

Study on “The murky symbiosis of dirty cop and gangster”

A three-year study for a doctoral thesis by a city criminologist has revealed the relationship between corrupt cops and gang members which enables gang warfare – but though the findings have been sent to politicians and heads of police, no action has been taken.

In a section titled “The murky symbiosis of dirty cop and gangster”, Liza Grobler’s study found:

- * Police members are known to steal drugs from court exhibits and act as couriers by using police vehicles to transport drugs for dealers.
- * Corrupt members do route clearance with their private cars, acting as “spotters” for gangs, driving in front of and behind a car carrying a shipment of drugs. If they see a police vehicle they inform the car carrying the drugs to divert.
- * Police members resell confiscated drugs, often outside their area. For example, they sell drugs from Hanover Park to merchants in Grassy Park.

These findings were part of Grobler’s PhD thesis, “A criminological examination of police criminality”, published in 2006.

Grobler interviewed police detectives, members of organised crime, police legal services, and branch commanders.

One police officer quoted in her report said corruption was common. He said there was a “big drug dealer” in Hanover Park who had police connections at a station Grobler describes as “station X”.

“When people had bought a lot of drugs from him, he phones these members and tells them what cars they are driving and that they have just bought such and such. The police officers stop the cars, take the drugs and sell them back to the merchant who alerted them.

“I was with these cops when they did this – it was common,” he told Grobler.

The Cape Times has decided not to reveal the name of the police station, pending comment from the police.

In 2006 Grobler sent the report to then Community Safety MEC Leonard Ramatlakane and his successor Lennit Max. It was also sent to former Western Cape police commissioner Mzwandile Petros.

In February, Grobler sent her findings to Community Safety MEC Dan Plato. Other than an acknowledgement of receipt of the report, there was no communication about her study, she said.

Police bosses were not “facing up to police criminality”, she said. “I never heard from them, not even to hear where Station X is or to appeal for more research. Their whole attitude was extremely strange and they didn’t seem to be interested in scratching it open and healing it,” Grobler said.

Other sources for her research included police researchers from the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, the Institute for Security Studies, the Independent Police Investigative Directorate and the National Prosecuting Authority.

Grobler also spoke to the head of the NYPD Internal Affairs Bureau and the director of investigations for the Independent Police Complaints Commission in London.

The study also revealed:

- * Some corrupt members do illegal search and seizure operations to obtain drugs, not to arrest individuals for possession or dealing, but to use the drugs themselves or to offer them for sale to drug lords. * SAPS estimates that only 5 percent of the market value of drugs is ever confiscated.
- * Corrupt police members would make firearms disappear from evidence stores. These were sold to gangsters.
- * Helping gangsters get firearm licences was also common practice.
- * Another common type of “assistance” offered to gangsters was selling them classified information, dockets, information from dockets (such as the names of witnesses) and making dockets “disappear”.

Greg Wagner, spokesman for Plato, confirmed that chapters of the study had been sent to the MEC this year.

"Minister Plato receives many reports from NGOs, civil society organisations, state entities and members of the public, and reads the reports as a way to gain further knowledge of the criminal justice system and related environments. External research documents are also considered when drafting our own documents, for example when drafting the Community Safety Bill, published earlier this year for public comment."

Wagner said Grobler's study "identifies numerous systemic problems within the police, many of which fall under the direct control of SAPS management. The department through the Community Safety Bill is trying to improve oversight over the police to identify and improve on this kind of systemic problem. "The department conducts numerous research projects throughout the year. We also receive and monitor reports from various NGOs such as the ISS, universities, state entities, as well as complaints and suggestions from the public."

Asked about action taken against members accused of corruption, Wagner reported:

* During 2010/11, 485 cases of misconduct by police officers in the Western Cape were reported to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate.

* In the same period, 438 cases of criminal conduct by police officers in the province were reported to IPID.

* IPID received 5 869 complaints in the 2010/11 year. Gauteng and the Western Cape received the largest number of complaints.

Weldon Cameron, spokesman for the Hanover Park Community Policing Forum, said: "These accusations come from the community but there must be proof so we can do something about it. Police management will also say they know about these allegations, but if people cannot come with hard proof then they remain allegations."

Jacques Sibomana, spokesman for the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (Nicro), said: "It's not the first time we've heard about these allegations, especially police tipping off drug lords about raids. These relationships are the cause of the huge lack of trust in police in the communities affected by gangs and drugs. The community needs to know that police are cleaning up their house."

Grobler added: "We need to do something about this problem, it is a major weakness and we need to deal with it. Community Safety needs to face up to this and look into (it) properly."