

**Crime in Public Transit: Commuter's Perceptions
of Crime in Metrorail trains in the
South African Context**

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**Nokulunga Nxele¹ and
Londeka Ngubane²**

*Department of Criminology
and Forensic Studies, College of Humanities,
University of KwaZulu-Natal, Republic of South Africa
NgubaneL2@ukzn.ac.za and nokulunganxele1@gmail.com*

Abstract

Rail transport is regarded as the cheapest mode of on-land transport for commuters who need to travel to and from work or school. It has distinctive characteristics that, over the years, have made it popular as a cost-effective mode of transport that accommodates a large number of people and reduces road congestion. Nonetheless, tolerant rail commuters in the city of Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, have become increasingly frustrated at the declining quality of rail service delivery. This is evidenced by angry commuters who burn trains due to failed rail assets, and these acts have been contemplated as a commuter strategy to enforce and guarantee service improvement by the operator. The rail commuter industry has been plagued by a history of poor service delivery due to inaccessibility, crowding, and poor security as the main reasons for dissatisfaction with railway services. Research has revealed that trains are rarely on time and tend to stop in the middle of nowhere without notice. This has prompted late arrivals at work and the possibility of job losses for commuters. Moreover, such delays and stoppages lead to train overcrowding and safety risks. As everyone's main goal is to get inside that train as soon as it arrives, getting inside could mean shoving, climbing on top of the train, or hanging

from doors or windows. There has been a growing concern about crime becoming a major issue for law-abiding commuters. Both major crimes, such as acts of violence, murder, or robbery, and minor crimes, such as pick-pocketing, occur regularly on trains or at stations. It was against this background that an extensive literature review was embarked on, and individual interviews were conducted with 20 commuters that had been recruited at a selected train station in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Based on the routine activities theory and crime pattern theory, the study aimed at exploring commuters' perceptions of crime on Metrorail trains, the dangers associated with overcrowding, and investigating safety and security measures based on participants' responses. Findings of this study confirm that the lack of patrol officers on trains and at train stations, as well as the high level of overcrowding on trains, are contributing factors to the high crime rate. The findings further propose that the ineffectiveness of policies and legislation that are in place to curb crime in the railway sector calls for a revitalisation of the purpose of providing safe, secure, and reliable Metrorail services to commuters.

Keywords: *Commuters, Metrorail, Crime, Transport, Safety, South Africa*

Introduction

Railways were constructed by mining companies over a hundred years ago, they were closely associated with modernisation as the years passed by. Initially, the purpose of railway was to provide cheap and reliable transport links directly to ports, but they quickly advanced into networks for passengers as well as freight (Rail in Africa, 2015). According to Wilson, Farrington-Darby, Cox, Bye, and Hockey (2007), cited in Hutchings (2017:15), "all countries with a rail network of any importance try to achieve the same outcome – that is, to move more people and more goods on time and safely to satisfy their customers. There are numerous traits that make railways different from other modes of transport. For instance, rail is cost-effective, and return trips are usually cheap. Furthermore, passengers can be transported in large numbers and this form of transport "is energy efficient, it is land-saving, has high safety levels, and is environmentally friendly" (Saputra, 2010:2).

Hutchings (2017:1) further outlines the importance of rail on the economy by stating, "the benefits of rail include creating economic growth, reducing congestion on roads, providing mobility to citizens, and contributing to re-industrialisation". However, for train transport to be of importance in society, safety must always be ensured. Research has

shown that a safe journey by train instils confidence in the community, passengers, and investors, and this in turn increases the country's economic growth (Hutchings, 2017:1). When the service quality meets commuters' needs, the number of commuters using this mode of transport increases. However, when passengers were not happy with the quality of service they were rendered, the number of commuters using this certain mode of transport declined (Heyns & Luke, 2018).

Various policies were drafted, such as the White Paper on National Transport Policy of 1996 and the Railway Safety Regulator, which both asserted the importance of railway services for both freight and passenger transport. The White Paper "was a point of departure for any discussion on national land transport" (DoT, 2015:13). The vision behind this policy was "to provide safe, effective, efficient, and fully integrated transport operations and infrastructure that will best meet the needs of freight and passenger customers" (Ibid.) It also aimed to improve levels of service and be more cost-effective in line with the government's strategies for economic and social development "while being environmentally and economically sustainable". Equally, the Railway Safety Regulator's legislative mandate was to enforce the safety performance of all railway operators in South Africa and to provide safety standards and regulatory practices for the protection of persons, property, and the environment (RSR, 2002). However, research has shown that the safety of commuters is persistently at risk, and many become victims or witnesses of crime as they board or disembark from trains (Page & Moeketsi, 2000).

It is against this backdrop that a comprehensive review of relevant literature was undertaken and that interviews were conducted with commuters. It was envisaged that the interviews with the commuters would elicit rich data that would enhance the researcher's insight into their perceptions of crime in Metrorail trains and the effectiveness of policies in place to curb crime. The study was thus premised on the perceptions shared by commuters that Metrorail quality is not adequate to meet their needs.

Problem statement

Despite the developments proposed by the White Paper (DoT, 2017) and the Rail Safety Regulator corporate plans of 2002, the correlation between Metrorail trains and crime is a serious challenge. In fact, the Metrorail service in Durban is in a state that can only be described as

dire. Metrorail trains have been considered a fertile ground for crime due to numerous factors, such as a lack of patrolling officers and security on trains, a lack of adequate lighting on trains and at stations, and limited staff on duty during peak hours. In Durban, commuters are exposed to unreliable, unsafe, and often inaccessible train services. Trains do not arrive on time or, if they arrive at all, due to delays and cancellations, people are crammed into carriages, and this results in overcrowding and discomfort. Train schedules are often and suddenly cancelled while commuters are already at the station waiting for transport. Moreover, due to taxi fees and road congestion, there is an increasing number of people who make use of train transport, but the unreliability of the system is a headache for commuters.

Many have argued that violence has become an everyday occurrence on trains. As Madzivhandila (2019) outlined, during the 2015/2016 financial year, 5,520 security-related incidents associated with the railways were reported. Similarly, in Cape Town, a security guard was shot and killed by robbers who were carrying guns, and then they shot a train driver twice in his head for his bag (Herman, 2016). Incidents of crimes directed at commuters have also been reported. Simelane and Nicolson (2015, cited in Madzivhandila, 2019:16) further reported the following incident that occurred in Johannesburg: "Four men moved into the carriage, pulled out guns, and demanded that everyone put their phones and money on the floor. At one stage, one commuter drew his own gun, and shots were exchanged, leaving one person dead and two injured before the criminals fled the scene."

Moreover, between Lynedoch and the Eerste River outside Cape Town, in the evening of Friday 7 September 2018, "a man was killed during a horrific attack on commuters who were travelling on the train" (Kempen, 2018:24). Another incident occurred in the Western Cape when a commuter, who was a final year engineering student, was travelling by train during the peak hour period one evening. The victim, who lost his life, was a passenger in the first-class corridor travelling back to where he resided when he was unexpectedly attacked by an unknown offender who stabbed him to death (Van Heerden, 2003). Many such incidents occurred during off-peak hours when there were no security staff and only a few commuters on trains (Madzivhandila, 2019).

With regards to this study, it was of great importance to generate a comprehensive understanding of key ideas that stemmed from previous research studies in terms of the effect of crime on commuters and their fear of crime when they use public transit. "Crime affects existing and

potential users of public transport in different ways” (Kruger & Landman, 2007:113). Pickpocketing and bag snatching were the most frequent types of crime encountered by commuters. However, “more serious and violent crimes such as assault, stabbings, and rape were also experienced. All these incidents occurred in locations associated with public transport, such as train stations, bus depots, and on-board trains” (Page & Moeketsi, 2000, cited in Badiora et al., 2015:140)

In another incident, sexual assault and harassment on trains in England and Wales are generally underreported (Gekoski, Jacqueline, Gray, Horvath, Aliye, & Adler, 2015), “with estimates of 75-95% of victims never reporting the incident to the police” (Ceccato et al., 2017:3). For the same reason, when passengers were interviewed on various Gauteng train routes, most of them “complained of gropers on early morning and afternoon rush hours [trains] when trains were full. Other passengers claimed that men fondled their private parts and that, since trains were packed to beyond capacity, identifying the culprit was difficult” (Groped, doped on the train, 2017, City Press).

The implication here is that empty trains in the evening allow offenders to see an opportunity to commit a crime. Similarly, crowded rush hours provide the right opportunity for groping and all sorts of inappropriate and unwanted sexual behaviours (Madan & Nalla, 2015; Natarajan, 2016, cited in Ceccato et al., 2017). Hence, the exposure of innocent commuters to such horrific crimes makes the researcher question the effectiveness of existing security measures as well as the implementation of policies that should ensure the safety of commuters and offer them reliable and comfortable journeys to their places of work and back.

The significance of the study

The study is crucial in contributing to a better understanding of what commuters’ daily experiences are and uncovering crimes that occur on trains. Passengers’ perceptions of crime in transit, concerns about unsafe conditions, and lack of security suggest that the visions of rail operators and the state have not been met as mandated by National Railway Safety Regulator Act No. 16 of 2002. Due to commuter’s dissatisfaction with service delivery, the study would therefore benefit the Department of Transport in revisiting the White Paper on National Transport Policy and the National Railway Safety Regulator Act No. 16. of 2002, ensuring that people receive the services promised.

Theoretical Underpinning

Two theoretical perspectives underpinned this study, namely the crime pattern theory and routine activities theory.

Crime pattern theory

Brantingham and Brantingham (1993a:226) argue that the crime pattern theory “describes an event that occurs when an individual with some criminal readiness level encounters a suitable target in a situation sufficient to activate that readiness potential”. According to the application of theory to one’s life, “As individuals go about their daily activities without knowing that they are suitable targets, they make decisions that become routine and create a template that guides their behaviour” (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2008:80). For example, when a person uses the same transport every day, it creates a pattern in terms of the time one gets at a station to catch the train and the time back from work to home.

This serves as an advantage to offenders, and one easily becomes a suitable target. In other words, one’s behaviour is predictable. Hiropoulos and Porter (2014) assert that the “crime pattern theory is based on the premise that crime does not occur randomly or uniformly in time and space, but that there are patterns to which criminal activity occurs. Criminal opportunities are found in places that come to the attention of offenders and are thus at risk of creating targets (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1993). “The concept of place is essential to the crime pattern theory; it links places with desirable targets and the context within which they are found by focusing on how places come to the attention of potential criminals” (Newton, 2004a).

Various studies have been conducted using crime pattern theory. For example, the work of Levine et al. in California in the 1980s found that certain crimes, for example, rape, homicide, and robbery, were more frequent when there was low pedestrian traffic, low surveillance, and many concealed areas (Newton, 2004). Furthermore, Burrell (2007:12) argues “that violent acts of crime on public transport tend to happen in the late evening or night-time when there is less supervision, whereas pickpocketing and purse snatching are more frequent during rush hour”. A common finding is that transport hubs act as crime attractors for dissimilar crimes at different hours of the day (Newton, 2014).

In a nutshell, transit modes encourage patterns of crime by creating opportunities and gateway potential for criminals who target high-risk populations (Brantingham et al., 1991). Transport stations are often congested with many people, and this presents opportunities for crimes such as pickpocketing (Newton, 2004). “At certain times of the day, these crowds and the characteristics they exhibit (for example, commuters during rush hour) may produce suitable conditions for a particular type of crime (for example, attract offenders who believe there is opportunity to pick pockets), and hence stations may act as a crime attractor” (Newton, 2004:13).

Other crimes that occur in public transit stops are characterised by a high number of people waiting for a train, which speaks to overcrowding as a contributing factor to crime (Buckley, 1996). “Edge effects come into play where there is enough distinctiveness from one part of the physical environment to another that the change is easily noticed” (Buckley, 1996:13). In essence, criminals look for their targets in places that they are familiar with or activity nodes where they spend most of their time. They thus follow primary paths as they move between or among nodes (Brantingham et al., 1991).

The Routine Activities Theory

The routine activities theory is rooted in the work of Lawrence E. Cohen and Marcus Felson (1979). It was later *further refined* by Felson and has become “one of the most widely cited and influential theoretical constructs in the field of criminology and in crime science more broadly” (Miró, 2014:1). In essence, the theory argues that “for a crime to occur, there needs to be an interaction in time and space between a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian” (Cohen & Felson, 1979:589). These are three important elements that contribute collectively to the commission of a crime (Makhaye, 2016).

Taking this into account, environments are fertile territory not only for sexual abuse but other types of abuse and harassment. These include minor crimes such as pickpocketing and robbery and major crimes such as violence and murder. For instance, an empty train in the evening with no patrol officers as capable guardians to look after commuters’ safety would allow the anonymity that an offender needs to commit crime (Gekoski, Gray, Horvath, Edwards, Emirali, Adler, & Joanna, 2015, cited in Ceccato & Paz, 2017). Similarly, crowded rush hours might provide

the right time for groping and all manner of ill-suited sexual behaviours (Gekoski et al., 2015).

Transit environments such as stations are characterised by certain features that render them alluring targets for the perpetrators of crime and that generate fear of crime; these include a lack of lighting at stations at late hours and a lack of patrol officers around the stations (Makhaye, 2016). Inside the train, different people with different intentions are transported; similarly, at a train station, different people with different intentions are waiting to board. Among commuters, there are suitable targets and motivated offenders, which, in the absence of security guards or measures as capable guardians, increases the chances of victimisation. This scenario is most likely the reality at peak times for transit use. The commuters that were interviewed attested to the fact that during peak hours some were victims of pickpocketing and non-consensual sexual activity through sexual touching, and it becomes difficult to identify who the culprits are as the train is overcrowded. Equally, in early morning trains with a limited number of commuters, there are no security guards to act as a capable guardian and scare the motivated offender off.

Motivated offender

Makhaye (2016:33) states that “a motivated offender is known as a person who most likely leaves home in the morning with the mentality that if he or she gets a chance to commit a particular crime, then he or she will”. The offender has already weighed the cost against the benefits of committing the crime, and his or her main goal is to obtain something of value from committing the crime, these types of people know which places to attack and where not to attack, which people to target and which not to target, as well as why such specific places and people are the only ones that should be targeted. Motivated offender is applicable to the study as commuters illustrated that less protection in trains in the form of patrol officers’ results in more offenders taking advantage of the situation.

Suitable target

A suitable target is characterised as “anything or anyone that can provide instant profit to offenders” (Argun & Dağlar, 2016:1189). In relation to the study, suitable targets are categorised as those commuters walking alone around the evening time from the train station or a person sitting

in an empty train without security guards around. In the absence of a capable guardian, the motivated offender uses this chance to victimise them (Badiora, Adewumi, Ojewale, Okunola, & Habeeb, 2015).

Capable guardianship

Hollis-Peel, Reynald, Van Bavel, Elffers, & Welsh (2011:54) define guardianship as “the physical or symbolic presence of an individual (or group of individuals) that acts either intentionally or unintentionally to deter a potential criminal event”. An example of this could be commuters sitting together or walking together from the railway waiting room to where they live, ticket staff, and security guards.

Contrary to the feelings of frustration and concern expressed by most of the commuters because of overcrowding, some stated that they felt safe in crowded spaces rather than in quiet spaces.

I feel safe and comfortable on a train if there are other commuters. However, as more and more commuters disembark at their stations, fear of being mugged or victimised. kicks in, especially as there are no security personnel on the train.

This comment is informed by the routine activities theory, which suggests that, in the absence of a capable guardian such as security staff or other commuters who act as guardians, a motivated offender is likely to use this opportunity to target the few commuters who are on a train, especially in the evening.

Research Methodology

The study was set apart into eight basic rail routes (main lines) radiating from Durban (Integrated Transport Plan, 2010:3, 11). These main lines follow north, south, and west: South Coast mainline, West mainline, New mainline (Cato Ridge), Old Main Road mainline, KwaMashu mainline, Umlazi mainline, North Coast mainline, and Crossmore mainline (ITP, 2010). The latter is supported by the Statistic South Africa (*Stats SA*) survey, which illustrates that overcrowding on trains is the most significant problem in KwaZulu-Natal. Surveys for KZN and Gauteng have revealed that 62% of commuters in KZN and 81% in Gauteng were dissatisfied with the level of overcrowding in trains (StatsSA, 2014). Interviewing both of these categories of commuters

helped the researcher identify developments or regressions in the rail sector and find out the current state of Metrorail trains.

This paper outlines findings based on data drawn from shared experiences of rail commuters. The findings were not generalised to only the negative shared experiences, as there were those who complimented Metrorail services without hesitation. The commuter's narratives were acknowledged and shared. This study drew on a qualitative research design. A primary data collection technique was adopted by conducting face-to-face interviews with 20 participants selected at Durban station as the central station in the city of Durban with eight mainlines. A purposive sampling technique was utilised based on the rationale that the researcher is aware of certain categories of participants that could provide more detailed information on the phenomenon under study. Such excerpts hinged on sampling commuters who were waiting at the platform to board a train.

The sample included both female and male commuters of ages ranging from 18 to 45 years. An interview schedule had been prepared beforehand, which question included questions about how old the participant was. The researcher chose 45 as an age group cut-off because, in most cases, the elderly seldom use trains, while those that are still working use taxis. This age group was deliberately chosen because the literature review had suggested that train commuters are exposed to overcrowding, which results in them standing at their feet until they arrive to their destination. As a result, this pushes older people to use other modes of transportation.

In research, various ethical principles must be considered before research is conducted, such as confidentiality, respect, and informed consent. According to (Kumar 2011:17), "all professions are guided by a code of ethics that has evolved over the years to accommodate a changing ethos, values, needs and expectations. In adherence to the above requirements, gatekeepers' written permission was obtained to conduct the study (Appendix D) and an informed consent form (Appendix A) was signed by the participants before the interviews began. They also gave permission for the use of an audio recorder on the same form. The consent forms were read aloud by the researcher in both English and *isiZulu* to ensure that all participants understood what was expected of them. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time should they feel so inclined.

The researcher personally visited these mainlines during off-peak hours when the commuters came back from school or work rather than in the morning when they were rushing to arrive at their destination. The researcher was at the station from 12h00 to 17:00pm every day for data collection. The study was carried out with questions that were tailored along the exploratory and interpretive paths (approaches) concerning commuters' perceptions of crime in Metrorail trains. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand their beliefs, behaviours, and attitudes versus the researcher's personal observation as well as a literature review regarding the threat of crime on Metrorail trains (Ngubane, 2016). By conversing with passengers using an interview schedule, the researcher was able to capture their responses to gain in-depth information about the issue under study (Makhaye, 2016).

During the record-taking process, the researchers took notes with a view to writing a more detailed and complete report afterwards. A voice recorder was also used for Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informants Interview's (KII), with the goal of transcribing the information gathered at a later stage. I therefore organised the obtained data by categorising it based on themes, concepts, or similar features. The researcher further ensured that the elicited data answered the objective guiding the research study. The researchers read the data several times to grasp the selected participants' perceptions on this subject. This was done by making cryptic written notes of what the participants were saying during the FGDs and KIIs to elicit themes. Pseudonyms were used for ethical reasons.

Discussion and Findings

The most significant finding of this study is the commuter's insights that were expressed regarding the prevalence of crime on metro rail. The views of commuters varied somewhat; some believed that crime was common on trains and at stations depending on the time of day and event, while others believed it was not common. The tone of voice of these commuters, who believed crime was common, reflected a fear of victimisation as they shared their experiences, while others could only speak of their observations and what they had heard. The themes that emerged from the data are presented and discussed in the sub-sections below. The researcher wanted to probe the insights of commuters' perceptions regarding crime on Metrorail trains; therefore, the below shared narratives outline most participants perceptions.

Using Trains as a Mode of Transport

The study revealed the importance of trains for socio-economic wellbeing. Twenty participants from eight different mainlines stated that they commuted using trains because it was the cheapest mode of transport available to them. Moreover, because the stations were close to where they worked and lived, they could save money. Below are the responses offered by the commuters.

P1: used the Umlazi line weekly to work and back.

He said:

I use the train weekly from Monday to Saturday. The first reason why I use a train is because it is affordable. Secondly, it drops me close by the area where I stay. I do not have to walk a long distance to my home.

P2: who was a student using the North Coast mainline to Stanger when going to school, commented:

I use the train every day, almost 25 days in a month. I can save money since I am not working.

P3: I use a train during working days Monday to Friday when I am going to school. The reason why I use the train is because I am unemployed, and my parents are not working. Using this mode of transport saves money as the return fee that I pay when going to school is only R16.50 compared to the taxi fee which is R40.

Considering the above comments, the *majority* of commuters in these areas used this mode of transport because of its affordability, be it for school or work purposes. During the data collection process, it came to my attention that the number of people who use metro rail trains is exorbitant, which questioned why that is the case because if one compares the service that they get, one would expect fewer people to make use of it. The commuter's responses confirmed my perception that this is because of affordability, and it outweighs the challenges that come with using this mode of transport. Most of the commuters were low-income earners, and as a result, affordability was crucial. Vilakazi (2013:22), who conducted a similar study, shared the same perceptive advice: "public transport enhances personal economic opportunities and saves individuals money in the sense that passenger transportation use lowers household expenses and frees up more income for other needs".

Commuters' perceptions of crime on Metrorail trains

The commuters narrated various perceptions about the topic under study. Fourteen commuters from different mainlines believed that crime was common on trains and at stations, depending on the time of day or evening.

P1: I used to hear people saying that the 7 o'clock evening train to Cato Ridge was not safe at all. At first, I did not pay much attention to that since I had been working for two years using this mode of transport, but I had never been a victim of crime or witnessed any criminal Behaviour. Who would have thought that one day it would be me who would be shot in the leg while a robbery was going on? On that day I swore on my life that I would never use trains again, no matter how broke I was. I mean, I almost lost my life.

P2: I feel safe and comfortable on a train if there are other commuters. However, as more and more commuters disembark at their stations, fear of being mugged or victimised.

Kicks in, especially as there are no security personnel on the train.

P3: I would say crime is common in trains that operate during the day where there are not so many people on the train. However, on the afternoon trains it is not common because there are plenty of commuters.

The above responses demonstrate that one can only surmise that, if a commuter was able to get away with a misdemeanour so easily, it would be much easier to try another ploy next time and get away with it. Therefore, transport hubs often become crime attractors, and commuters are victims; as a result, safety is not guaranteed. This is evidence that having protection at stations and on trains diminishes the level of fear, as it is believed that, should an offender plan anything 'dodgy', security guards are in place to protect commuters. However, in the absence of effective figures of authority like security guards, commuters live in fear (Hamid et al., 2015).

The study findings indicate that for some commuters' safety, it means more commuters inside the train, whereas for others, it means the presence of patrol officers inside the trains. The emphasis on the above response is safety; out of twenty participants, not even one shared that they felt safe in an empty train with no guards. This goes to prove that

the absence of security guards at railway stations allows criminals' notorious intentions to behave in an unacceptable manner, which instils fear in commuters.

Challenges faced by train commuters.

The majority of participants admitted that there were various challenges associated with train transportation, mainly lack of service delivery. All the commuters faced challenges such as the unreliability of train arrival times and poor communication between PRASA and commuters should there be delays or cancellations. Commuters complained about regularly not arriving on time for work and school.

P7 I do not arrive on time when I am going to work. I believe that the reason for this is because trains do not arrive on time at the stations which results in one not arriving on time at his or her destination. Another reason as to why trains do not arrive on time at the stations. is because Newline is currently faced with the problem of using one railway route, meaning that the trains departing from Berea station (Durban) to Cato Ridge use the same route as the ones that are departing from Cato Ridge to Durban. Therefore, to avoid any collisions, if one train has departed from Berea to Cato Ridge no train from Cato Ridge is to be released."

P8 Well, days are not the same in most cases. I do not arrive on time because, if you are dependent mainly in this mode of transport, you will find cases where due to cable theft the train is late or cancelled. As a result, I will have to wait for the next train if I do not have money for a taxi.

P9 First of all, overcrowding in trains has become a norm. As Newline commuters we are currently faced with cancellation of most trains. As more trains are cancelled, the number of people who will be using that one or those two trains that were not cancelled increases and results in health and emotional problems. Due to lack of space inside you will find commuters pushing and shoving one another. Some want to jump off and others are looking for space to stand. It does not end there: some commuters end up not jumping off at their stations because there is no space to get off. There are also cases where train doors are loose and leaning next to it is dangerous. How can you not lean when the train is packed?

The P1 response resonates with a statement by Fester (2018), who states that there is poor communication between the service provider and commuters as they are not given updates when trains must suddenly stop or have been cancelled. This results in late arrivals at work and school. The majority of respondents admitted without concealment that overcrowding is a challenge their comments demonstrated that delays and cancellations of certain trains resulted in severe overcrowding. Their assertion showed that the more consistent and reliable train schedules are, the more accommodating they are to commuters.

This means that if trains arrive on time without any delays or cancellations, it is easier for commuters to board without being pushed and shoved. However, more delays and cancellations lead to more overcrowding, which is coupled with discomfort, frustration, and crime. A similar conclusion was reached by Myoya et al. (2018), who found that overcrowding occurred because passengers feared that if they missed even a train late, another train might not even arrive or, if it does, it would be far too late for them to arrive early at work or at school. Similarly, during my visit to the train station while I was busy recruiting participants, the train platforms were full. It has become the norm for commuters who use this mode; it requires patience, making peace with getting home late, and waking up early the next morning to catch an early train. This becomes train commuters' routine; others will take a train that is an hour early before the normal shift to avoid being late.

Commuters were further asked if they were updated should the train be cancelled or delayed, as a way of finding out if communication was key in such instances.

P1 had said "Yes. Updates are given through loudspeakers that let us know which trains will be late or are cancelled".

P2 shared "There is an office where we buy tickets. Updates come from them when there is going to be any delay or cancellation of a train."

P3 "In the morning at 5h30 Thabile from uKhozi FM usually gives us an update on the train service – whether it is going to be late or cancelled. However, if you missed listening to Thabile then you will find yourself sitting at the station waiting for a train that is either late or cancelled. As train commuters we have come up with a strategy of creating a WhatsApp group where we update one another if there is going to be any delay or cancellation."

Contrary to commuters admitting that there are forms of communication initiated by PRASA, these are not regularly updated, apart from the Ukhozi FM update, which also questions what happens if you do not have access to a radio. Commuters expressed that the updates given are not accurate; in one minute, they advise that the train is 10 minutes delayed, but surprisingly, it comes after an hour. Giving such inaccurate information results in one being hopeful that they will arrive more or less 10 minutes late at work, and they relax and wait for this train instead of trying for other means, such as considering using a taxi at that time to avoid being late. This therefore raises concerns that this form of communication is not effective for some commuters.

Conclusion

When boarding a train, the public's expectations are that their safety and security are paramount and that they will be safeguarded against crime and intimidation. Communities know that railway safety regulators such as PRASA have the legal mandate to enforce the safety performance of all railway operators in South Africa and to abide by safety standards and regulatory practices for the protection of persons, property, and the environment (RSR, 2002). In this regard, the National Railway Safety Regulator Act No. 16 of 2002 plays a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of all commuters. However, commuters are persistently plagued by victimisation, fear, and personal discomfort when they travel on Metrorail trains. This study revealed alarming incidents of crime on Metrorail trains and the impact of criminal behaviour on law-abiding commuters. A disturbing fact is that the participants acknowledged that many incidences of crime—albeit petty crimes such as bag snatching and cell phone theft in most instance—remained unreported. Persistent victimisation and crime on trains not only diminish rates of patronage, but also increase fear among innocent bystanders and those who may have heard about these incidents but have never been victims themselves.

Recommendation

After considering the findings of this study that were merged with the data collected, the following recommendations can be made for improved Metrorail services:

- Security staff should be visible at stations and on trains at all operational hours. If the last train leaves at 19h30, for instance, security staff should be visible. Regular patrols are also necessary, which means that guards should walk around and not remain stationary in one location.
- More trains should be operational to improve service punctuality and reliability and to reduce journey cancellations, delays, and overcrowding.
- Union representatives should oversee PRASA's safety measures and take care of commuters. They should ensure that the services offered by the service provider are user-friendly for commuters so that vandalism and the burning of trains due to frustration are curbed.
- PRASA officials should regularly interview commuters to monitor client satisfaction on a regular basis. They should understand the experiences and frustrations of commuters to alleviate the challenges they encounter and to improve service delivery.
- Railway lines must be improved so that trains will be able to intersect rather than wait for one another to pass. This will also avoid collisions and delays.

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