eleven (11) CPF members and ten (10) focus group interviews were conducted with community patrollers in the five corridors. In addition, the Chairperson of CPF Provincial Board was also interviewed.

### **Data collection**

The interviews entailed asking the participants their views on the effectiveness of the patroller programme. An interview guide with open-ended questions was used to collect qualitative data. Notes were taken by the first author during and immediately after each interview. Each interview lasted an average of 35 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

The following steps were followed when analysing data: categorisation of data and a thematic analysis. Thereafter coding which is the process of grouping evidence and labelling ideas was done so that data can show a broader viewpoint.

## **IV. FINDINGS**

Themes were identified according to the objectives of the study to evaluate the effectiveness of the patroller programme.

### **4.1 The effectiveness and efficiency of the community patroller programme in fighting crime**

Most patrollers stated that they are working under the command of the police and are deployed daily at crime hotspots such as shopping centres, open spaces and close to the Automated Teller Machines (ATMs). The deployment is driven by the intention to prevent fraudsters from taking advantage of vulnerable groups. The

departmental coordinators added that the community prefers calling the patrollers before the police because they respond quicker than the police. It happens mostly in the affluent areas where the patrollers are the first to arrive at the accident scenes as they are trained on how to secure a scene and administer first. The patrollers stated that they conduct operations such as stop and searches, awareness campaigns, raiding of illegal taverns, stolen goods operations and roadblocks with the police. The patrollers said they act as a backup for the police during raids and help them carry confiscated goods and serve as witnesses. It was mentioned that these operations take place twice a week, especially on Fridays and Saturdays. The patrollers averred that they undertake about twenty-five (25) to thirty (30) patrols in crime hotspots during the week while thirty-five (35) patrols are undertaken during the weekend (Saturdays and Sundays).

The patrollers highlighted they conduct their duties in groups with the first shift starting from 4am to 6am in order to ensure safety for people going to work. The second group resumes to patrol from 7am to 8am in order to guard school going children while the other group starts their shift from 18H30 to 19H30. This last group is meant to protect those coming from work and they are mostly stationed in crime hotspot areas such as railways, open spaces and bridges.

The patrollers emphasised their deployment is motivated by the operations conducted by the SAPS and the number of sectors in their respective policing precincts. The departmental coordinators revealed that each corridor has 200 patrollers who are responsible for “Siyabangena Operations”. This is a task team that looked after homeless people during COVID 19 lockdown level 5. These task teams were tasked to maintain law and order during elections but also form the bulk of the part of Operation Okae Molao which is an operation meant to fight crime in the province. The SAPS officers interviewed stated patrollers attend parade every morning at a police station where they get their pocketbooks signed and that is when they are signed in the SAPS 15. The purpose of the parade is to inspect for cleanliness and how presentable the patrollers are for duty. The SAPS officers maintained that the patrollers also assist with certification of documents at the Community Service Centre (CSC).

The departmental coordinators affirmed that according to crime statistics, the crime rate has reduced since the introduction of the patroller programme. The coordinators asserted this is evidence of how effective the patrollers are in fighting crime since they are the first port of call for community members. In addition, the patrollers and CPF Deputy Chairperson stipulated some patrollers are deployed at the schools to provide 24-hour monitoring to prevent crime from occurring at these places. The departmental coordinators added that some patrollers are deployed in clinics while others are deployed in old age homes where they assist in dishing out food to elderly people. They are also deployed around supermarkets to ensure customers adhere to COVID-19 regulations. The departmental coordinators avowed that the patrollers also offer protection to those seeking refuge at Green Doors (a temporary shelter for victims of gender based violence). They (patrollers) also assist in distributing pamphlets during awareness campaigns. The respondents further stated that the patrollers’ responsibilities are to prevent crime in the community.

Furthermore, the patroller programme was assessed as effective during the festive season to curb burglaries at residential premises. There are a lot of attempted burglaries during that period because many houses remain unoccupied since most people travel to various provinces for vacation. The CPF Provincial Board Chairperson mentioned that Memeza and solar alarms were installed at fifty schools where attempted burglaries were experienced.

Moreover, community patrollers stated they ensure that where they are visible, the places are safe and crime is not occurring. The patrollers also prevent crime in the areas where they are deployed. The patrollers further asserted that community members have revealed that they no longer get robbed when going to work. The respondents also mentioned that the businesses which were closed due to high crime are reopening because crime has decreased as a result of the work done by the patrollers. The respondents added that the crime rate has reduced because of the visibility of the patrollers. There has also been a reduction in the number of burglary cases in schools and gang violence. Moreover, SAPS officers added that mob justice, where community members take the law into their own hands to punish criminals, is no longer an issue since the introduction of the patroller programme.

Additionally, the participants mentioned that the patrollers assist the community to recover stolen goods by asking the victims to describe the people who robbed them. Thereafter, the patrollers trace and arrest the suspect and call the police. The participants also revealed that the patrollers accompany people who are asking for directions to prevent them becoming victims of mugging/robbery.

In addition, the patrollers stated that there are WhatsApp groups that community members use to communicate with the police and the patrollers use their smartphones to capture criminal activities which they send to the police as evidence. Some patrollers are stationed in recreational parks while others are stationed in stadiums especially during events such as soccer tournaments. The patrollers at Evaton said sometimes departmental coordinators assist them during patrols.

#### **4.2 The effectiveness of the community patroller programme in enhancing police visibility**

The patrollers cited that their visibility makes a difference because criminals do not commit crimes when the patrollers are visible. In addition, the participants stated that patrollers are force multipliers, as well as the eyes and ears of the police. The participants indicated stakeholders such as the Department of Education (DOE), Private Security Companies who are legalised to carry firearms, Gauteng Traffic Police (GTP) and Metropolitan Police Departments (MPDs) get involved in the operations conducted by the patrollers and the police. It was also highlighted that the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) has a security wing that works very closely with the GDCS to assist with the provision of security at Germiston train station.

Furthermore, all the participants averred that the patrollers patrol with the police and report any suspicious activities. It was revealed that in some instances the police take more than two hours to arrive at the crime scenes while the patrollers arrive immediately and cordon off the scene. The patrollers stated that they are mostly stationed around supermarkets, taxi ranks, filling stations, shopping malls and post offices.

According to the patrollers, there are also street committees that assist in dealing with criminal cases committed by young people. One of the duties of the patrollers is to educate communities on what steps to take when opening criminal cases. The patrollers act as a link between communities and the police, for example, they call the police to arrest boys who are violent towards their family members because of drugs such as nyaope. As a result of their efficiency in dealing with crime, community members now seem to trust the patrollers more than the police as they are the first port of call. The patrollers said they conduct an operation every Wednesday that deals with illegal mining. Those arrested during such operations are taken to police stations. They (patrollers) are also involved in raising awareness on the dangers of drug abuse through various campaigns. Some patrollers are deployed at crime hotspot areas such as taxi ranks where thieves tend to take advantage of innocent citizens and vulnerable groups namely women and children. The SAPS officers said they welcome the patroller programme as they assist when police are not immediately available.

#### **4.3 The successes of the patroller programme**

In terms of the successes of the patroller programme, the participants stated that there are a lot of people who are willing to join the programme, especially young people. In affluent areas, professionals such as medical doctors, nurses etc. are also part of the programme. Ten young patrollers were trained to operate the drones in the province which enabled these individuals to have an opportunity to apply for jobs. In addition, the patrollers conduct citizen arrests and confiscate illegal items such as drugs, firearms and knives. The patrollers stated that they arrest people who commit various offences such as murder, street mugging, common assault, Assault GBH, business robbery and Theft. The patrollers also perform other duties such as extinguishing fires and finding dead bodies. It was further indicated by the participants that in some of the cases where the patrollers arrested suspects, a conviction has been the result.

The patrollers said they have been involved in the arrest of drug lords in communities, tracing and confiscation of illegal firearms as well as the closing down of illegal liquor bars. Such information they receive through tip offs from community members and a task team whose duty it is to track criminal activities. This shows how important and efficient the patrollers are in dealing with crime in communities.

The departmental coordinators averred that the patroller programme is more integrated in affluent areas. For instance, in affluent communities there is neighbourhood watch which patrols with its resources. These neighbourhood watches are supported with resources such as cars, uniform, torches etc by the residents and the businesses in their localities. It was indicated that some of the neighbourhood watch groups do support and patrol in the nearby black dominated areas, but it did not happen previously. There is also Community in Blue launched by SAPS in 2018. One of the success stories of the patrollers mentioned by the departmental coordinator was in Lenasia where the patrollers were involved in the arrest of three notorious criminals who committed armed robberies and ATM card scamming in January 2022.

#### **4.5 The challenges experienced during the implementation of the patroller programme**

The patrollers mentioned that the police take time to arrive when they call them for backup after arresting suspects, as a result, suspects run away. The patrollers raised concerns about the lack of support from the police during night shifts. It was revealed that in some instances the police do not show up at all and the patrollers conduct operations on their own. The participants further averred that the GDCS is failing the patrollers because the patrollers do not have a uniform, the last time the patrollers received such was two to three years ago. The

wrong sized uniform given to the patrollers was also raised by the participants, for instance, a size 62 jacket and size 13 boots are sometimes given to the patrollers by the department. In other instances, about five patrollers share one jacket which has a bad odour as there is no time for it to be washed. The participants also stated that the patrollers do not have torches; they use their cellphones to be visible to the community when patrolling in the dark.

The patrollers revealed that they no longer receive the funeral benefit. It was highlighted that the department's officials provide different information pertaining to the payment of funeral benefits. The patrollers also mentioned that management in the department informed the patrollers the funeral benefit is still in place whereas the coordinators stated it is no longer paid to the patrollers. Furthermore, the patrollers cited that the department does not pay the medical bills of patrollers when they are injured whilst on duty.

The participants cited a number of challenges the patrollers experience when working with the police. To this end, some of the participants mentioned the lower ranked officers, such as the constables. It seems as if the constables feel threatened by the patrollers since they make more arrests. In addition, the police do not respond immediately due to a shortage of vehicles whereas the patrollers in affluent areas respond more quickly. In some stations, the patrollers are seen as a problem because they expose the corrupt behaviour of the police. The patrollers said there are some corrupt police officers who take bribes from criminals therefore, they do not want to work with the patrollers. The departmental coordinators and the community patrollers added that some police officers are not willing to offer transport to patrollers. The patrollers highlighted that some Visible policing officers undermine them; they do not interact with them unless they want them to assist with operations. The participants also revealed that some police officers do not even talk to the patrollers when they are doing operations with them.

With respect to the relationship between the patrollers and the GDCS coordinators, the former felt it was poor. This is so as patrollers are not given opportunities when there are income-generating projects. The patrollers added that they do not receive any support from the GDCS. The patrollers also raised concerns on the lack of proper clothing when conducting their duties. They said there is a need for proper uniforms and shoes that are compatible with their line of work. The patrollers believe having uniforms will bring dignity and respect from the community. Some patrollers accused members from the GDCS of demanding sex in exchange for income-generating projects. The patrollers also raised concerns about the number of suspects being released as well as the withdrawal of cases at police stations. They view this as a setback that undermines the work of the programme.

Some patrollers interviewed lamented the involvement of their fellow patrollers in criminal activities. As a result, the image of the programme is tarnished leading to a lack of trust from the community. Some patrollers are said to be involved in physical fights amongst themselves which shows a lack of discipline. The departmental coordinators revealed that there are some patrollers who harass undocumented immigrants by demanding bribes if they fail to produce proper identity documents.

The departmental coordinators and the patrollers stated that there are always delays with payments after projects are concluded. As a result, patrollers lose interest in the programme. According to some SAPS officers, there have been reports of patrollers being intimidated by criminals when performing their duties. The patrollers averred that they do not feel safe since they believe that their lives are at risk as some corrupt individuals from the police are collaborating with criminals. These corrupt police officers often give tip offs to criminals. All the respondents averred that challenges such as poverty and unemployment amongst the patrollers leads to an expectation that when they are called for duty there is an anticipation of remuneration even though they are volunteers. Some CPF members said community members are skeptical to join the programme as they feel their lives would be at risk. This is so because patrollers do not carry any weapons like the police. Therefore, community members do not join the patroller programme.

#### **4.6 Suggested measures to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the patroller programme**

The participants mentioned that the GDCS should come up with measures to professionalise the patroller programme for the patrollers to think and plan their work accordingly. The respondents also stated that SAPS and MPDs should consider absorbing the patrollers who qualify when recruiting personnel. In addition, the departmental coordinator and CPF Provincial Board Chairperson cited that the patrollers in both affluent and less affluent areas should receive the same training. For instance, in affluent areas, the professionals train the patrollers in a variety of skills and the same should prevail in less affluent areas. Some of the respondents mentioned their need for stipend paying programmes in less affluent areas as it would assist to alleviate poverty. It was also mentioned that community patrollers need transport to their homes after the operations late at night.

Treating patrollers with respect at the police stations was suggested by all respondents since they are dedicated volunteers who protect the community by fighting crime. The participants added that there is a need to categorise the patrollers into age groups because the young generation are more e-policing and technologically inclined. The patrollers should be given certificates of appreciation when exiting the programme to show that they have participated in such an initiative.



In terms of the areas where the community patrollers should be visible, the patrollers mentioned Braamfontein as there is a great deal of crime happening in that area. The respondents stated that theft out of motor vehicles, smash and grab and street mugging are high in that area. It was also revealed that the patrollers should patrol all areas where the SAPS are not visible. The CPF members and the patrollers pleaded with the MEC to meet with the patrollers to hear their concerns.

**Training** - The patrollers added that there is a need for them to be equipped with security skills to protect themselves when dealing with criminals since they are not armed. The patrollers stated that they would like to receive Traffic Warden and Peace Officer training to be equipped with security skills to increase their chances of being employed in the safety and security sector. Training to use pepper spray was cited as a requirement by the respondents since the patrollers were informed by their superiors that they cannot use such tools as they have not been trained to do so. The patrollers also pleaded with the Department of Community Safety to fulfil its promise of taking them to firearm training. The departmental coordinators mentioned that there is a need to train the patrollers in self-defence as they are attacked by criminals while patrolling.

**Resources** - The need for the patrollers to have computers and printers was highlighted as a necessity for them to capture information. In terms of tools of trade, the patrollers added that there is a serious need for handheld receivers (walkie-talkies), to improve communication amongst them during rounds. The CPF members said the patrollers also need pocketbooks, pepper sprays, identification cards and whistles. They also highlighted the need for torches because they make use of their cell phones when they are patrolling at night. The patrollers further requested that the SAPS should provide them with bicycles for patrols as well as bulletproof vests.

**Stipend** - The patrollers added that the department should increase the stipend from R2500 as the projects only take place twice a year. The payment of stipends every month and buying groceries was also cited by the patrollers as a need. The patrollers stated that monthly stipends would motivate them to work even harder. The patrollers further averred that the department should assist them to get proper accommodation as some of them are residing in dilapidated buildings. The patrollers further mentioned that they should get paid after every operation conducted with SAPS.

**More paying projects** - The patrollers cited that the department should create more projects to assist them in receiving an income.

**Need for Uniforms** - The patrollers expressed a need for uniform such as t-shirts, caps, reflector jackets, jeans, boots and raincoats as they are currently using old uniforms which they received five years ago.

**Equal opportunities for patrollers of all age groups** - The patrollers stated that the department should also offer job opportunities to patrollers over the age of 35. In addition, the patrollers stated that the patrollers over the age of 35 should also be given opportunities to be part of different projects. They pleaded with the department to have projects that last four to six months so that the patrollers are visible for long to prevent crime. The patrollers also mentioned that the department should offer learnership opportunities to the patrollers who have qualifications. The patrollers also expressed interest in becoming police officers at SAPS.

**Certificate of Participation** – The patrollers averred that the GDCS should issue the patrollers with certificates as proof that they participated in the patroller programme.

**Community in Blue Concept** - Furthermore, the CPF Provincial Board Chairperson stated that the Community in Blue concept would make the patroller programme perform better and do more. The Community in Blue is an initiative of the South African Police Service to elevate all Community Policing Forums to the level the law intended by close vetting and training of all Community Policing Forum members to ensure high standards of protocol and action (SAPS, n.d). In addition, the programme aims to operationalise the concept of community policing with a view of stimulating active citizenry and citizen participation in the fight against crime (SAPS, n.d).

**Involvement of Metropolitan Police Departments (MPDs)** - The patrollers also implored other departments like the MPDs and private security companies to assist during operations.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Gauteng Department of Community Safety should consider the following:

The department should speed up the procurement process of uniforms for the patrollers so that they are recognised when conducting their duties. This will help to restore dignity and respect from the community during patrols. In addition, the department should also consider procurement of tools of trade such as torches and Walk-talkies to promote ease of communication during patrols especially at night. In addition, there is a need for patrollers to be equipped with inter-personal skills through training every year.

### **5.2 Regular meetings between the patrollers and departmental coordinators**

Departmental coordinators should hold regular meetings with the patrollers perhaps at least once every quarter as some patrollers interviewed indicated that they are not familiar to them. It is concerning as some of the patrollers mentioned that they do not even know the GDCS as they only interact with the CPF in their respective policing precincts.

### **5.3 Awareness sessions**

The department should regularly conduct awareness programmes which are meant to educate communities about the existence and objectives of the patroller programme. These awareness sessions should also be conducted over the weekends and public holidays so that those working during the week can attend.

### **5.4 Rewards for active patrollers**

The department should consider rewarding the patrollers who are always active in the programme monthly. This can be done through partnering with businesses and other stakeholders in areas where patrollers operate. For instance, an agreement with businesses to provide loyal patrollers with food parcels and vouchers.

### **5.5 Partnership between the patroller groups in affluent areas with those in less affluent areas**

CPFs and the department should build partnerships between the patrollers in affluent areas and those in less affluent areas. This may assist to remedy the issue of shortage of resources experienced by the patrollers in less affluent areas. The patroller groups in affluent areas can assist with resources when those in less affluent areas are conducting operations. The patrollers can also request assistance with transport from the patrollers in the affluent areas since they are well resourced as they purchase their own vehicles and are not dependent on police resources.

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The study has revealed that the patroller programme is achieving its intended objectives of enhancing police visibility and fighting crime in communities. The findings reveal that the police and the patrollers engage in a number of operations as confirmed by the respondents who participated in this study. It is evident that the patroller programme is making a positive impact in fighting crime as the study discovered that where the community patrollers are visible crime has decreased. There are a number of challenges raised by the participants which requires the intervention of all the stakeholders involved in the functioning of the patroller programme. It is significant that the department should not be the sole provider of resources for patrollers, other stakeholders such as businesses and willing community members in areas where the patroller programme is active should also sponsor the programme in as many ways as possible.

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