

UBI VUIMUS, QUO VADIMUS ACTA CRIMINOLOGICA?**Francois Steyn¹ and Harriët Klopper²****ABSTRACT**

Academic journals often represent the 'zeitgeist' (defining mood or spirit) of the current debates and new developments in a discipline. We asked the question 'Ubiuimus, quo vadimus' Acta Criminologica? 'Where have we been and where are we going' with the aim, among others, of revealing insights into trends of research topics, author productivity and methodological aspects of the journal. A content analysis was conducted of articles published in the Acta Criminologica journal between the twenty-year period of 1994 and 2013, in order to describe shifts in the origins of publications, the number and post-level of authors, research methods, units of analysis, themes and matters related to the incorporation of policy and theory in publications. Having excluded special and conference editions, a total of 629 articles were included in the analysis. The twenty-year period was divided into five four-year terms to facilitate time-trend analyses. Depending on the nature of the variables involved, statistically significant differences over the five intervals were determined by means of the Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests. Significant shifts featured in terms of local versus international publications ($p=0.013$); the universities that contributed to the journal ($p=0.006$); the number and post-levels of authors per publication ($p<0.001$); the frequency of empirical versus literature-based articles ($p<0.001$); and the research approaches ($p<0.001$) and designs ($p=0.010$) of contributions. Further insights were revealed regarding the units of analysis used in published work, as well as fluctuations in the thematic content of articles. The limited use of theory in publications and minimal focus on the value of research with regard to policy and decision-making remain a cause of concern. Overall, the research demonstrated the value of critically reflecting over time on the trends in publication in the Acta Criminologica with the view of informing future directions.

Keywords: *Acta Criminologica; analysis of articles over twenty-year period*

INTRODUCTION

Academic journals often reflect the 'zeitgeist' of a discipline (Blancher, Bublotz & Soper, 2010: 139). Editors and editorial boards must select from a variety of submissions those that will speak to the preferences and thinking of a broad readership. At the same time, publications must represent current debates and prominent, cutting-edge developments in the discipline. From time-to-time, scholars conduct historical analyses of published work to track trends over specific periods of time, the angles of which vary from publishing productivity, thematic trends and gender output to the methods researchers use when investigating particular phenomena. The present contribution takes stock of publications in the *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*, a southern African journal dedicated to Criminology and related disciplines. It represents, to the authors' knowledge, the first attempt at systematically reviewing trends in the origin, content and methodological characteristics of publications in the journal between the years 1994 and 2013.

A historical review of *Acta Criminologica*, being the only journal in southern Africa exclusively devoted to publishing research on crime, victimisation and reactions to crime, was thus both pertinent and opportune. We argue that the review can potentially reveal some insights about how southern African Criminology makes sense of crime. It may well be

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argued that some of the trends over time were predictable or even anticipated, but the authors believe that several of our findings lay bare some truths that have been obscured. Rafter (in Rock, 2011: 20), in her Sutherland Address in 2009, laments the fact that Criminology produces such a small number of studies of its past, by poignantly professing "...[w]e lack a sense of our work as a project in time. Large chunks of our memory have fallen away, leaving us, like [sic] victims of Alzheimers [sic] disease, stripped of our identity". We perceive the present historical review of the *Acta Criminologica* to be a small step towards local understanding of developments in the discipline.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

The *Acta Criminologica: Southern African Journal of Criminology*, is a peer-reviewed academic journal that promotes academic and professional discourse and the publishing of research on the subject of crime and victimisation, conflict, deviance, abuse of power and reactions to crime and other crime-related phenomena in the broad criminological sciences and applied criminal justice field. The journal is an accredited journal approved by the South African Department of Education and Higher Training and is independently published by the Criminological and Victimological Society of Southern Africa (CRIMSA), although up to 2010 the Centre for Criminological Sciences at the University of South Africa (UNISA), subsidised printing costs since both then editors were staff members of the Centre. The journal was first published in 1988. Members of CRIMSA automatically receive the journal (in either hard copy or as an e-journal). Presently, *Acta Criminologica* has an editor-in-chief and three sub-editors. Submissions are firstly scrutinised for relevance to the journal, after which a double-blind peer review process is followed (cf. Editorial Policy and Guidelines for Authors of the *Acta Criminologica*).

Academic and research journals in South Africa are subjected to independent, multiple peer reviews as part of quality assurance procedures initiated by the Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). These external reviews also serve to provide scholarly journals with suggestions on improving aspects related to standing, merit, exposure and procedures (Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf), 2014: 11). The *Acta Criminologica* is categorised in the review group 'South African Law and related legal fields journals' and it is worthwhile to take note of the findings of the latest review conducted in 2014.

The external review noted that members of the editorial committee have high standing, as well as expertise, with representation from South Africa, Uganda, Germany, Australia, USA, Japan, Belgium and the Netherlands. Editorial board members are not appointed competitively, and their appointment period is not specified. They are appointed from inside and outside the country to provide specific topical expertise. Editorial board members manage the peer reviews of manuscripts and also advise on editorial policies and practices. UNISA has a strong representation on the editorial committee, since the university has the largest number of Criminology lecturers, researchers and undergraduate and post-graduate students in South Africa. Despite international membership on the editorial board, less than ten percent of publications in the past three years originated from outside South Africa. Roughly, 25 percent of peer reviewers had non-South African addresses. There has been no interruption in the publication of the *Acta Criminologica*, with special and biannual conference editions featuring regularly (since the resuscitated CRIMSA conferences started up again in 2008). The average period between article submission and appearance in print is about six months. The journal publishes three issues per year and includes editorials and book reviews (ASSAf, 2014: 70).

The external review accentuated that "[t]he quality of the articles varies, a significant percentage appearing to be largely descriptive rather than analytical" (ASSAf, 2014: 71). In 2011, it was decided to adhere strictly to the minimum word limit of 7 000 to a maximum of

12 000 in order to ensure more analytical research-based articles be submitted. In addition, the report highlights the following regarding the content and origin of publications in the journal:

... comprise mainly, but not exclusively, material of South African concern. A refreshing number of articles deal with developments in Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe and elsewhere... The journal does profile a number of regional and national issues and problems (ASSAF, 2014: 71).

The consensus review stated that the *Acta Criminologica* provides a forum for established and emerging researchers. However, it cannot be considered a leading international journal. The two suggested improvements amounted to increasing international contributions and prioritising the publication of articles with stronger analytical content.

FOCI OF JOURNAL REVIEWS

Historical reviews of journals and publications have different purposes. The brief descriptions of existing work below serve to orientate the reader to the various focuses and purposes of such reviews. The authors acknowledge that these descriptions are by no means representative of the body of work regarding historical reviews of journals and articles.

Thematic trends and origins of publications

Kosutic and McDowell (2015) conducted a review of publications between 1995 and 2005 in five family therapy journals in order to identify trends regarding the themes of diversity and social justice. Of the 1 735 articles, 346 (19.9%) included meaningful discussions of markers of cultural identity, cultural competence and social justice. Gender was identified as the most frequently considered theme of cultural diversity (5.3%), followed by health status (3.5%) and ethnicity (3.4%). The study further reported a significant increase in articles on diversity and social justice between the publication periods 1995-2000 (17.6%) and 2001-2005 (22.4%).

Renn, Brazelton and Holmes (2014) investigated articles regarding college student development, learning and experiences published in eight journals from 1998 to 2011. Of the 3 540 articles, five percent addressed internationally-focused themes on student development, learning and experiences. Two in five articles (40%), came from only three of the 27 nations that contributed to publications.

In their review of 990 articles published in three science and education journals, Tzu-Chiang, Tzung-Jin and Chin-Chung (2014) demonstrated meaningful shifts in journals' preferences and researchers' interests, most notably towards research on students' learning contexts. The researchers identified an increase in the number of countries that contribute to the journals, as well as increased collaboration by science educators of different countries. Despite this, three countries (USA, UK and Australia) continued carrying the bulk of the contributions. The three journals prioritised empirical research with few articles taking the form of position papers (2.6%), theoretical papers (3.1%) and literature reviews (3.0%).

Rock (2011), conducted an analysis of articles published in the *British Journal of Criminology* between 1965 and 2009 to identify trends and foci of the discipline. A variety of themes were noted, with some peaks in the cases of Victimology; administrative, policy and legal work; therapeutic research; positivist investigations; sociology of police; offending patterns; restorative justice; expressly theoretical articles; and radical Criminology. Despite the thematic richness and diverse nature of the articles published in this journal, Rock concluded that "there has been no time at which any single theory or substantive theme has been in dominance. To the contrary, the criminology presented in those journals is remarkably diverse and heterodox" (2011: 19).

Nature of results and sources of information

Koletsis, Karagianni, Pandis, Makou, Polychronopoulou and Eliades (2009) set out to determine whether studies that report significant results are more likely to be published, especially so in journals that have an impact factor. A total of 1 785 journals published in five orthodontic journals between 2004 and 2008 were included in their study. They found that articles were more likely to communicate significant results (88% as opposed to 12% without significant associations). Journals with an impact factor had a 100 percent increased probability of publishing a statistically significant result compared to journals without an impact factor.

Kareithi and Lund (2012) reviewed publications on factors that influence the performance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Their findings being that a total of 31 academic articles published between 1996 and 2008 met the inclusion criteria. The sources of information were mainly NGO directors, programme staff and funders, with fewer studies relying on information from beneficiaries. Although the majority of studies were conducted in developing settings, the authors were affiliated to institutions in developed countries.

Author productivity and gender

Ross (2010) investigated trends in publications from 1993 to 2003 of the *Library Quarterly* with an emphasis on author productivity. Single authors made up 85 percent of the 772 articles and 125 of the 840 authors (15%) were repeat authors. Rigg, McCarragher and Krmeneč (2012), focused their review of articles in geography journals on gender in the context of authorship, collaboration and publication productivity. They found that women accounted for 21.7 percent of total authorship and 16 percent of all single-authored publications, the last being associated more with publications in the field of cultural geography. Collaborative publications were more likely to be male-male or female-female, with those involving both male and female amounting to 18 percent of publications. Articles with high citation rates were more likely to be authored by single or male-male collaborations. Stack (2002), analysed 702 publications by lecturers at ten Departments of Criminal Justice in the USA and found no gender difference in the number of articles produced or citations received. The top ten by number of articles published authors at these departments accounted for 388 (55%) of all publications.

RESEARCH METHODS

A quantitative research approach was followed to assign numerical values to variables of interest, for example the country of origin and number of authors per publication (Somekh & Lewin, 2011: 220). Quantification was further needed to test significant relationships between variables and to ensure that the study could be replicated. The purpose of the study was to describe trends in the *Acta Criminologica* insofar as the origin, methods and content of publications (Babbie, 2011: 92). The research design amounted to content analysis, which is “the systematic analysis and selective classification of the contents of mass communication” (Hagan, 2010: 217). Content analysis is particularly useful for comparative and historical research, especially to determine trends, as is the case with the present research. A further strength of content analysis lies in its replicability, where different researchers should be able to come up with similar, if not the same, categorisation of information.

A sample of volumes and issues was not drawn, since all articles (n=629) published between 1994 and 2013 (twenty years) were included in the research. Post-2000 articles were retrieved electronically while the hard copies of those published between 1994 and 1999 were obtained from the library of the University of Pretoria. Letters to the editor, book reviews and special editions were excluded from the investigation. Special editions are most often dedicated to a particular theme, which could potentially skew the thematic trends of publications and, by default, the general picture of the journal as a whole (Blancher et al., 2010: 140). The researchers developed a data capturing sheet that covered the year of

publication; origin (country and institution of higher learning); number and post level of author(s); the nature of the article (empirical or literature review); research methods (approach, design, sampling, units of analysis, nature of data analysis and presentation); use of theory; and the themes of publications. The full text of each article was scrutinised individually and the relevant data was recorded. Except for the country of origin, all items were pre-coded to facilitate efficiency in the data recording process (Sarantakos, 2013: 257). Where categories were added, for example the affiliation of authors, codes followed chronologically. Recoding also took place, for example, a total of 55 thematic categories were created although 93.9 percent of articles could be recoded into ten broad categories. The remainder (6.1%), encapsulated multiple themes and were omitted from the analysis of publication themes. In the present study, the number of authors per publication was used as a proxy indicator of research collaboration, although inter-departmental and inter-institutional collaboration were not determined (*cf.* Kareithi & Lund, 2012).

The completed data capturing sheets were coded and captured in Microsoft Excel and exported to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 23) (IBM, 2015). Inspection of the histograms with normality curves revealed that the data was not normally distributed hence non-parametric statistical procedures were followed. In addition to descriptive data (i.e., frequency tables and figures), the Mann-Whitney *U* (two independent samples, for example sampling approach) and Kruskal-Wallis *H* (three or more independent samples, for example research designs) tests were used to identify significant associations between variables. P-values are only presented where significant associations prevailed. The trend analysis was made possible by recoding the year of publications into new variables, namely: five four-year intervals (1994-1997, 1998-2001, 2002-2005, 2006-2009 and 2010-2013).

Since the perceptions, attitudes or experiences of human respondents were not determined, the researchers considered face validity relevant to the study (Bachman & Schutt, 2012: 93). Measurements and concepts were fairly basic and no scales were used. Ethical approval for the study was not sought, since the study did not involve any human subjects (Kien et al., 2014). The researchers adhered to the principles of accountability, honesty, fairness and professional courtesy throughout the research endeavour (Rossouw, 2014: 2). The researchers encountered various methodological challenges:

- Transformation of South Africa's higher education landscape resulted in several mergers and name changes. For example, the former University of Durban-Westville and the University of Natal merged to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Similarly, name changes were accommodated under the present name of universities. For example, the former University of Transkei became the Walter Sisulu University (WSU). In these cases, publications were coded according to the current names of institutions of higher learning.
- The journal did not consistently divulge author details over the twenty-year period. For example, institutional affiliation was not indicated for 54 articles, the department of origin was not reported for 83 publications and the post level of authors was not indicated for 467 publications. In such instances, the information was treated as missing data, although the analysis of the post level of authors was possible by comparing two four-year intervals.
- Publications were not always clear about the research methods the researchers followed and consequently inferences had to be drawn. For example, some articles were particularly vague about research designs and sampling methods, in which case careful reading of the limited information and the results culminated in considered assumptions being made about the sampling approach and units of analysis. As a case in point, if a

survey was conducted, it logically flows that a quantitative research approach was followed.

- At times, the researchers had to deliberate about the main theme of a publication. For example, an article about the impact of a victim-centred diversion programme on recidivism could be categorised under the criminal (intervention/rehabilitation), youth crime or restorative justice. In these cases, the primary focus or intent of the publication guided the categorisation process. Nevertheless, the authors fully agree with Rock (2012: 28), that most of the tools used in the categorisation of themes are crude, inexact and blunt and the outcomes are, therefore, open to scrutiny.

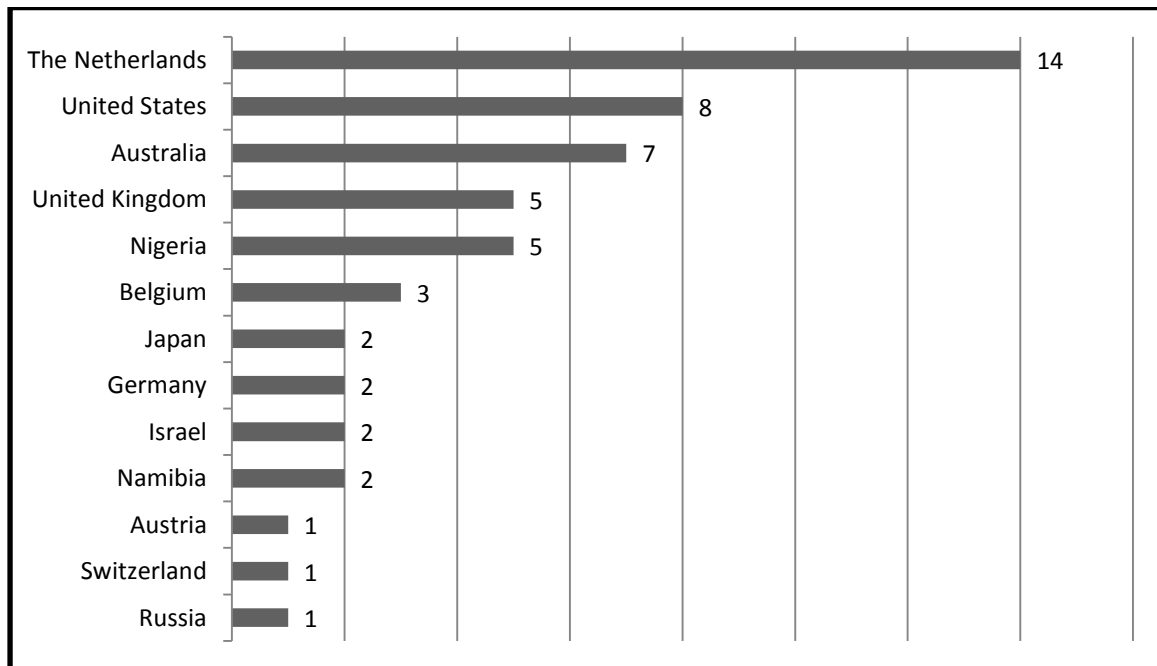
It is important to note that the results of the present study are by no means representative of crime-related research in South Africa. The *Acta Criminologica* is one of several academic journals that report on crime-related research. These other journals include the *Social Work*, *Psychology*, *Child Abuse Research in South Africa* (CARSA), the *South African Crime Quarterly* (SACQ), and the *South African Journal of Criminal Justice* accredited journals. In addition, local scholars publish in a variety of international journals. Despite this, the exclusive focus of the *Acta Criminologica* on crime, victimisation and reactions to crime, makes the journal a melting pot to gauge how southern Africa makes sense of crime and how the discipline has developed over the recent past. The imperativeness of such an endeavour is well illustrated by Rock (2011: 28), who professed that “If we don’t understand the nature of the discipline we practice, we may well misread its accomplishments, and potentialities, and we may be doomed to repeating its mistakes”.

RESULTS

Origin of publications

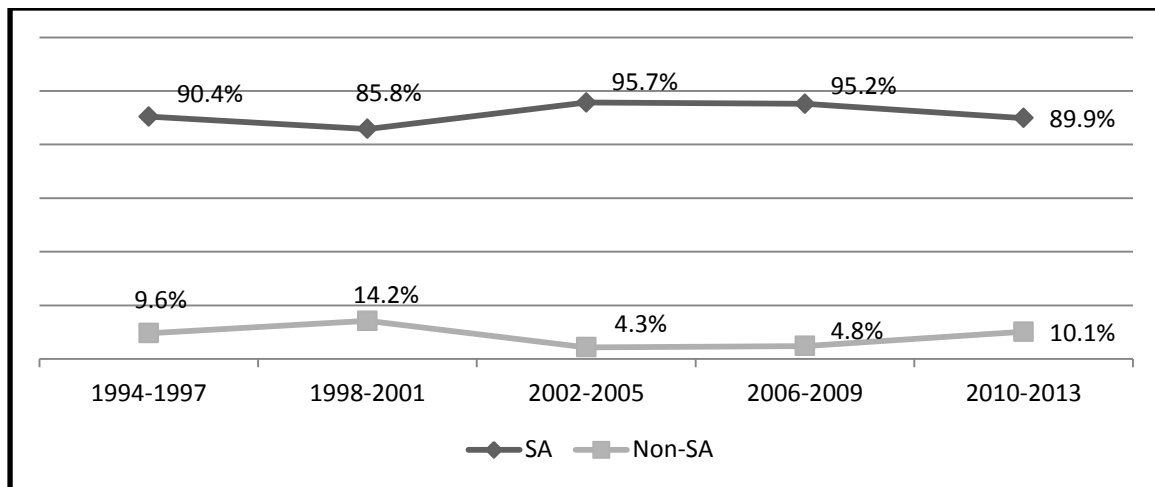
The majority of publications (n=576; 91.6%) were from South African universities. A total of 53 articles (8.4%) originated from outside the country. One in four publications (n=14; 26.4%) from abroad originated from the Netherlands and very few publications (n=7; 13.2%) were from other African countries. Articles from other African countries represented a mere 1.1 percent of all publications over the twenty-year period.

Figure 1: Origin and number of publications from outside South Africa



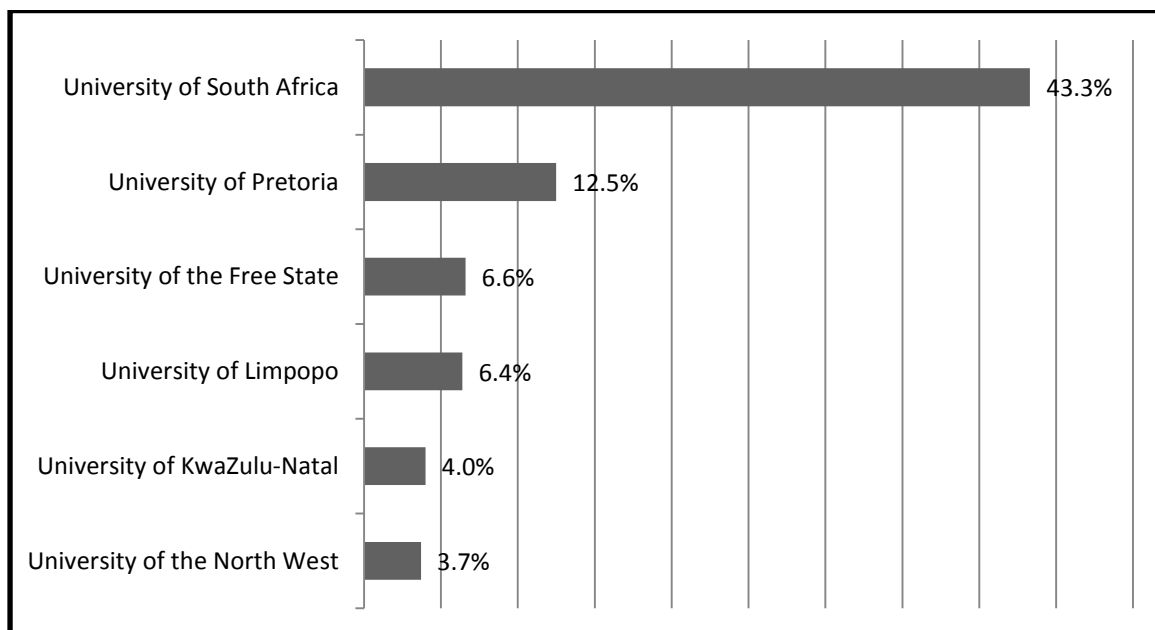
The number of publications from abroad showed a significant shift ($p=0.013$) over the twenty-year period, varying between 4.3 percent and 14.2 percent over the four-year intervals.

Figure 2: Proportion of articles from South Africa and abroad



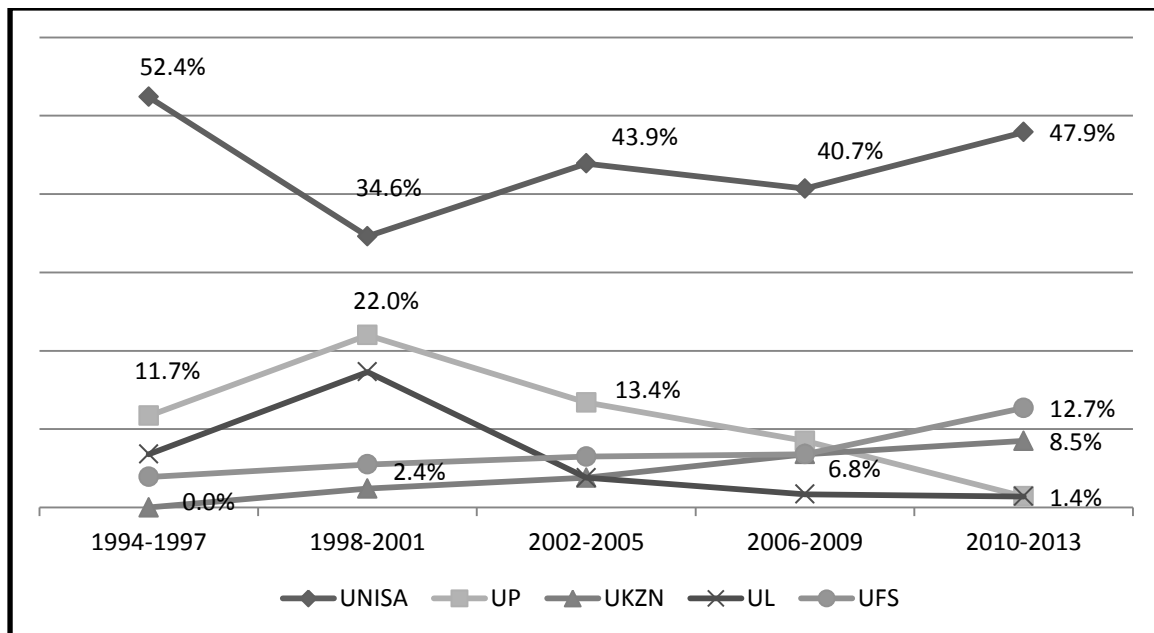
A total of 55 institutions (including universities, universities of technology, government and civil society) have published in the *Acta Criminologica* over the twenty-year period of review. The university, most closely connected to the journal (in terms of providing the bulk of editors and presidents of the Society during the review period), namely: the University of South Africa (UNISA), carries the bulk of publications ($n=249$; 43.3%). The University of Cape Town (UCT), one of South Africa’s leading universities with a research centre devoted to Criminology but with no undergraduate teaching of Criminology as a discipline, published only three articles (0.5%) over the same period. Very few contributions ($n=27$; 4.7%) stem from previously marginalised/traditionally black universities. Government departments, for example the South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), contributed to 4.0 percent ($n=23$) of all publications. Figure 3 depicts the contributions of South African universities that published more than twenty articles over the twenty-year period.¹

Figure 3: Contribution of South African universities to the journal



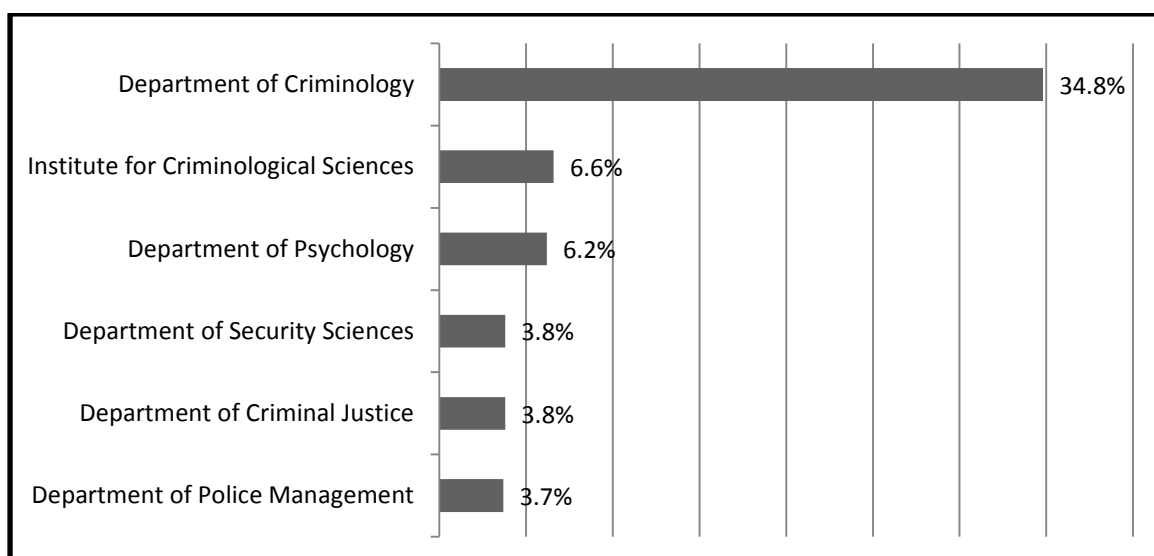
There were significant shifts ($p=0.006$) in the publication frequency of the five universities that published the greater proportion of articles. A peak, followed by a steady decrease in contributions, is evident insofar as the University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of Limpopo (UL) are concerned. Increases are noted in the cases of the UKZN and the University of the Free State (UFS).

Figure 4: Frequency of publications by contributing universities



A total of 80 academic departments, centres, institutes, schools and units contributed to the 629 publications. The names of these were captured as they appeared on the articles. Simply taken at face-value, 52.7 percent of articles originated from Criminology departments and related academic disciplines (Figure 5). The remainder of the publications (47.3%), stemmed from, among others, Law, Social Work, Health, Linguistics, Education, Geography, Military, Business, Psychology, Politics, Communication, Anthropology, Sociology, Industrial Psychology, Psychiatry, Constitutional Development, Anatomy and Economics, to name but a few.

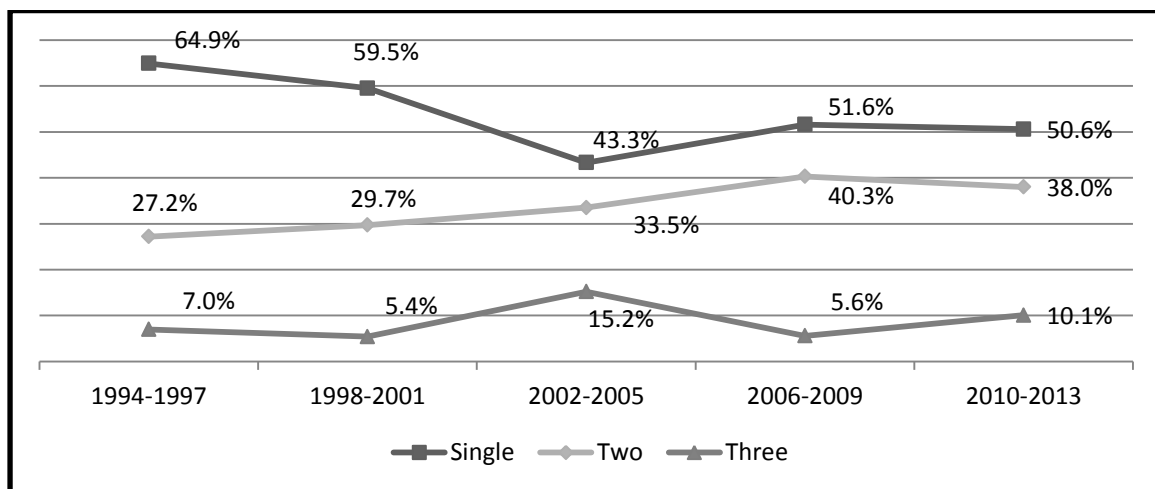
Figure 5: Proportion of contributions by academic departments



Number of authors and post levels

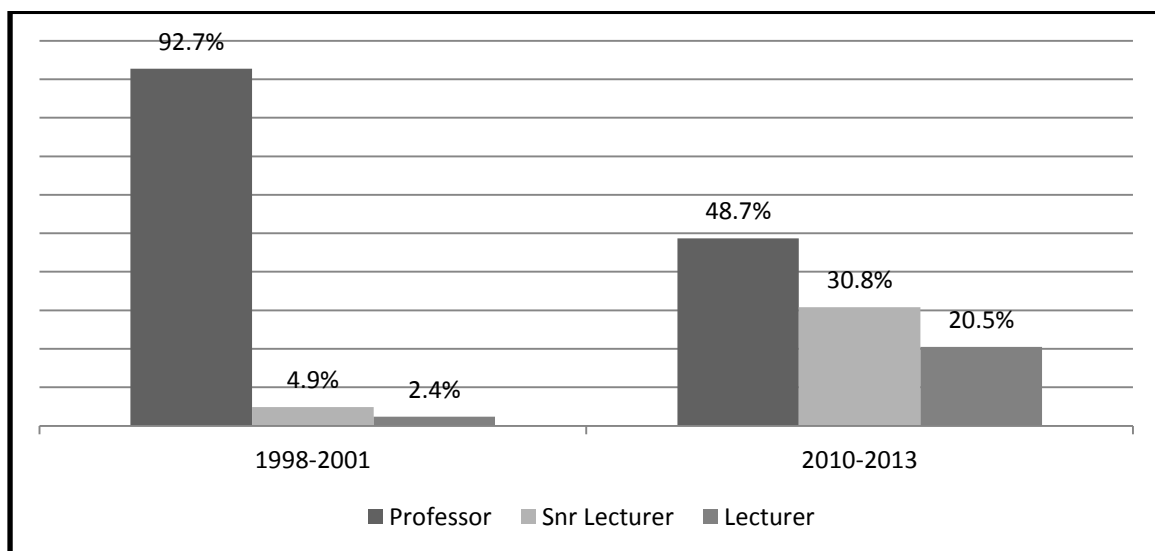
Roughly half of all publications (n=337; 53.6%) were single authored, followed by one in three (n=210; 33.4%) having been co-authored. Nearly one in ten articles (n=56; 8.9%) were written by three authors and 26 publications (4.1%) by four or more authors (Figure 6). There were significant shifts ($p < 0.001$) in the number of authors per publication over the twenty-year period, with a general declining trend in the number of single-authored articles from 1994 onwards.

Figure 6: Number of authors per article



For intermittent periods, the *Acta Criminologica* indicated the post-level of authors. From the data available (n=162), half of authors (n=84; 51.8%) were at the level of professor; 8.6 percent (n=14) were senior lecturers; 7.4 percent (n=12) were lecturers; 3.7 percent (n=6) were postgraduate students and 27.2 percent (n=44) were other contributors (possibly including postgraduate students, researchers at independent research institutions, non-governmental organisations and government departments). There was a significant shift ($p < 0.001$) in the academic post level of first authors between the four-year periods 1998-2001 and 2010-2013 (Figure 7).

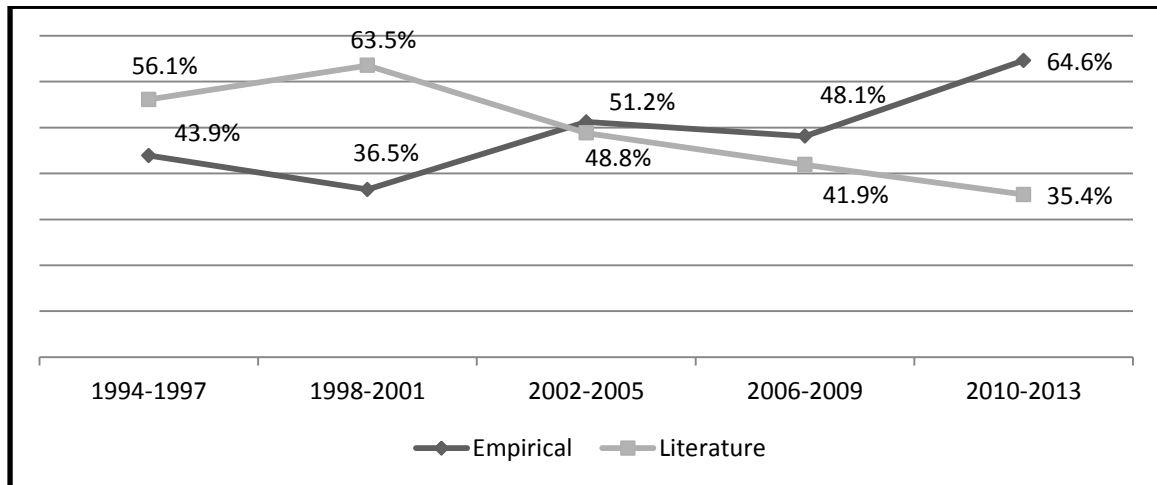
Figure 7: Academic post-level of first authors



Research methods of publications

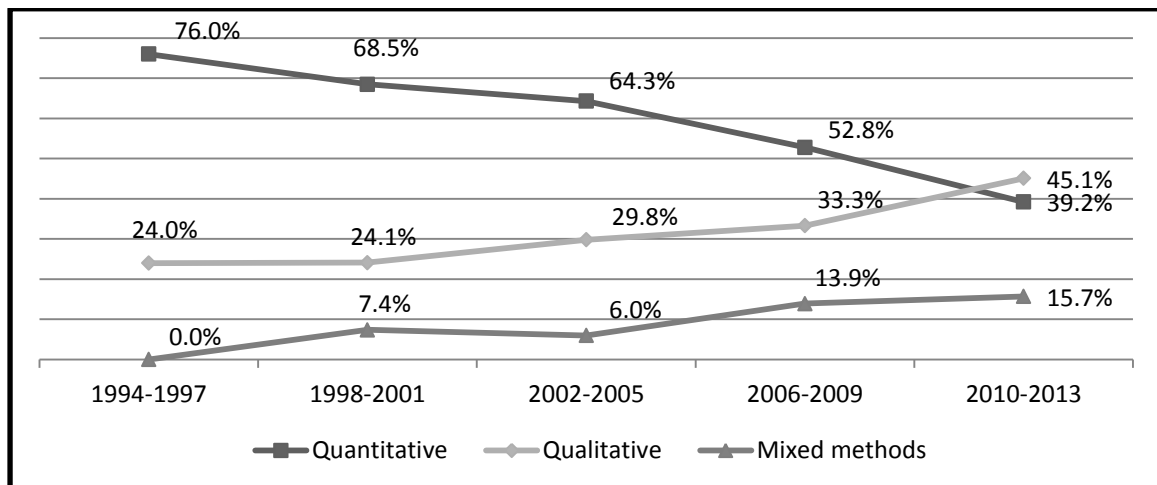
The contributions were equally divided between empirical (n=310; 49.4%) and literature-based (n=318; 50.6%) publications. There was, however, a significant shift ($p<0.001$) with empirical articles showing an increase over the twenty-year period (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Frequency of empirical and literature-based publications



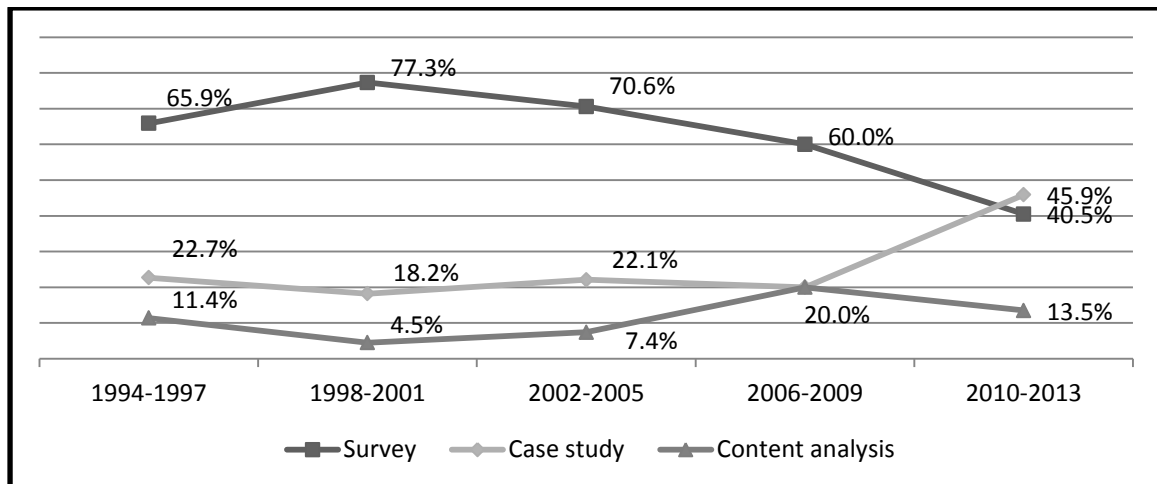
Of the empirical articles (n=310), the greater proportion (n=187; 60.3%) was quantitative in their approach, followed by qualitative (n=96; 31.0%) and mixed methods (n=27; 8.7%) approaches. There were significant shifts ($p<0.001$) in the frequency of the types of research approaches that were adopted over the twenty-year period with quantitative articles showing a substantial decrease (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Research approach of publications



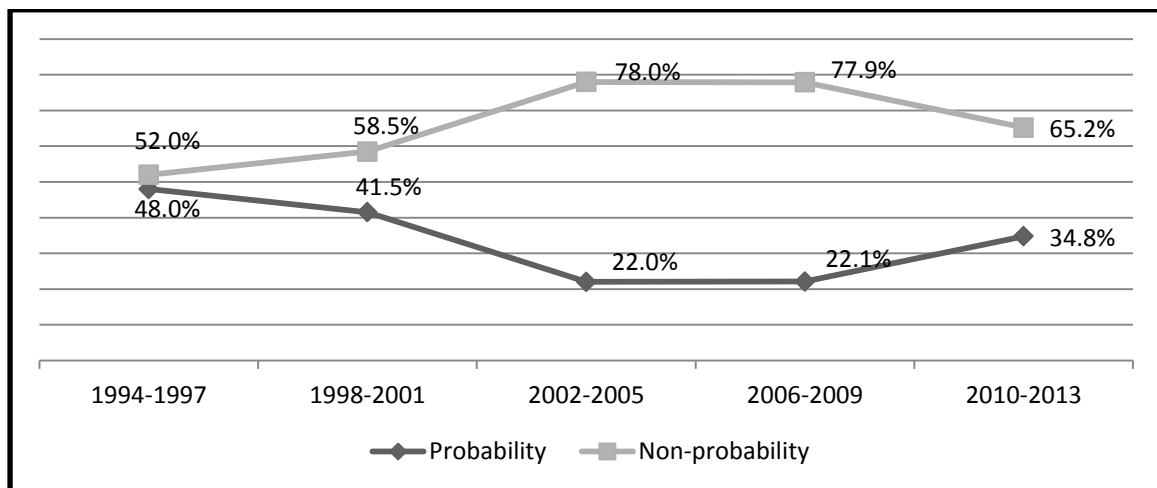
A wide variety of research designs featured across the twenty-year period, although three designs accounted for the bulk of the publications (n=238; 78.6%), namely: surveys (n=155; 51.2%), case studies (n=58; 19.1%) and content analysis (n=25; 8.3%). Ten (3.3%) evaluation studies were published. There was a significant shift ($p=0.010$) in the research designs over the four-year intervals (calculated for the three main designs only), with case studies having surpassed survey designs recently (2010-2013) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Frequency of three main research designs of publications

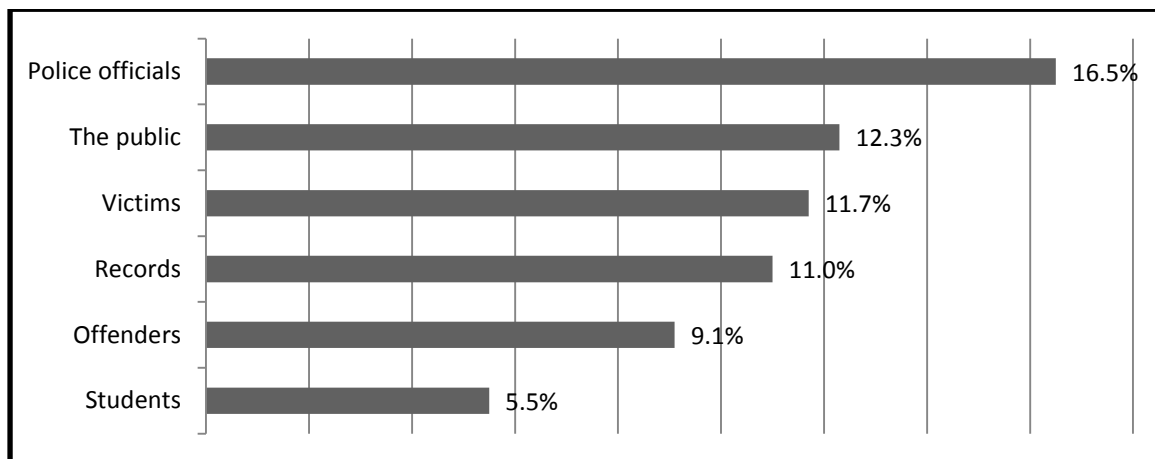


Nearly half of the quantitative publications (n=90; 48.6%) made use of probability sampling strategies. Of the 629 publications over the twenty-year period, 14.3 percent entailed surveys that relied on probability sampling procedures. Figure 11 should be interpreted with caution, since roughly half of quantitative publications (n=95; 51.4%) relied on non-probability sampling methods, which here feature together with qualitative empirical studies. There were significant shifts ($p=0.004$) in the sampling approach of publications with probability strategies appearing to steadily increase after a prolonged period during which it plummeted.

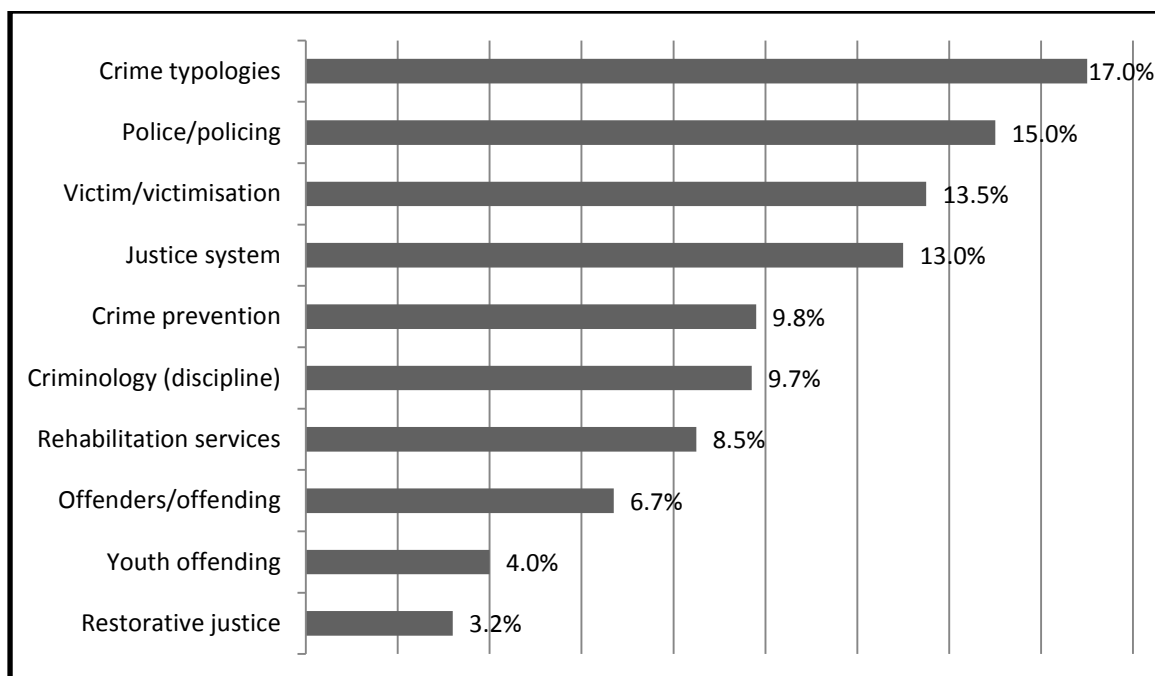
Figure 11: Sampling approaches of empirical publications



Publications drew upon various sources of information (n=118) as units of analysis, including educators, learners, commercial sex workers, drug users, crime investigators, managers, social workers, health practitioners, crime statistics, criminal records and court cases, to name but a few. Figure 12 depicts the units of analysis of three-quarters (n=204; 66.0%) of empirical articles. Police officials featured prominently (16.5%) and roughly one in ten publications (9.1%) sourced data from offenders.

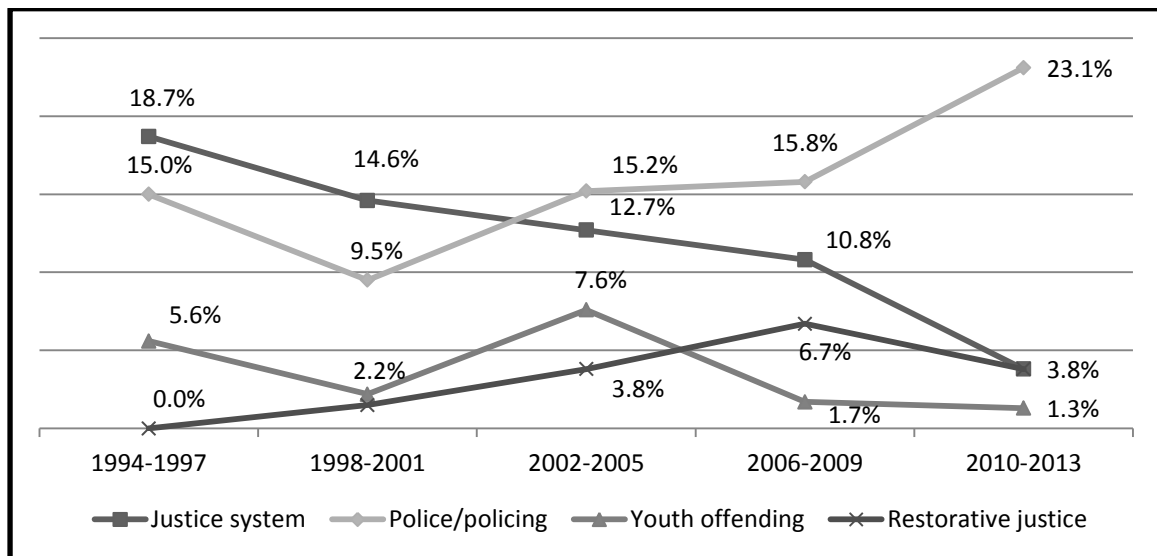
Figure 12: Units of analysis of empirical articles**Themes of publications**

The vast majority (93.9%) of articles could be categorised into ten broad themes (Figure 13). The first category represents a variety of fairly unique themes, albeit at low frequencies, inter alia, rhino poaching, polygraph technology, cultural practices, such as initiation schools, witchcraft and muti-murders, human trafficking, spatial ecology, drunk driving and traffic offences, genocide, corporal punishment, ethics in commerce, substance addiction, maritime piracy, prison gangs, media and crime, taxi violence, terrorism, white-collar crime, workplace violence, organised crime, suicide and vagrancy.

Figure 13: Major themes of publications

The vast majority of themes do not show a clear pattern over the twenty-year period. The data shows a decrease in publications about the justice system (matters related to judicial advancements) and an increase of articles focusing on police/policing. Publications reporting on youth offending and restorative justice appear to have peaked in certain periods (Figure 14).

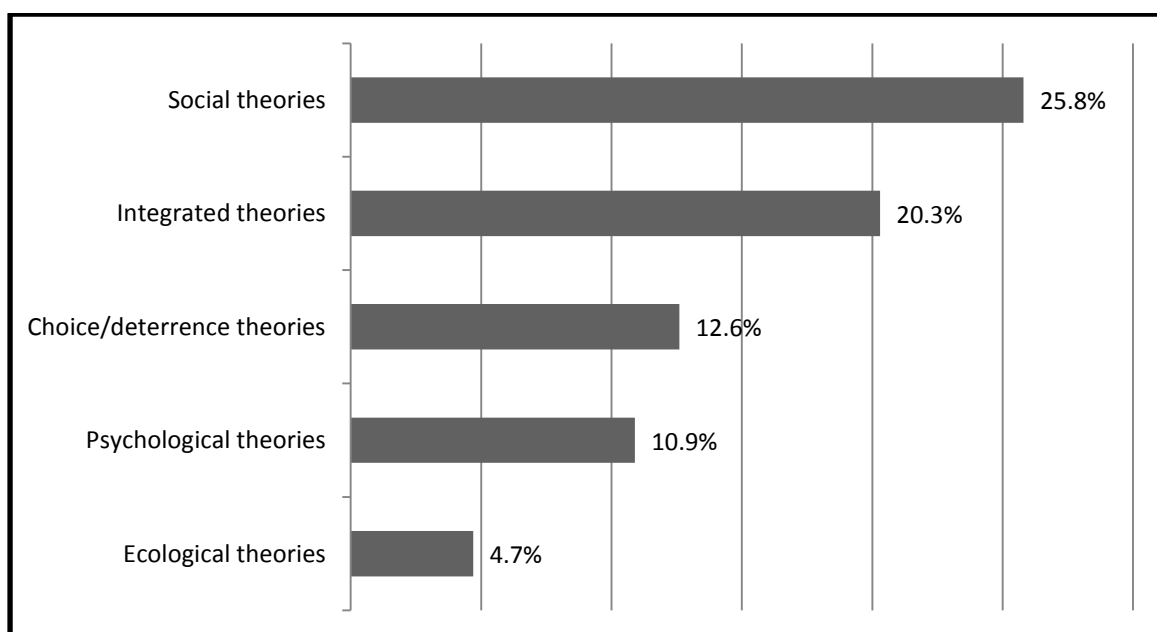
Figure 14: Changes in the frequency of selected publication themes



Policy and theory in publications

Nearly a third of publications 30.4 percent (n=191) incorporated policy matters in the research. Of all the articles, 20.3 percent (n=128) meaningfully incorporated theory, in other words with discussions that revisited/addressed the theory and not theory merely presented as part of the introduction or literature sections. There was no significant change in the presence of policy or theory over time. Very few publications dealt exclusively with theory and theory development (n=23; 3.7%). Theories used in publications were diverse and fairly unique, including epidemiological criminology, conservation criminology, victimology, systems/organisational management, crime prevention and African perspectives. Figure 15 shows that a quarter of publications (n=33; 25.8%) that used theory relied on social theories and one in five (n=26; 20.3%) incorporated integrated theories.

Figure 15: Main theoretical perspectives used in publications



DISCUSSION

In retrospect, the authors questioned whether this historical review of the *Acta Criminologica* was worthwhile to conduct. Does it add any value to our understanding of a 'Southern African' Criminology, as proclaimed by the title of the journal itself? Some colleagues may question whether the effort should not have been devoted to the investigation of more pressing crime-related concerns. Here our response echoes the views of Rock (2012) that scholars of Criminology and its related study fields ought to pay substantially more attention to historical developments in their disciplines. What follows are our sense making of the study's results, although readers are likely (and more than welcome) to provide alternative and richer interpretations.

As the external review of the ASSAf (2014: 71) of the *Acta Criminologica* noted, the journal attracts little international publication interest. In this regard, a positive trend is that the number of publications from non-South African scholars appears to be recovering from the slump experienced a decade ago (from four percent to ten percent of all publications). It is of concern that very few contributions in the *Acta Criminologica* stem from other southern African countries (1.1%), especially given the journal's title and subtext indicating it to be a 'Southern African journal of Criminology'. However, there are other journals, for example the *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, where continental research is disseminated. At the same time, questions should be asked whether a regional journal, such as the *Acta Criminologica* ought to accommodate large volumes of publications from elsewhere, potentially at the cost of established and emerging local scholars who share and debate unique southern African crime phenomena.

Due to its large number of lecturing and research staff, it is reasonable that UNISA carried the bulk of publications (43.3%) over the twenty-year review period. The CRIMSA council has limited, since the early 2000s, UNISA's stake in publications to a maximum of 50 percent per issue, to which the editors clearly adhered.² Despite the preponderance of publications from UNISA, a large and rich variety of institutions contribute to the *Acta Criminologica*, thus demonstrating Criminology's interdisciplinary nature and the cross-cutting dimensions of crime and criminality. One must appreciate the opulence that disciplines, such as Economics, Languages and Geography, bring to the Criminology table. Without a doubt such insights, which some scholars may perceive as parochial, add to the ever-expanding interest in crime and responses to criminal behaviour.

The time-trend analysis shows shifts in the stake of universities regarding publication frequency. For example, UFS and UKZN show a steady increase in publications – and thus exposure of their work – over the twenty-year period. At the same time, contributions by UP have decreased from 22 percent (1998-2001) to one percent (2010-2013), which could be ascribed to the institution's strategic drive towards broader international recognition and ranking (UP, 2011: 5). In fact, the authors of the present article have first-hand experience of faculty management dissuading Criminology lecturers from publishing in the *Acta Criminologica*. The matter raises important questions as to international exposure (primarily for 'academic standing' purposes) vis-à-vis disseminating local research to local audiences that are familiar with and (similarly) engage with the uniqueness of crime and criminality in South Africa.

Noteworthy shifts are evident in the collaborative nature of publications in the *Acta Criminologica*. Although more than half of all articles (53.6%) were single-authored, the trend has declined from 65 percent (1994-1997) to 51 percent (2010-2013). Over the same period, co-authored publications increased from 27 percent to 38 percent. A similar trend is visible in the post level of authors: professors were responsible for nearly all output (93%) in the period 1998-2001 but their contributions declined to 49 percent for the period 2010-2013. Senior lecturers and lecturers made up 31 percent and 21 percent respectively for the last period. These shifts could be ascribed to increased collaboration among scholars, mentorship

and structured skills-building programmes for young and emerging academics and increased capitalisation on student research (in other words publications stemming from postgraduate studies). The trends further suggest increased productivity among emerging lecturers and researchers, potentially so since evidence of a collaborative publication record is, *inter alia*, essential for academic standing, research funding and promotion purposes.

There is general consensus that academic journals prefer rigorous, evidence-based contributions. The study shows that empirical articles increasingly receive preference in the *Acta Criminologica*, with a sharp increase from 48 percent in 2006-2009 to 65 percent in 2010-2013. Conversely, literature-based articles decreased from 64 percent in 1998-2001 to 35 percent in 2010-2013. A directive in the *Acta Criminologica's* editorial policy and guidelines for authors quotes the Ministry of Education (2013) that research output is defined as "textual output where research is understood as original, systematic investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge and understanding". A superficial, uncritical synthesis of literature is, therefore, not considered research output and this directive may well have contributed to the decrease in literature-based articles. While empirical work increased, significant shifts in the methodological approaches of these articles are noted. Quantitative articles decreased substantially over the twenty-year period (from 76% to 39%), while qualitative work increased (from 24% to 45%). It is noteworthy that publications with mixed-methods research increased from zero percent to 16 percent. The reasons for these shifts are not clear. We speculate that it could be due to scholars conducting exploratory work in order to understand unique crime phenomena, such as rhino poaching, farm attacks, witchcraft and labour disputes. The situation may not be that unique, since critique locally and abroad about the quantitative-qualitative rift draws attention to the vices of number-crunching at a sanitised distance and mathematicisation in research at the cost of data gathering with real people (*cf.* Rock, 2012; Marks, 2012). It is, therefore, not surprising that survey designs lost significant ground (from 77% in 1998-2001 to 41% in 2010-2013) in favour of case study designs (up from 18% in 1998-2001 to 46% in 2010-2013). In the light of the ascendancy of qualitative publications, specifically case studies, one can expect that non-probability sampling procedures will feature strongly. However, the data shows an increase in probability sampling strategies (from 22% in 2006-2009 to 35% in 2010-2013), thus suggesting that quantitative publications are increasingly based on data from randomised samples. This is a positive development in light of the external review of the *Acta Criminologica* calling for increased analytical content (ASSAf, 2014: 71).

A variety of information sources have been consulted over the twenty-year period, which is expected and justified given the interdisciplinary nature and multiple study fields of Criminology. Police officials featured as a prominent study population (16.5%), which explains why police/policing prevailed as a major research theme in publications (15%). Moreover, police/policing-themed articles increased substantially from 16 percent in 2006-2009 to 23 percent in 2010-2013. The reason for the increase is not clear, although thematic shifts have been ascribed to the preferences of editors (*cf.* Blancher et al., 2010: 142). In addition, themes appear to gain prominence alongside legislative developments. For example, youth offending (which includes diversion and the development of the Child Justice Act) was a major research theme in the early 2000s (eight percent of all publications) but it decreased to only one percent in 2010-2013. Over and above these observations, there is virtually no clear trend in terms of the research themes of most articles. As mentioned, the category 'crime typologies' represents a large number of fairly unique themes that fall outside the ambit of clear-cut categorisations. Many of these themes portray the uniqueness of crime and responses to crime in South Africa. Our analysis, therefore, concurs with Rock's observation (2011: 38) that our discipline is characterised by "pluralism, diversity and hybridity". Ironically, the unique research foci of South African Criminology are not always of interest to international journals. In fact, attempts by the present authors and colleagues to publish

internationally, for example on car guarding and ATM bombings, have had minimal success with editors and editorial boards considering such themes as of little international interest.

The main research themes published in the *Acta Criminologica* (among others, police/policing, victims/victimisation, offenders and crime prevention) ought to convey important messages for policy and practice. However, the results suggest minimal work in this regard, with less than a third of publications (30.4%) incorporating policy matters in research. A number of authors (Duffee & Maguire, 2007: 30; Marks, 2012: 1; Robinson, 2005: 228) critique the absence of Criminology when policies about crime and crime control are formulated. Policies may well not be effective if they are not informed by evidence-based research. Robinson (2005: 228), is particularly harsh in criticising researchers in Criminology as being preoccupied with staking out a position in academia, rather than making a real difference by becoming part of policy making and pursuing social justice. Furthermore, in the light of its distinctly academic nature and roughly 120 paying subscribers, the limited reach of the journal may well hamper communicating results to decision-makers and practitioners. It is of equal concern that even fewer articles (20.3%) meaningfully engaged theory in the discussion of results, with extremely few publications (3.7%) per se grappling with theory and theory development. The results further show that the theories employed in local research almost exclusively rely on Western perspectives, with very limited theory development advancing indigenous understandings of crime and criminality. Criminology has a rich theoretical tradition and it is not clear why only a few researchers tap from this theoretical treasure chest in order to meaningfully understand and explain their empirical results.

We acknowledge that our endeavour with the historical review of the *Acta Criminologica* will not be without criticism, specifically so regarding the categorisation of research themes. Refinement of the tools and methods we used in the study is open to scrutiny and forms part of broader academic discourses in shaping and strengthening our discipline. Our contention is that moves towards understanding developments in Criminology over time ought to receive sustained, regular attention. We hope that the present study sets the tone for many such inquiries into Criminology and related disciplines, also extending to matters of curriculum content, research niches across institutions of higher education, and influences of the discipline on society and responses to crime.

CONCLUSION

The authors wish to reiterate that the present review of the *Acta Criminologica* should not be perceived as an exercise that judges the quality of publications in the journal, but rather an appraisal of what we have done and where we are (should be) going. The study is not a product that belongs to the authors; it is a work in progress that we hope researchers in Criminology and related disciplines will take ownership of in order to amplify and augment our understanding of the discipline, as well as the manner in which we engage with crime, victimisation and the real world. To the authors, the historical review was a self-indulgent, invigorating and sobering exercise, all at the same time. We are convinced that much of the debates in the *Acta Criminologica* are vivacious, dynamic and sensible, which is evident in the recent ascendancy of empirical work. However, scholars should heed the cautionary signs that theory and policy implications should receive more prominence in publications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We offer some recommendations to facilitate endeavours of this ilk. Information such as the origin of publications and the post level of authors should be consistently reported for each article. The objective categorisation of themes could be simplified by requesting authors themselves to indicate the broad theme of their contributions. Empirical work must be accompanied with lucid and rigorous descriptions of the units of analysis and research methods used. The journal should consider clear instructions to authors, in the editorial

policy, to pay pertinent attention to the inclusion of theoretical frameworks and the implications of the work for policy, training and practice.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The authors acknowledge that the historical review of the *Acta Criminologica* is limited by their own interpretations and judgements. Other researchers may consider different methodological procedures, in particular the categorisation of the themes of publications. In addition, the results of the study (especially the significant differences) could be subject to temporal effects. Importantly, the study is by no means intended as a reflection of Criminology research in South Africa, since technical reports, grey literature, postgraduate and contract research did not form part of this limited study. As mentioned, scholars publish in a wide variety of other local and international journals.

Future researchers are advised to investigate more rigorously matters related to the post-level of authors and author productivity, specifically with gendered and transformation focuses in mind. Lastly, qualitative work should accompany quantitative analyses so as to broaden understandings of developments in the journal. The views and experiences of current and previous editors, members of the editorial board and authors ought to form part of a more comprehensive appreciation of the *Acta Criminologica*.

ENDNOTES

1. Due to space constraints, it is impossible to list all contributing institutions (or categories) hence the percentages of some figures do not necessarily add up to 100 percent.
2. From 2016, however, new higher education legislation limits the contributions of publishing universities to a maximum of 25 percent per issue. In other words 75 percent of articles published in an edition must emanate from multiple institutions/universities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015).

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