

# A survey of car guards in Tshwane

## Implications for private security policy and practice

Francois Steyn, Annika Coetzee and Harriët Klopper\*

francois.steyn@up.ac.za  
annika.coetzee@up.ac.za  
harriet.klopper@up.ac.za

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*Car guards form an integral part of South Africa's urban landscape. This article reports on a survey of 144 car guards in Tshwane to identify the implications of their work for private security policy and practice. The profile of respondents reflects their low socio-economic status and marginalisation from the formal economy. The study found that some car guards struggle to survive financially because of the daily levies payable to car guard agencies and the managers of shopping centres. The results of the study suggest that, despite positive sentiments and advancements in policy and legislation, regulation of the formal car guarding industry remains constrained due to inadequate implementation and monitoring. The article offers insights into the factors affecting car guarding as a form of private security in South Africa.*

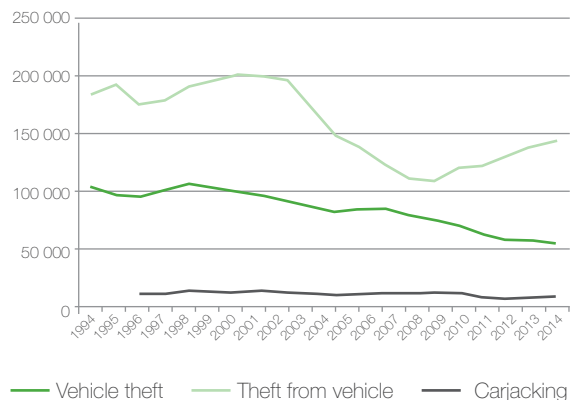
South Africa carries a high burden of vehicle-related crime, even though there have been reductions in some categories, especially vehicle theft, which has decreased since 1998 (Figure 1). In the 2013/14 financial year, 56 870 cases of motor vehicle/motorcycle theft, 143 812 incidences of theft from motor vehicles, and 11 221 cases of carjacking were recorded by the South African Police Service (SAPS).<sup>1</sup>

Vehicle-related crime occurs in a variety of places, although theft of and from vehicles, as well as vandalism of vehicles, occur more frequently in residential settings than outside offices and shopping centres (Table 1).

\* Dr Francois Steyn is a senior lecturer, Annika Coetzee a lecturing assistant and Harriët Klopper a lecturer in the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria.

According to the 2013/14 National Victims of Crime Survey, theft of vehicles occurs at roughly the same frequency at night (47.7%) as during the day (52.3%). Theft from a car, however, occurs more often at

**Figure 1: Trends in vehicle theft, theft from vehicles and carjacking (1994–2012)<sup>2</sup>**



**Table 1: Vehicle-related crime in South Africa  
(April 2012 – February 2014)<sup>3</sup>**

	Vehicle theft (%)	Theft from vehicle (%)	Vandalism of vehicle (%)
At private residence	67.1	71.9	55.0
On street in residential area	13.9	5.7	18.9
On street in town	9.8	10.2	2.8
In parking lot	5.3	6.2	12.9
Other	2.0	1.9	4.4
Outside office/shops	1.9	4.1	6.0

*(Source: National Victims of Crime Survey. Note that vandalism of vehicles adds up to 94% and not 100%; this appears to be an error in the report of the National Victims of Crime Survey)*

night (60.1%), compared to during the day (38.8%).<sup>4</sup> Strategies to prevent vehicle-related crime include installing alarms, immobilisers and tracking systems. This is known as target hardening, which makes it more difficult to commit vehicle-related crime, and thus less attractive to perpetrators. The presence of others, especially safety and security officers, also helps to deter theft of and from vehicles.<sup>5</sup>

Sporting their yellow bibs and eagerly pointing drivers to open parking bays, car guards have over the past two decades become an integral part of South Africa's urban landscape. A car guard is a person who provides a service, in expectation of remuneration, to guard and protect vehicles in a demarcated parking area. They guide and assist vehicles entering or exiting the parking area, and help drivers load their vehicles. Their services are rendered with the permission of the vehicle owner.<sup>6</sup> Even though a driver can decline the service, s/he still benefits to some extent, as the mere presence of car guards could deter potential theft, break-in or damage to the vehicle.

A distinction is generally made between formal and informal car guards. Formal car guards are coordinated by agencies working on behalf of shopping centres, and provide their services at shopping centre parking lots. Informal car guards

operate mainly in city centres, where they guard cars parked on the street.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the National Road Traffic Act 2000 and the Business Act 1991 (Act 71 of 1991), informal car guarding is an illegal but tolerated activity.<sup>8</sup>

Private security has multiple dimensions. It is important to understand the motivations for, and outcomes of, private security services, as well as to understand the supply side of private security and those who provide such services.<sup>9</sup> By reporting on a 2012 study conducted in Tshwane, this article adds to the limited body of knowledge regarding the car guard phenomenon. A detailed description of formal car guards is provided: who they are, why they engage in car guarding, and how they deliver security services. The results are used to identify strengths and shortfalls in policies directed at the formal car guarding industry.

## Aim and methods

The aim of the study was to describe the car guard phenomenon in Tshwane, Gauteng, with specific reference to the background characteristics of formal car guards, their perceived role in curbing and dealing with vehicle-related crime, the temporary nature of car guarding, their access to training and equipment, and matters related to legislating or regulating the industry. A survey was conducted by means of interviews with formal car guards, using a questionnaire that was developed following a study of the literature available on car guarding. The instrument consisted predominantly of closed-ended questions and Likert scales. To enhance the validity of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted with 12 formal car guards in Johannesburg, after which minor changes were made to the questionnaire.

In the absence of a sampling framework from which to randomly select respondents, availability sampling was used. Data were gathered from formal car guards working at shopping centres with a no-fee parking area (i.e., excluding malls where parking fees apply, buildings devoted to parking, office parks and streets). Three teams of data gatherers (12 in total) interviewed 144 formal car guards: 36 in northern, 60 in eastern and 48 in southern Tshwane. The number of interviews

results from the non-probability approach followed in the research, where each data gatherer had to interview 12 formal car guards. Therefore, the results of the present survey are not representative of all car guards in Tshwane. The data were coded and captured in Microsoft Excel and exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (20.0)<sup>10</sup> for analysis. Participation in the research was voluntary and respondents provided written consent to be interviewed. The standard ethical principles of confidentiality and no harm were adhered to throughout the research.

The results have been interpreted with existing literature and evidence on car guarding, in particular studies conducted in Cape Town,<sup>11</sup> Bloemfontein<sup>12</sup> and Empangeni,<sup>13</sup> in order to highlight similarities and trends in car guarding in different geographical contexts. It is important to note that the present research focuses only on formal car guarding as a type of private security response to vehicle-related crime at shopping centres in Tshwane.

The results of the study should be read bearing in mind the limitations of non-probability sampling strategies (in particular availability sampling). Therefore, interpreting and generalising the findings to other settings should be done with caution. In addition, the survey relied on self-reporting measures, which introduce self-reporting bias. Further research is needed to explore potential differences in the experiences of male and female car guards, as well as immigrants' motivations for engaging in car guarding. Matters related to the responsibilities of role players in the car guarding industry and the unionisation of car guarding should also be explored. Future research should focus on the preventative value of car guarding and the nature and extent of the criminal activities car guards have to confront.

## **A theoretical understanding of car guarding**

In the context of vehicle-related crime, rational choice theory<sup>14</sup> assumes that offenders make a rational decision to steal, break into, damage or hijack vehicles. The criminal act occurs after the offender has weighed the potential benefits of the crime against the negative consequences, such as apprehension and punishment. Factors hindering

vehicle-related crime include precipitating factors (the opportunity), attracting factors (choices available in selecting a method to commit crime) and predisposing factors (financial and/or material need).<sup>15</sup> Rational choice theory further proposes that offenders have sufficient economic motivation and skills to execute vehicle-related crime, having paid due attention to the type of offence, the time and place, and the nature of the target, for example the model, make and value of a vehicle or the content of the vehicle (e.g. handbags, electronic equipment and car radios). Similarly, routine activities theory<sup>16</sup> explains the environmental, place-based behavioural patterns of offenders and victims as they intersect in time and space.<sup>17</sup> According to this theory, three elements are necessary for the successful execution of a crime; that is, a motivated offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian. Against this backdrop, car guards can be seen as visible safeguards or obstacles that contribute to the deterrence of vehicle-related crime by acting as guardians to protect the crime target, namely the vehicle.

## **How car guarding has evolved**

Over the last two decades, car guarding at shopping centres in South Africa has evolved from an informal service to an organised labour activity. It provides an opportunity for unemployed people to earn some form of income in the informal economy. The informal economy is estimated to provide work to 2.4 million people (excluding those who work in the agriculture sector).<sup>18</sup> Car guarding started as a survival strategy in a context of high levels of poverty and unemployment in South Africa.

Car guarding is believed to have originated in 1996, when Corrie van Zyl was asked to guard a driver's car in exchange for a fee at the Durban beachfront.<sup>19</sup> Soon afterwards, car guarding burgeoned across the country, in particular in the commercial centres of urban areas. However, the uncoordinated presence of car guards created a dilemma for shopping centre management, as some of these guards displayed aggressive and threatening behaviour towards shoppers. In reaction, the shopping centre managers and business owners intervened by restricting car

guarding to selected individuals and providing them with name tags and proper identification, usually in the form of recognisable, brightly-coloured bibs.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, car guarding developed from being an uncontrolled informal activity to an organised and visually recognisable response to vehicle-related crime at shopping centres in South Africa. However, car guarding in general remains informal and unregulated, and takes place in public streets and city centres.<sup>21</sup>

## Reasons for private security and car guarding

It is important to position car guarding within the different types of security systems in South Africa. The first, state security, involves national and international security systems that aim to assure the safety of the state from an external threat. Secondly, public safety relates to the services of the police, which are governed by legislation. Thirdly, private security provides services to private clients and, in South Africa, receives its mandate from Section 42 of the Criminal Procedure Act 1997.<sup>22</sup> The private security industry in South Africa employs more than 500 000 security officers.<sup>23</sup> Minnaar has argued that the burgeoning private security industry is, in part, a response to the high levels and serious nature of crime, coupled with pessimistic views about the ability of the police to protect society.<sup>24</sup> For example, in the Victims of Crime Survey 2013/14, 35.4% of respondents explained that not reporting theft from a car was because the 'police could not do anything', while 29.7% said that the 'police won't do anything about it'.<sup>25</sup>

Car guarding, in the form of omnipresent car guards in parking lots, can primarily be seen as a perceived deterrent to vehicle-related crime. Therefore some researchers believe that car guards capitalise on the public's fear of crime and victimisation.<sup>26</sup> However, the reasons to opt for private security go beyond a two-sided understanding of risks or notions of the fear of crime. The concept of 'private security regimes'<sup>27</sup> points to the complexities and multi-dimensionality of factors that influence why public and business communities decide on private security. In the context of car guarding, dimensions of private security extend to protective measures (e.g.,

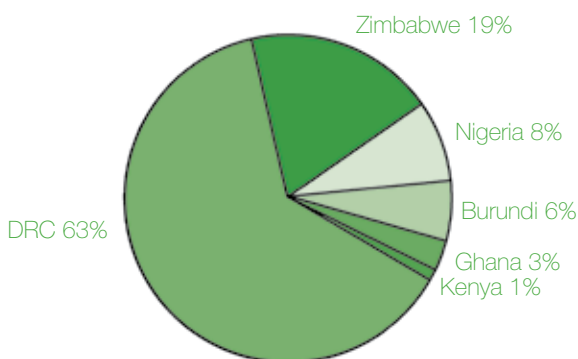
minimising theft and vandalism to vehicles, buildings and other infrastructure at shopping centres); the provision of a safe environment for customers and workers; regulating misconduct and disorder (e.g., vagrants, loitering and the selling of illegal substances at shopping centres); and ensuring the reputation of retailers and franchise holders.

In the following sections we present the results of the Tshwane study with specific reference to the background characteristics of formal car guards, the temporary nature of formal car guarding, the perceived role of car guards in crime reduction, access to training and equipment, and matters pertaining to the legislating of the car guard industry.

## Background characteristics of car guards

Car guards represent various types of people, although the disproportionate presence of immigrants is an important characteristic of the industry in highly urbanised areas. Evidence from Cape Town shows that a large number of car guards are refugees and migrants from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, Mozambique, Rwanda, Gabon and Malawi.<sup>28</sup> A similar picture emerged from the Tshwane survey, where nearly two-thirds of respondents (63%) were from outside South Africa, compared to the 37% who were South African citizens. The majority of immigrant car guards (63%) originated from the DRC (Figure 2). The families of immigrants who work as car guards rarely join them in South Africa and remittances are often sent home.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 2: Origin of immigrants working as car guards in Tshwane**



In a Cape Town study, car guards were mainly African, male and between the ages of 20 and 30 years.<sup>30</sup> Results from the Tshwane study show that the majority of respondents (90%) were African and only 10% were white. Furthermore, most of the respondents were fairly young: 4% were below the age of 20; nearly half (47%) were between 20 and 29 years of age; 40% were between 30 and 39 years of age; and 9% were older than 40. The results thus confirm a similar profile in terms of the age and population group of car guards in urban areas, which is hardly surprising given the fact that African males between the ages of 20 and 30 represent the largest proportion of unemployed in South Africa.<sup>31</sup>

The level of education among car guards varies, with notable differences between locals and immigrants. South African car guards have generally not continued their education beyond secondary school, while those from other countries often hold tertiary qualifications in the form of a diploma or degree.<sup>32</sup> In the Tshwane study, it was found that the majority of respondents had obtained an education level of grade 8 to 10 (24%) and 11 to 12 (38%), with nearly one in three respondents (28%) holding a post-school qualification. Immigrants working as formal car guards were significantly more likely to have completed tertiary education compared to their South African counterparts (Pearson chi-square,  $p < 0.001$ ). Notwithstanding their significantly better qualifications, and the fact that they are more likely to possess professional skills, non-South African car guards face numerous obstacles – notably in obtaining work visas – when attempting to enter the formal South African job market.<sup>33</sup> These results also highlight the low levels of education of local car guards and the difficulties they have in entering formal employment.

The majority of car guards have wide-ranging previous work experience, with some having held formal positions in the service sector.<sup>34</sup> Research in Cape Town found that the previous occupations of car guards ranged from professional careers such as teachers to blue-collar work such as garbage collectors.<sup>35</sup> In the Tshwane study, two-thirds (67%) of respondents had been employed prior to working as car guards. Interestingly, 45% previously worked in the security industry while the remainder worked

in construction, retail, mining, the public sector, catering, agriculture and as artisans.

The bulk of respondents in the Tshwane study were male (99%). Only one female car guard was interviewed, which could be ascribed to the availability sampling method used in the study. Roughly half of respondents (49%) were single, while 47% were married and three each (2%) divorced or living together. Half the respondents (51%) lived with their families, while 38% lived alone and 11% lived with people they know. Of the respondents who lived with their families, two-thirds (68%) were the sole breadwinners, while 32% lived with at least one other person who was also working for an income.

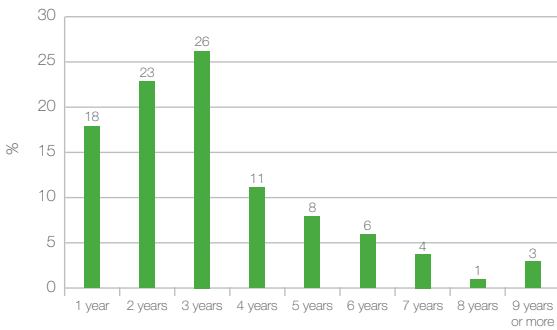
The Cape Town study found that there are various ways in which car guards enter the industry. The majority of car guards in Cape Town became car guards with the help of friends and family, while others got car guard jobs via social networks.<sup>36</sup> Results from the Tshwane study are similar: the majority (76%) of respondents became involved in car guarding through the help of family and friends, while the remaining 24% did so on their own.

## **The temporary and despondent nature of car guarding**

The majority of respondents (87%) in the Tshwane survey said that they work as car guards because they cannot find other employment. Not surprisingly, most respondents (85%) considered car guarding as temporary employment, with 89% of respondents indicating that they would leave the industry immediately if they could find alternative employment. The results underscore the stark reality of unemployment in South Africa, and the limited opportunities in and access to the formal job market. Furthermore, the transitory nature of formal car guarding is reflected in the finding that only one in three respondents (33%) worked as a car guard for more than three years (Figure 3).

Despite working under harsh conditions, being on their feet on hot summer and cold winter days, the vast majority of respondents (94%) in the Tshwane study felt that they made a meaningful contribution to society. However, more than half (56.9%) stated that they merely survive from day to day. A total of 60% of

**Figure 3: Number of years working as a car guard**



respondents sometimes felt depressed, and one in ten (11%) always felt depressed. About 40% said that their main reason for feeling depressed was because they were working for a small income.

### **Crime reduction and responding to crime**

The Empangeni study showed that the public generally values the crime prevention services provided by car guards.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the benefits and drawbacks of being a car guard have been a subject of public debate for quite some time. Some people consider the guards as a beneficial security service, while others regard them as a nuisance and a form of harassment and begging.<sup>38</sup> In the Tshwane study, formal car guards were asked what they perceive as their main responsibilities, to which the majority replied preventing vehicle theft (75%), vehicle break-ins (61%) and damage to vehicles (60%). Nearly half of respondents (48%) had faced someone trying to steal a vehicle, while 19% had experienced vehicle theft while on duty. Similarly, 43% of car guards had faced someone trying to break into a vehicle, while 20% had experienced a vehicle break-in while on duty.

The majority (79%) of respondents felt that car guarding is an important way to prevent vehicle-related crime in parking areas. In fact, car guarding is considered a more effective preventative measure than closed-circuit television and patrol cars.<sup>39</sup> However, research into car guarding has also picked up incidents of car guards engaging in intimidation tactics and other criminal activities, such as selling drugs and colluding with organised syndicates in vehicle-related crime. These

incidents mostly take place in unregulated settings (the street).<sup>40</sup>

Questions can rightfully be raised regarding the ability of car guards to manage criminal incidents. In the event of a criminal act, car guards have been advised to not physically challenge or engage the suspect but rather to raise alarm and call for help from other car guards, the police or members of the public.<sup>41</sup> In the Tshwane study, the majority (73%) of respondents indicated that they mostly contact the centre manager in the event of a criminal act, while some (32%) simply chase the person away. Although not recorded in the questionnaire, some respondents related incidents where they were beaten and even fired upon by perpetrators during a gun-related incident. Car guarding can thus be dangerous and life-threatening work. In one incident, two car guards were shot when trying to apprehend a group of armed robbers. In this incident a car guard died and the other, his daughter, was hospitalised following the shooting.<sup>42</sup> It is thus necessary for car guards to acquire some skills and equipment to effectively perform their car guarding tasks while minimising the danger to themselves.

### **Training and equipment of car guards**

The Private Security Industry Regulations Act 2001 (Act 56 of 2001)<sup>43</sup> states that car guards have to complete a one-week training course on security and security-related matters prior to registration with the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority (PSIRA) in order to formally work as car guards. Car guards must pay for the training, which includes the registration fee, uniform costs and name tags, themselves.<sup>44</sup> In the Tshwane study, less than half (47%) of the respondents had received the required training, which, according to them, primarily entailed vehicle security (35%) and public relations (28%). Two in five respondents (42%) expressed the need for (further) training. Of this number 75% indicated a desire to improve their performance as car guards, and 20% said that they required training on how to handle weapons.

The Basic Conditions of Employment Act 1997 (Act 75 of 1997)<sup>45</sup> states that an employer must provide an employee, free of charge, with any equipment s/

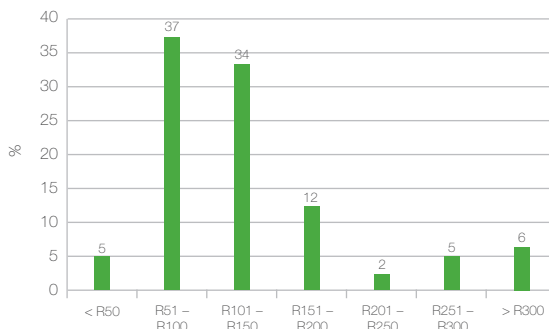
he might need. The equipment car guards receive usually amounts to no more than name tags and a bib or uniform. The Empangeni study raised the question whether car guards should be armed, with male car guards favouring the idea of carrying weapons in the execution of their duties.<sup>46</sup> In terms of equipment, respondents in the Tshwane study indicated that they used their mobile phones in the execution of their duties (27%), while 10% stated that they had a whistle and note book respectively. Ten respondents (7%) carried pepper spray. None of the respondents had a Taser or police club. The results concur with findings from the Cape Town study that car guards use minimal equipment in performing their duties.<sup>47</sup>

### Legislation and policy frameworks

PSIRA controls private security and, in line with the Private Security Industry Regulations Act, all individuals who offer security services must be registered with the authority before they can offer their services.<sup>48</sup> Registration entails a monthly fee and identification documentation.<sup>49</sup> In 2009, the Employment Conditions Committee investigated the car guarding industry in the context of Sectoral Determination 6: Private Security Sector.<sup>50</sup> The report acknowledged the presence of various forms of car guarding in South Africa and concerns were raised regarding the compliance requirements with PSIRA if car guards were to be included in the Sectoral Determination. More specifically, the registration of car guards could prove challenging as some car guards have criminal records, and others do not have the necessary educational requirements and/or are undocumented immigrants.<sup>51</sup>

On 25 August 2009, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act was amended to include car guards under the Sectoral Determination for private security. According to the amended act, car guards fall within the category 'employees not elsewhere specified', and for the Pretoria and Johannesburg area the minimum wage was set at R2 519 per month.<sup>52</sup> The Tshwane study found that on weekdays, 37% of car guards earn between R51 and R100, and 34% between R101 and R150 per day (Figure 4), which means that

**Figure 4: Daily income of car guards in the Tshwane area**

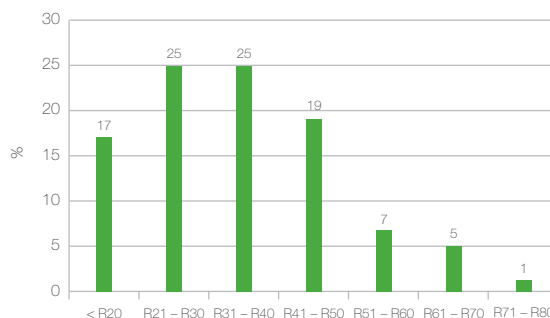


most manage to earn the minimum monthly wage – but this is not guaranteed by their employers.

Some car guards might not reach the minimum monthly wage because they are required to pay a daily 'bay fee' to either car guarding agencies (78%) or directly to the managers of shopping centres (22%). Roughly a third of respondents (32%) paid more than R40 per day to work as a formal car guard (Figure 5). The 'bay fee' varies according to where a car guard is situated in the parking lot – those closer to the shops or the entrance of the shopping centre pay a higher fee compared to those who work further away. In addition to the daily 'bay fee', one in three respondents (36%) had to pay supplementary fees (mostly to hire clothing), ranging between R10 and R30 per day. Not surprisingly, the Employment Conditions Committee expressed concern about the financial exploitation of car guards.<sup>53</sup>

Apart from the regulations provided by PSIRA and the Sectoral Determination for private security in South Africa, some municipalities have taken

**Figure 5: Amounts car guards pay per day to work at shopping centres**



additional steps to regulate the car guard industry. In Bloemfontein, a bylaw has been introduced that requires car guards to register with the Mangaung metropolitan municipality in order to obtain a valid car-guarding permit. The bylaw includes restrictions on the activities of car guards, and penalties for improper behaviour towards the public.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, the City of Cape Town introduced a bylaw for the promotion of safety and the prevention of nuisance following a series of complaints from the public regarding informal car guards. An addendum to the bylaw intends to formalise the car guarding industry in the city.<sup>55</sup>

No information could be found regarding the regulation of car guards in the City of Tshwane municipal bylaws. As such, it comes as no surprise that very few respondents (7%) knew about legislation governing the car guard industry, or labour laws that guide and protect the rights of workers (16%). Three-quarters of respondents (75%) felt that car guarding should be regulated to protect their rights, while others (15%) wanted legislation to secure their income. The majority of respondents (75%) would like to have a say when laws affecting car guarding are formulated. Additionally, most respondents (72%) said they would like to form a workers' union to safeguard their interests and conditions of employment.

## Conclusion

Vehicle-related crime in South Africa remains a cause of concern for drivers and law enforcement. Theoretically, car guarding has the potential to deter theft of and from vehicles because of the presence of a (capable) guardian to prevent criminal behaviour. The literature further suggests that the benefits of formal car guarding extend beyond vehicle safety to include advantages to business owners, workers and the infrastructure of shopping centres.

Car guarding is not only a response to vehicle-related crime, but also a response to poverty. Car guards represent the disenfranchised and marginalised in South African society: they are mostly African, male and relatively young, a profile that is characteristic of the unemployed in the country. Given their socio-economic realities, the prospects of car guards to gain employment in the formal economy

remain constrained. The transitory nature and low income associated with car guarding may provide a temporary, albeit survivalist, reprieve for those who engage in it. Partnerships ought to be galvanised between the public sector (e.g. housing, social development and labour) and the private security industry to promote the social welfare, well-being and safety of formal car guards.

Legislation and policy has led to steps being taken to address the disjointed and unregulated nature of formal car guarding. Directives are provided on training, registration and the minimum income of car guards, among others. Nevertheless, it appears as if these advances are rendered largely ineffective by inadequate implementation and stewardship. For example, car guards are exploited financially, they lack labour protection, and their poor knowledge of matters pertaining to labour legislation and the rights of workers remains a concern. Moreover, it is evident that not all car guards obtained the necessary qualification from PSIRA, which calls into question the monitoring practices of private security authorities.

There are various role players in the formal car guarding industry. Policies are needed regarding the responsibilities of car guard agencies and the managers of shopping centres alike, specifically to address the exploitative levies that car guards are expected to pay. Considerations for policy and practice include:

- Recruiting and screening of aspirant car guards
- Strategies to invest in the human economy of car guards
- Providing an enabling environment for car guards to render security services
- Addressing criminal incidents and ensuring the safety of car guards
- Coordinating crime intelligence among stakeholders (including the police)
- Adhering to and applying relevant policies, labour legislation and municipal bylaws
- Monitoring car guard activities in relation to performance, needs and feedback from clients



Lastly, policies are needed to clarify matters related to (undocumented) immigrants who work as formal car guards, vis-à-vis the legal requirements of work permits, residency status and registration with PSIRA. To this end, a partnership between the private security sector and the Department of Home Affairs is imperative.



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