

# Crime Displacement

---

Whenever there is a shift in usual crime patterns, it is easy to put it down to crime displacement. During the month of March 2009 the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa's Crime Prevention Programme (CGCSA CPP) has noted an unusual pattern on the crime front. The question is should this be jotted down as crime displacement and be accepted as that? Or should we delve a little deeper in this phenomenon of crime displacement?

## Crime displacement: The Theory

Situational crime prevention focuses on changing the environment or setting that criminals operate within, so that crime requires more effort, more risk and produces lower rewards (Crime displacement, 2001 <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/skills/skills10.htm>). The Displacement of crime theory argues that by removing the opportunity for crime or seeking to prevent a crime by changing the situation in which it occurs does not actually prevent crime but merely moves it to a new environment with less obstacles (Displacement theory, 2002).

There are five main ways in which this theory suggests crime is displaced:

1. Geographical displacement : crime can be moved from one location to another
2. Temporal displacement : crime can be moved from one time to another
3. Target displacement : crime can be directed away from one target to another
4. Tactical displacement: one method of committing crime can be substituted for another
5. Crime type displacement : one kind of crime can be substituted for another  
(Displacement theory, 2002)

Although this suggests that displacement is always negative, there can be some positive effects. Another way of looking at displacement is perhaps in terms of the effects of any displacement:

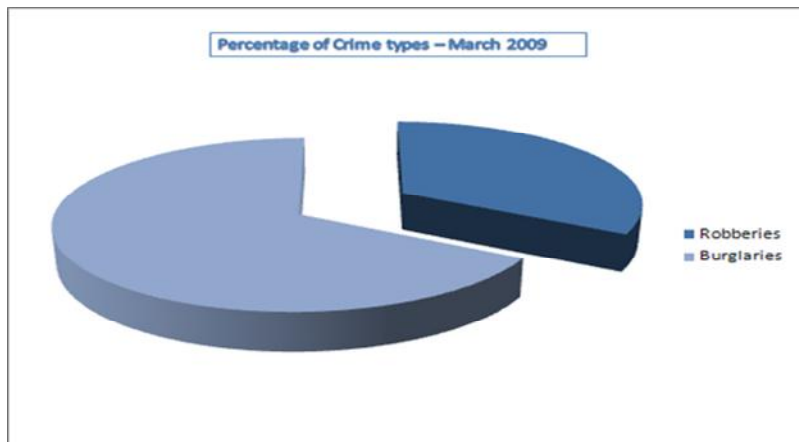
- Positive – a crime is displaced to a less serious type of crime or a crime with greater risk, with lower rewards or causing less serious damage. It represents a success since it produces a net gain.
- Neutral – a crime is displaced to one of the same degree of seriousness, of the same risk, rewards and damage.
- Even-handed – Crime prevention initiatives are concentrated on those who are repeatedly victimised in order to achieve a more equitable distribution of crime.
- Negative – a crime is displaced to more serious crime, crime with greater reward or greater social cost.
- Attractive – activities and/or places attract crime from other areas or activities (eg 'red light' districts attract customers from other areas, as well as other criminal activities). (Displacement theory–

[http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/displacement\\_theory.htm](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/learningzone/displacement_theory.htm))

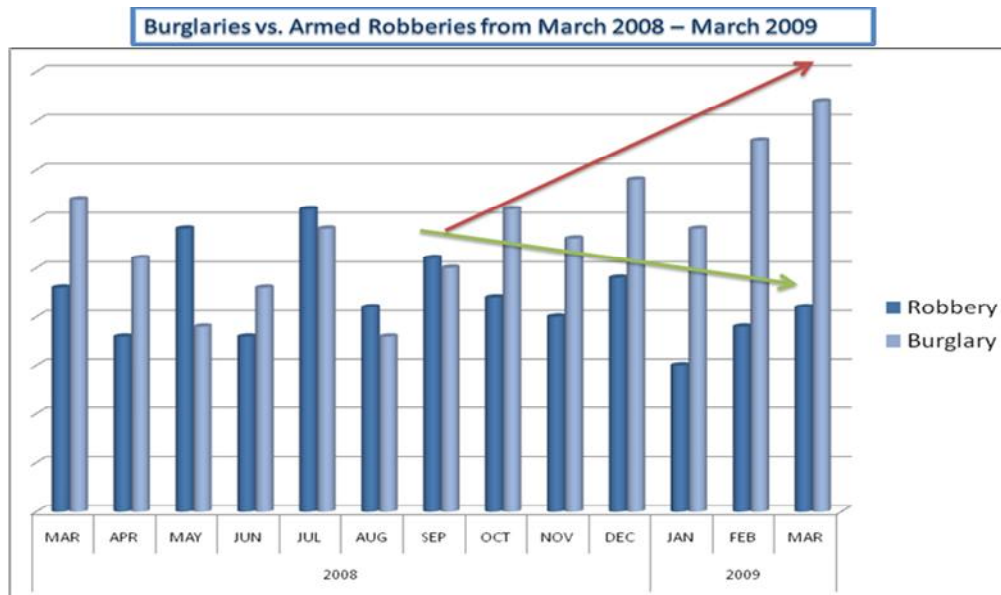
## The Current situation in the Retail Industry (CGCSA CPP Analysis)

During March 2009, a different pattern to the ordinary has emerged. Reports of burglary incidents were reported much more frequently than cases of armed robbery and incidents in Gauteng has taken a backseat when compared to the number of incidents reported in the Western Cape and KZN.

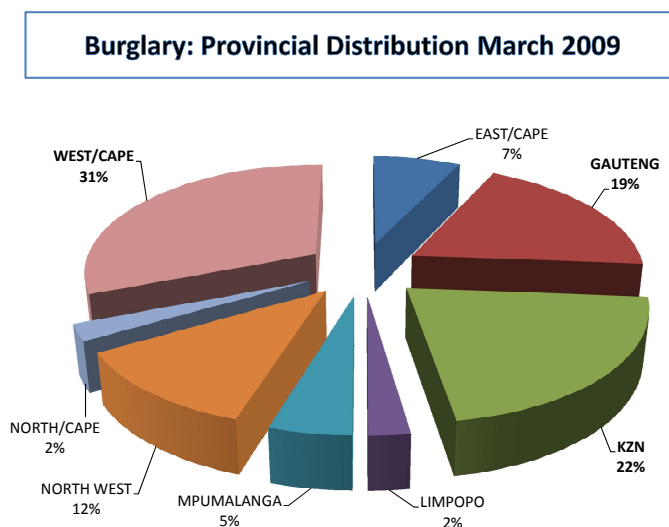
The following diagram indicates the proportional distribution of crime types experienced during March 2009:



One can see that burglaries are by far the bigger proportion of incidents reported to CGCSA CPP. When a snapshot is taken from March 2008 to March 2009, it is clear that it is not the first month that burglaries were more prominent than armed robberies, yet from September 2008 a clear pattern has emerged. It is evident that as armed robberies are decreasing slightly, burglaries are on the increase, which illustrates a displacement from one crime type (Robberies) to the other crime type (Burglaries).

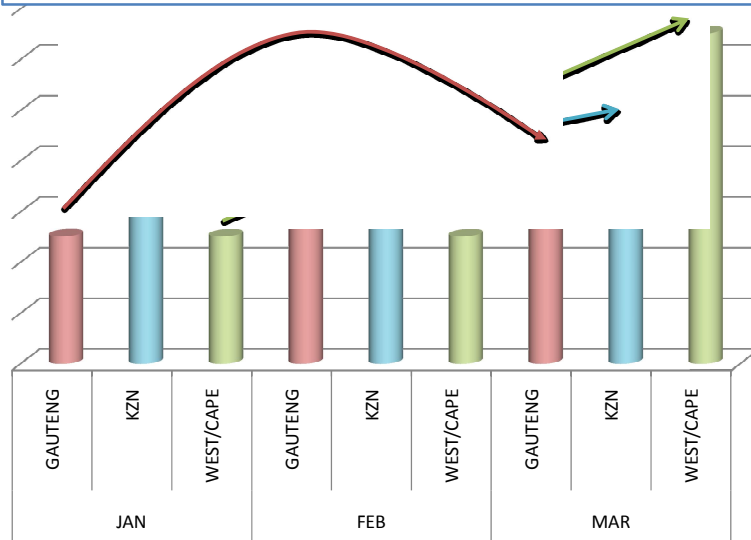


It was also noted that during March 2009, an increase in the number of burglaries in the Western Cape and KZN, where traditionally Gauteng represented the highest number of burglaries. The following graph illustrates the displacement of retail burglary incidents reported to CGCSA CPP on burglary incidents:



As mentioned before, stores from the Western Cape reported the most incidents (31%), and second most incident of burglary was in KZN (22%). Gauteng only represented 19% of all retail burglaries across South Africa. To put this in perspective, the following graph indicates the burglary incidents for Gauteng, KZN and the Western Cape for the three months of 2009.

### Burglary: Provincial Distribution for 2009 1<sup>st</sup> quarter



From the graph above, it is clear that for the two coastal provinces there has been a steady increase of incidents reported for 2009, compared to Gauteng which showed an increase and then a decrease of incidents reported across the province for 2009.

### Could these changes be ascribed to crime displacement

For these changes to qualify as crime displacement, some effective/significant preventative actions needed to have been implemented by all or some of the role-players. In other words, there had to be a reason for the criminals to prefer committing a burglary rather than an armed robbery and why criminals regard the Western Cape is now as more favorable than Gauteng to commit their crime.

A possible reason for this phenomenon could be that on a national level the SAPS have identified the "TRIO-crimes" as priority crimes, which includes hi-jackings, house robberies and business robberies. Some initiatives and operations have been launched to target these specific crimes. Successes from these efforts have been reported in the media, for example the following article that was published on NEWS 24:

Team tackle crime trio 23/03/2009 21:14 - (SA)

Johannesburg - A Johannesburg police team tasked with dealing with a "trio" of crimes has arrested 33 people in the last week, Gauteng police said on Monday.

SA Police Service director Govindsamy Mariemuthoo said the trio of crimes were house robbery, business robbery and hijackings. Of those arrested, 17 faced charges of business robbery, 12 for house robbery and seven for hijacking, he said.

From: [http://www.news24.com/News24/South\\_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442\\_2490310,00.html](http://www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442_2490310,00.html)

Successes like this could be a reason why there was a crime displacement. Specifically a tactical displacement, whereby criminals would now rather commit a burglary than a robbery due to the increased risk involved when committing one of the trio crimes.

In Gauteng specifically, the Rapid response unit has added to the efficiency of the SAPS regarding Trio crimes. In Gauteng a 130 police stations have been grouped into 21 clusters - where dedicated Trio Task Teams have been established. To this end, the SAPS have established a special task team of 15 members comprising seven members from the Crime Combating Unit and eight specialist detectives. Improving the police's reaction times, especially when dealing with the trio crimes, was very important. Therefore, 42 high performance vehicles were handed to the SAPS' Rapid Response Teams consisting of 154 police members. It is promised that soon another 38 vehicles will be handed to the team. The value of these vehicles is more than R7 million (Survamus: **Kotie Gelden More vehicles and the launch of a new specialised unit** - [http://www.servamus.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=290&Itemid=139&ed=63](http://www.servamus.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=290&Itemid=139&ed=63)).

The publicity and possible successes resulting from this initiative may have lead to the second crime displacement that has been noted, namely geographical displacement. The increase of KZN and Western Cape incidents may have resulted due to a higher risk of committing crime in Gauteng.

## What is to be done

CGCSA CPP members are already exposed to a number of preventative measures that have made a positive impact with regard to the number of incidents reported and the cash losses suffered. These measures should be more stringently adhered to over this period where burglaries are on the increase. The following are some examples of measures that are already in place:

- Strict cash management procedures
- CCTV systems
  - Needs to be maintained/ upgraded
  - Footage needs to be circulated to relevant recipients
- Alarm Systems
  - Needs to be maintained
  - React to alarm activation
- Report incidents as soon as possible with as much detail as possible
- Report suspicious activity to CGCSA CPP

The following suggestions can be offered:

- Focus on target hardening to curb burglary, burglar bars, and time delay slots.
- Consider different types of barriers, namely life barriers such as guards or patrols; Symbolic barriers such as fencing.
- Follow up procedures for after an incident occurred can be effective with regard to investigation and successful convictions but also to convey a message to offenders that criminal behaviour will be act upon and consequences may follow. *Therefore, it is important to ensure effective monitoring of alarms as well as quick and effective responses*
- Joint efforts of different shop owners or shopping centre management to observe and report suspicious activities
- Effective relationships with role-players of the criminal justice system such as the local SAPS and the courts
- Be informed of criminal activities in the area
- Be knowledgeable on the recent modus operandi and develop counter measures
- Sustainability of preventative initiatives

## Conclusion

It is however very important to remember that crime displacement happens in conjunction with the times, other factors play a role. For example factors that influence the trends are the economical situation and the 2010 soccer world cup. Each of these influence crime trends in its own way and therefore influences crime displacement patterns.