

Secured Electronic System for Safe Police Case Records Management to Support Judicial Judgments in South Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate a secure system for the proper management of police case records to support judicial judgments in South Africa. The objective of the study was to establish a secure system for proper management of police case records to support judicial judgements in South Africa, determine the security of records on the system during creation and management, find out the kind of system for records creation and management, and identify participants' education and experience. Manual paper-based records management has always been the cause of many problems in the entire judicial system in Africa, such as causing a delay in finalising some cases, or some cases being closed or dropped due to a lack of or unavailability or accessibility of required evidence. The study applied a qualitative approach to employ an interview data-collection technique to collect qualitative data from a purposively sampled population based on the knowledge and experience acquired by candidates as senior officers in nine police stations under the Tshwane Municipality in Gauteng Province of South Africa. The findings revealed that police stations are still utilising or applying a manual mode of records management with records created and managed in a paper-based format. The study

presents a proposed framework that will help policing institutions across the world in the benchmarking development of their secure electronic system for safe police case records management to support judicial judgements in their countries.

Keywords: Police Case, Records Management System, Records Security, Judiciary Judgements Support, South Africa.

Introduction and Background

Benton and Sexton (2024) underscore that “in the last 20 years, several initiatives have been introduced across the criminal justice system in an attempt to improve the delivery of information and support services for victims of crime”. However, proper management of records has been a serious problem across different organisations, especially public bodies from days in memorial. This always results in the further victimisation of the victims in the process of accountability and judgment, especially when it comes to criminal judgment and resolutions. Police case records may also be referred to as court records since they are also used as a vital resource in a court of law’s legal proceedings (Mosweu and Mosweu, 2018; Motsaathebe and Mnjama, 2009b). Motsaathebe and Mnjama (2009b: 133) further underscore that these records are created by different role players in the legal workflow, including legal administrative staff, police, court and public prosecutors. Mosweu and Mosweu (2018) further underscore that such records are not only used by the court of law per se but also by other professionals for different reasons, such as the development of policies to be applied

in decision-making. Other users may include legal researchers, legal practitioners and policymakers for informing their decisions in their respective business responsibilities and activities. They further elaborate that proper records management is crucial to ensure authenticity in the information contained and, more importantly, to ensure that legal decisions taken in court proceedings have the ability to avoid biasness (Mosweu and Mosweu, 2018).

The introduction of technology such as artificial intelligence may come with many advantages, although it does have its disadvantages. This may include a quick or timely legal system, informed court judgments, fair and reasonable decisions and many more. "The use of technologies reduces delays, improves economic efficiency and effectiveness and promotes confidence in the justice system" (Mosweu and Mosweu, 2018). The use of technology in the management of police case records as a fundamental legal resource will ensure the appropriate serving of justice in the country, especially for vulnerable victims of crime (Saman and Haider, 2012). Technology will bring about proper maintenance of records characteristics, such as availability, accuracy, authenticity, reliability and trustworthiness that will assure timeous court judgement, which will assure a reliable judicial system (Motsaathebe and Mnjama, 2009a). Records availability and authenticity are crucial for serving justice to all citizens in the country. The manual form of records management will never be discharged without errors, and that affects justice delivery more often in the legal proceedings, with either delays or questionable content authenticity, as also alluded to by several authors such as Odima (2014), Abioye (2014), Lowry (2013), Mosweu (2012), Mukembo (2000), Ngoepe and Makhubela (2015), and Motsaathebe and Mnjama (2009b). In most instances, organisations that are operating manually with a traditional mode of records management usually face challenges such as misfiling and misplacement of records in files, delays in the retrieval of records, and difficulties in locating files containing records in required records on the shelves in filing cabinets, which results in litigations by clients (Mosweu, 2012; Motsaathebe and Mnjama, 2009b; Namakula, 2016; Ngoepe and Makhubela, 2015). The best way to face such challenges is through the introduction of technology by managing such valuable records electronically with systems such as those with artificial intelligence applications (Doma, 2016; Mosweu, 2012; Ramadhani, 2010; Saman and

Haider, 2012).

The study by Mosweu and Mosweu (2018) discovered that most of the countries in Africa automated their court systems, although the implementation may not be in good order. Some of the reasons for automation of the court systems were found to be curbing missing files and turn-around time in the provision of information for public interest. The other reasons discovered include timely file updates, information sharing and management. Through the automated system, information is captured, stored and retrieved automatically on the workflow. At the end, it provides for enhanced service delivery regarding court proceedings (Mosweu and Mosweu, 2018).

Problem Statement

Police dockets contain critical information that is used for legal proceedings in the court of justice. The problem that led to this study is that case records, or dockets in respective police stations, remain the central cause of justice delay and justice denial in the country for different courts of justice at different levels. In most instances, the court is led to the wrong decision or is unable to give judgment because evidence is missing or cannot be found. In some instances, records as key evidence to give judgment are discovered to have been tampered with by unidentified persons. This, as a result, leads to the victim of crime becoming even more victimised than healed or recovering from wounds of crime, because they will never be satisfied or happy until the culprit is convicted and charged accordingly. Poor records management also leads to delays in the finalisation of judicial cases (Mosweu and Mosweu, 2018). This also puts service delivery in a negative light, with its institutional reputation being affected. It keeps the institution rendering service delivery in disrepute. Therefore, this study aims to investigate a system that can manage police case records to an extent that access and retrieval are done timeously and safely with ease to support the judicial function by ensuring the availability of records at any time when required by authorised officials, as also proposed by Motsaathebe and Mnjama (2009a).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate a secure system for the proper management of police case records to support judicial judgments in South Africa.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

- Establish a secure system for the proper management of police case records to support judicial judgments in South Africa.
- Determine the security of records on the system during creation and management.
- Find out the kind of system for records creation and management.
- Identify participants' education and experience.

Literature Review

A police records management system must have an interface that is excellent, information search functionality that is comprehensive, and many other functionalities that describe records through metadata. It must enable the police force to discharge their mandate of storing, securing and tracking records movement for further retrieval in the near future. The system must capture records and/or data about police incidents, tickets, other crime evidence and records related to any subjects (Ricoh Team, 2023). A police records management system must have required diversity in its functions to support pre-trial investigation. The system diversity must cover the required activities or tasks for each official required to do something on the workflow, and the management of records created during the course of action. The system functionalities must cover business activities in the processes and documentation of such activities. Otherwise, it may be useless to the crime investigation (Valtonen, 2007).

In order for the police to have their records properly managed, accessible and usable, there will be a need to apply "a good police records management system" that will be able to ensure a good maintenance of standards. The system must be able to keep records centrally for proper access by all authorised stakeholders for discharging their policing mission. The police records management system must meet certain requirements for it to be suitable for adoption and use in the policing mission. These requirements include an appropriate interface, data fields that are customisable, search capabilities that are comprehensive, allow the integration or interoperability with other systems, provide dispatch that is computer-aided, have appropriate security measures for data, be an evidence management system or function that is digitised, and use advanced

analytics (Ricoh Team, 2023). The system must also meet the country's regulatory, technical and practical requirements, especially for the processes of recording (Valtonen, 2007).

System interfaces assist with training and staff onboarding, and in a way encourage users to use the system as they gain confidence throughout the process. This will help police officers to get used to the system and, along the way, master its functionalities. A customisable data field may allow officers to adjust or reshape data elements according to their reporting and data-capturing needs. For instance, police officers may collect and capture information of different kinds of cases altogether and in a way, they must be able to adjust the data elements per kind of case on the system (Ricoh Team, 2023). The system must also assist or enable multi-institutional collaboration with integration and interoperability possibilities. It must also be capable of identifying and rectifying errors in the documentation or recording while also dealing with privacy matters by hiding identifiers with anonymity to unauthorised people with a particular access purpose rather than dealing with the cases (Plecas et al., 2011). However, the system must also be capable of protecting the information against corrupt police officers in a manner that is proactive, to avoid interference with the authenticity of information created in the docket system. The system needs to have the capability to immediately report or flag such incidents or activities to appropriate authorities for immediate actions (CCJ, 2021; Freemon, 2024; Walker and Archbold, 2018). When a crime occurs, it requires both reactive and proactive actions; therefore, the system needs to have functionalities with qualities to support such actions from officers.

The system must also have comprehensive search capabilities to prevent officers from struggling to get what they need in the system. The search functionality must be robust to ensure that the turnaround time is acceptable in retrieving records or generating a report. The system must make provision for a variety in search options to provide outputs or results that are accurate (Ricoh Team, 2023). The system must also be integrated for interoperability with other organisational systems containing critically useful data to avoid data or records that are managed and analysed in silos (Plecas et al., 2011; Ricoh Team, 2023), but sharing of information must be controlled across different institutions (Plecas et al., 2011). This will ensure easy and quick access and analysis of results for serving

justice in an acceptable time interval. It is critical that all systems contain related data or evidence that “talk to each other” to aid officers. Computer-aided dispatch (CAD) in the system assists officers in sharing relevant information about any reported or observed incident or case, with details about the location or area. This kind of system technology replaces the old mode of radio communication (Ricoh Team, 2023).

Normally, the modern and advanced records management system comes with an embedded CAD system as one package, which saves time and energy for officers and brings efficiency in their records for reporting and evidence in their cases. The system also needs security measures for records and/or data safety against theft, misuse, disasters, software attacks and any other hazards that may lead to the loss of information and records. The system must have restrictions for record amendments and sharing by unauthorised personnel, and ensure effective access control to the data sources with appropriate encryption technologies (Liou, 2019; Ricoh Team, 2023). The system must also keep digital evidence for different activities on the system with cameras and microphones in the field, and record storage. Evidence about records sharing must also be kept through a digitised evidence management system. Data analytics must be able to give information or reports about the kinds of records kept in the system, the frequency of usage and users. It will also help in analysing the frequency or dominance in the types of cases based on the information captured (Ricoh Team, 2023).

There is a need for a web-based records management system for police records. The system must support officers with built-in visual analytics for decision-making that is based on evidence to ensure strong public security. The system must be capable of analysing data based on different levels of government for efficient policing services. Each officer must be able to access information in the system using his or her own login credentials for capturing or retrieving information for work purposes and generate reports for analysis of crimes with details such as locations, information-sharing and predictive policing (UNDP, 2022). The system application supports the digitalisation of police business processes, bringing crime analysis into the digital era. It is also bridging geographical divides within countries, by allowing virtual access to records and reporting from anywhere in the country – with important impacts on efficiency and citizen

safety” (UNDP, 2022).

In policing, records management is used as a cornerstone for the management and building of cases under investigation. Although a records management system needs to be managed as well, more importantly, one needs to focus to a great extent on managing the records themselves. A records management system needs integration of both the case management system and law records management system, since together the two serve different law enforcement purposes for different departments such as the sheriff, police, public safety and investigative units. A records management system is a system that enables the entire organisation to store, retrieve, retain, manipulate, archive and view law enforcement operational records or information or data throughout their life span. In this instance, records created from different organisational activities are captured in the same system to serve different organisational purposes. Records stored in the system may be used for awareness of dominant incidents around the area, inform strategies, fight specific kinds of crime, support citizens for insurance claims, and be used for documentation purposes. The system will also simplify the process of reporting crime at different levels of government, as it breaks down to ensure proactivity in preventing and fighting it (Gunningham and Algatt, 2024). This kind of system may assist institutions or governments in curbing corruption and policing systems that are not effective in helping with anything. It will also bring about community partnerships with policing officials and support policing proactivity in identifying problems or crime before it happens, and will help with problem-solving and decision-making (Liou, 2019). To make it even simpler, the government may consider creating an open data policy within their communities. This will enable them to ensure that crime is exposed in different affected communities in advance. This will also help in building community trust for the law enforcement officers and may even lead to the establishment of a collaborative relationship. Although organisations may have a records management system, they still need a case management system since the record management system (RMS) only keeps and manages records, but the case management system (CMS) is also capable of analysing the information stored in the RMS and gives police meaningful information that may help in investigations and prosecutions of suspects. CMS helps in tracing the case, showing what was done and what may be done going forward

with investigations (Gunningham and Algatt, 2024).

Working electronically may reduce or save time that may need to be spent on analysing data and report generation (UNDP, 2022). A case management system may capture information relating to incident reporting, from citizens, criminals, officers' patrols and many other sources. CMS may also help in managing investigations by assigning, collaborating and monitoring cases that may be somewhat too complex. RMS captures and organises data to make it useful for reporting, arrest management and administrative functions management. CMS may also help in managing operations like personnel, tasks, follow-ups, evidence and best practice compliance (Gunningham and Algatt, 2024). The old technology introduced in the twentieth century for policing was capable of identifying multi-shot pistols, and the identification of criminals through systematic photographs, and the use of telephones and telegrams. Such systems also had an embedded classification system for fingerprints, a crime laboratory for police, radios with two-way or one-way communication, automobiles, a polygraph, radar, a machine for processing data electronically, the computer-assisted dispatching system, an emergency call system, riot control technologies, a system for automatic identification of fingerprints, a crime-mapping computer and crime-analysing patterns, and DNA-testing evidence. The system also used a global positioning system (GPS) for computer-aided dispatch. These are just a few examples (Liou, 2019). CMS must be capable of integrating data from different operational systems, including RMS (Gunningham and Algatt, 2024).

CMS often includes workflow management features, allowing investigators to track the progress of a case from initiation to closure. It facilitates collaboration among different departments and individuals involved in the investigation... RMS is more centred on recording and organising data, making it efficient for routine tasks like generating reports, managing arrests, and handling administrative functions. However, it may not offer the same level of support for complex investigations. (Gunningham and Algatt, 2024).

In the twentieth century, "police organisations have used various technologies to analyse data, record crimes, conduct investigations, respond to crises, protect citizens, prevent crimes and promote public safety" (Liou, 2019). The police service requires a system that can analyse different kinds

of information or evidence in different formats, including images, videos and text. This will enable officers to electronically analyse crime on the same media. This will save them the time of going through every little piece of evidence in different formats and media. They need a system that will enable them to connect the dots based on available data, based on the locations or places, behaviour patterns and so forth. The system must also allow collaboration and sharing of data among colleagues working together on similar and/or related cases. The system must also help in the consolidation of all evidence and related information to put together an investigative report. "Law enforcement software that offers both RMS integration and robust case management capabilities can help you improve incident reporting, clearance rates, community relationships and overall public safety" (Gunningham and Algatt, 2024).

In the management of police case records, there is always a need for a system made up of software that is used by law enforcement officers in keeping and retrieving the records during the business process. It is always important for the organisation to ensure that when records are produced digitally, the system for managing such records is digital, and this applies to all other formats of records (Axon, 2023). The system also needs to be integrative regarding diversity in terms of records and recording mediums and formats to cover different kinds of records like videos and papers, from multifaceted tasks (Liou, 2019). For instance, in case the records are created in a multifaceted format, the technology applied must bring about a system that is also made to accommodate all the different formats produced. The records may contain information about patrol reports, hand-over reports, criminal activities discovered, reports about victims and suspects, criminal evidence collected and arrests, to name only a few. An effective records management system, whether electronic or manual, must be capable of integrating or merging together all the records in different formats into the same folder or system slots. The system must be capable of keeping police case records throughout its life span, from the creation stage to the end when the records are no longer useful for legal proceedings and considered due for disposal (Axon, 2023).

A records management system will assist officers in analysing data from their records and also computing information if it is stored digitally (8-10 Systems 2024: Liou, 2019). A records management

system must be capable of embracing all records management functions throughout the life span. These include, but are not limited to, records “storage, retrieval, retention, manipulation, archiving, and viewing of information, records, documents, or files pertaining to law enforcement operations” (LEITSC, 2003). The system must generally provide functionalities for all activities involved in records management as well as reporting strategies. In the case of policing services, records that need to be managed include those containing information about, among other things, “incident and accident reports, arrests, citations, warrants, case management, field contacts, and other operations-oriented records” (LEITSC, 2003).

In developing a records management system for the organisation, you have many things that need careful consideration. One of these things is the system interface, which represents the appearance and functionalities of the system. This contributes to a great extent to the usage or preference of users to use the system. It entails the appearance of the system on the screen, and functionalities with buttons to click in capturing, storing, maintaining and retrieving the records. This also contributes a lot to the user-friendliness of the system. It must be common or not difficult to identify which button to click for any functionality to encourage the adoption and use of the system (Axon, 2023).

The other thing that needs to be accommodated in the police system is computer-aided dispatch (CAD) integration. This is part of the system creating records about officers’ communication in their course of action and the discharge of their functions. During patrol or crime prevention and crime reactions, officers use this kind of system to communicate with each other about the kind of action to be taken, by whom, how, where and what is discovered where, when and how. This makes communication of officers convenient during the course of action as they are able to quickly share information about what happened and what should be done in which area, especially during the crime reaction moment. CAD may either be introduced with the system during creation or just be integrated into the system (Axon, 2023; Liou, 2019).

The other requirement for a police records keeping system is a data field that is easy to customise. This is simply a records management field customisation. The system must allow the data field or management fields to be customised with the records management

business process and activities. For instance, there may be a need for records capturing, organising, arranging, classification, transfer, retrieval and disposal. This implies that the system must be able to be customised toward these requirements (Axon, 2023).

The other important feature for the system is record security. This will help police institutions to avoid data or information theft or misuse and destruction, whether deliberately or by mistake. The security features for a police records system must be capable of preventing negative effects from misconduct of some officers, records attached from outside the business, or natural disasters, among other things. The system may also be programmed to keep confidential information secret or private, such as that requiring redaction for restricted age group members. Also, the system must have some encryption to avoid access by intruders. Generally, access to police case records needs to be controlled since these carry very sensitive information in most cases. The intention is to maintain the characteristics of such records, like their authenticity, integrity, reliability, trustworthiness and usability among others (Axon, 2023). The system must also be capable of “reducing criminal victimisation; calling offenders to account; reducing fear and enhancing personal security; guaranteeing safety in public spaces” (Liou, 2019).

In most instances, the system must only allow a single data entry for the records capturing to avoid duplications, to save time and energy for other responsibilities during retrieval. Normally, records are filed or arranged and organised using a system-generated number or code, whether electronically or manually. The system may also offer a spellcheck and text-formatting service, especially if records are captured in the form of narratives or text rather than a documented PDF or other formats. However, if the records capture is in document form, then each record will be captured with its appropriate metadata, which may also be spellchecked. During the capturing, the system may also be programmed to validate data upon entry to see that it is logical and free from errors. The system must also allow multiple access to the same records at the same time with different workstations to permit productivity for officers in their different tasks. The system may also make provision for other stakeholders to automatically access the records through the system, such as the office of the prosecutors and correctional services, to name only a few. Some systems are born with a data analytics

functionality to allow police officers to manage their time for different responsibilities or tasks. In some instances, data analytics may also assist officers in analysing data in their investigations (Axon, 2023).

Finally, the Industrial Revolution brought about many sophisticated technologies. One of these is cloud computing, which brought about many advantages in record storage, including security and remote access. As the population grows and the number of residential areas grows, the police service will also spread its wings with the introduction of many stations and satellites. In this instance, they do not have to struggle with records storage, maintenance and access. This must not come as a burden to increase their turnaround time for these kinds of administrative activities. Cloud computing will allow them to access and store their records using different kinds of technologies like smartphones, tablets and laptops. Cloud computing will bring about sophisticated security measures and shorten the time for records management and retrieval. With this kind of technology, police officers will be able to enjoy the luxury of their time, and tasks will be accomplished without much struggle anywhere and anytime as their job requires them (Axon, 2023).

Methodology

This case study used a qualitative approach to explore the cause of the problem and solutions to remedy the situation based on the explanation, experiences, interpretations, reasoning, motivations and views of the people affected by the situation under study (Creswell, 2014: 11–12).

This study was a multiple case study as it targeted more than one police station, that is, ten police stations within the Gauteng province. The population of this study entailed records management officers, police officers and guidelines for records creation and management at different levels in ten police stations within the Gauteng province. This is because police officers are the ones creating records and using information created in the records to prove the cases, and they are the ones affected by the records directly. Records management officers are responsible for the management of records to support police cases with information.

This study applied purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling method for the interviews, coupled with a convenience sampling method. This was to ensure that the researcher purposively includes people who appear to be knowledgeable

about the issues under study (Kumar, 2019) and that only available officers are accommodated. This implies that even though officers are identified for participation based on the researcher's judgement that they are knowledgeable about the situation under study (Kothari, 2004; Kumar, 2019), it still depends on whether the selected participants are available to participate or not due to other commitments in their work. The interview sample covered ten police stations within the Gauteng province due to the researcher's proximity for accessibility. Participants were purposively sampled per rank in ten police stations. From each of the ten police stations, the researcher targeted at least one senior management commissioned officer, a commissioned officer, or a non-commissioned officer, and one records management officer (head/representative).

In this study, data were collected using interviews, observation and content (documents/system) analysis as some of the common tools normally applied in social science studies (Ngulube, 2020). Using more than one data-collection tool and technique eliminates bias, weaknesses and errors, which also strengthens the study's findings and recommendations (Creswell, 2007). In conducting the interviews, the researcher requested a meeting with the heads of records management and police officers at supervisory or senior levels to have a conversation regarding the issues under study as guided by the research objectives (Bless et al., 2013). In conducting the Data-collection techniques, the researcher observed the state of records management for police case records in terms of maintenance, circulation (usage), safety and security, access and control, disaster management, and recovery and disposal. In conducting content analysis, the researcher assessed systems and guidelines used for records creation and management and those that are used to study the cause and effects of the problem under study in line with the specific objectives. During the process, data were reviewed, interpreted and presented (Creswell, 2009).

The study applied thematic data analysis by creating themes from objectives and addressing each theme with appropriate data and literature. For interview data, participants were coded to properly present their responses verbatim using quotation marks, and for observation and content analysis, data were presented under each appropriate theme addressing a particular objective. Data were arranged, organised, cleaned and presented thematically per

objective (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). The findings were also published with pseudonyms to hide the names of the target institutions and participants, to allow a contribution to the body of knowledge and assist other related institutions.

Presentation of the Findings

Due to the protection of personal identifiable information for institutions and participants, the study used pseudonyms for both police stations (target institutions) and participants who took part in the study. In this study, police stations are coded as Police Station 1 to 9, and the participants for the interviews are coded as Participant 1 to 9 for officials working in the dockets filing custodies.

Participants' Education and Experience

Participants were requested to provide information about their qualifications and experience. The responses from policing participants were as follows:

Police Participant 1 stated: "My work title is sergeant. I am 16 years in the field, my highest qualification is matric."

Police Participant 2 stated: "I am a warrant officer and I have only 8 months in this police station. My highest qualification is standard 10."

Police Participant 3 stated: "I am appointed as a sergeant, holding a national diploma in policing and currently doing a National diploma in policing."

Police Participant 4 stated: "I have 15 years of service and a BA in policing."

Police Participant 5 stated: "I am 15 years in the field of policing with matric and in-field training."

Police Participant 6 stated: "I hold a sergeant position with 15 years of service, and I completed a diploma in policing with small courses in SAPS."

Police Participant 7 stated: "I am a warrant officer and served for almost 25 years. My qualifications include grade 12 and a diploma in policing with many short courses in SAPS."

Police Participant 8 stated: "I have 29 years in the field of policing and my qualification is a national diploma in policing."

Police Participant 9 stated: "I am a commander with 34 years of policing service, holding a BTech

degree in policing."

The interview also covered participants working with records management. The responses from police case records (dockets) management participants were as follows:

Records Participant 1 stated: "I am a Senior registration Admin officer with 30 years in policing."

Records Participant 2 stated: "I am a Captain with 30 years of service, I have a B-tech degree."

Records Participant 3 stated: "I am a sergeant with 15 years in police service. I have a national diploma in policing."

Records Participant 4 stated: "I am a sergeant with 29 years' experience in police service. I have a B.Tech in policing and am now busy with honours."

Records Participant 5 stated: "I am a docket admin clerk with 3 years in the organisation and I have matric."

Records Participant 6 stated: "I am 15 years in the field and currently appointed as sergeant."

Records Participant 7 stated: "30 years in police service and standard 10."

Records Participant 8 stated: "I am a sergeant who served SAPS for 22 years with a policing diploma."

Records Participant 9 stated: "I am a warrant officer and I have been in SAPS for 16 years now."

Kind of System for Records Creation and Management

It was observed that there is no electronic system used in the police stations for record creation. Instead, officers create case records by interviewing clients face-to-face and writing them down using a pen and paper, which is then filed. A content analysis report indicates that the information captured at the police station with clients includes personal, demographic and case incident information. Participants were requested to answer a question about the kind of system used for the creation and management of police case records. Responding to the question about the records creation system, participants replied as follows:

Police Participant 1 stated: "The station works on pen and paper; we write on paper when taking statements from victims and suspects."

Police Participant 4 stated: "In policing, we do not

have the luxury of a computer; a statement is created with handwriting on paper.”

Police Participant 5 stated: “I am appointed as a sergeant, holding a national diploma in policing and currently doing a National diploma in policing.”

Police Participant 7 stated: “We are writing in paper dockets, we are taking statements or capturing any important information for the case.”

Police Participant 8 stated: “The procedure is that information must be captured by writing using pen and paper in the file for each case.”

Participants responding about the system for records management provided the following responses when asked about the kinds of systems they use:

Records Participant 4 stated: “We are still working manually in paper-based format and medium.”

Records Participant 5 stated: “Our system is not electronic since we are still filing in boxes and shelves, which is very hard and risky.”

Records Participant 8 stated: “The station is still very far from modern technology; we are stuck to paper-based records management.”

Records Participant 9 stated: “The system is still very manual, and I do not see it changing soon.”

Security of Records on the System During Creation and Management

Content analysis shows that most of the stations do not have access to records management guidelines since the majority were not able to produce the guidelines, and others are not aware of their existence. This was discovered when we started requesting them and realised officers cannot produce. It was observed that records are vulnerable to many security hazards. That is because there is no access control, although there is burglar proofing; there is no ventilation system, no fire and water disaster preventive measures, and the wrong fire extinguishers are installed, that is, using water and foam. Some buildings are not suitable for recordkeeping due to the vacuum space. There are no records of a disaster management plan. Participants were asked questions regarding the security of records in the current system, keeping in mind access control, disaster management, risk management and movement tracking for the records. Some of the participants replied as follows regarding security at the records creation stage:

Police Participant 3 stated: “Working manually is

always challenging because during the course of work we may not always focus on the file, especially when attending to other issues in the process, so anything can happen.”

Police Participant 4 stated: “Working with paper is always challenging because files may get stolen along the process when focusing on other things or clients.”

Police Participant 5 stated: “It does not happen too frequently, but records may always get stolen, whether in a charge office or in the vehicle during fieldwork.”

Police Participant 6 stated: “Sometimes in the car file may get damaged in an accident, and it is not always easy to control access, but we try our best as officers.”

Police Participant 7 stated: “At least at the charge office, we have a counter preventing full access to customers, but other colleagues may have access to any of the records under creation behind the counter.”

Police Participant 8 stated: “To be honest, our information is confidential and remains vulnerable to damage and theft in its current form.”

In case of officials dealing with case records management in respective police stations, participants provided the following answers:

Records Participant 1 stated: “Unlike electronic, paper-based records management has never been safe for any situation, be it access control, risk and security, disaster management and other perils.”

Records Participant 3 stated: “To be honest, the station needs an electronic records management system for it to be safe from any hazard like disaster because there are many risks and security matters with the current paper-based system.”

Records Participant 4 stated: “Our security system is very basic or minimal for our record storage because we only rely on bugler proofs and access is not well controlled against other colleagues not working with records.”

Records Participant 5 stated: “Records are not safe here because of insufficient space; they are squeezed and congested. Also, ventilation is not controlled well. At times, locating one file is a struggle, especially for files that are

required urgently.”

Records Participant 6 stated: “With a paperwork file may always disappear without any ability to trace, and that to me is a high risk.”

Records Participant 9 stated: “Physical files get lost very easily because anyone can pick them up anywhere and anytime and use them for any purpose, whether positive or negative to the station or government, and that is a high risk.”

Discussion

Police case records are created and managed manually at each police station. They do not have any electronic system, whether for the creation or for the management of their case records. The exception is a recently developed backup system for scanning dockets immediately after creation, and the system is only used in a situation when the docket cannot be found in the storage or is missing. Safety and security measures are crucial for any business record, but are even more critical for police case records for judicial judgment in court. Records management in the police stations for dockets is still discharged manually in a paper-based format. Security measures are not appropriate to safeguard the case dockets against any dangerous hazards like fire and water disasters, and ventilation problems like ultraviolet rays, humidity and temperature, among others. Records are vulnerable to security threats because access control is a problem everywhere, including the creation stage in the charge office or reception and in police vehicles when in the field. The other high-risk factor is that officials working for records management do not have access to guidelines and other working documents. In other words, one may conclude that they work without being guided by any policy. Policies are not available for the management of records, but instead, the head office provides a guideline that is electronically available online through their internal systems. However, other officials are not aware of this and have never had any access to it.

Recommendations

There are a lot of things that need to be done to improve the safety and security of case records in the police stations. One of the key things is to modernise access control to the storage facility to make sure only authorised officials have access. This may be a biometric or card access system, but a biometric system is the best using current technology because with a card system,

officials may have the opportunity to share or borrow each other’s cards, or it can be used by strangers in a situation where the card gets lost or misplaced. In case the institutions remain manual for some time, they may need to install an appropriate ventilation system to regulate the temperature and humidity as required to maintain the quality of the records or prevent them from fading because of high humidity and temperature. There is a need to have measures in place for disaster prevention, fighting and recovery. These are the tools that may assist in preventing, fighting/reacting and recovering from any kind of disaster in case it happens, whether manmade or natural. These include fire, water flooding, theft, pests and many others.

However, it is highly recommended that institutions start thinking about adopting technology to avoid almost all perils to their records. It is highly recommended that institutions from the national departmental level develop a collaborative, integrative and interoperable system to ensure that every officer involved or authorised to use case information for their work has access to information with ease and without any struggle. The system may need to cover all spheres of records creation, management and use. In other words, all members responsible for creating, managing or using the information will have to be provided with access for their specific function. The study proposes an electronic system as illustrated in Figure 1 to ensure safety, security and ease of records management, access and use. According to the figure, the system needs to function at a crime investigation point in which statements are captured from victims and suspects of crime, as illustrated by **A** and **B**, respectively. At this stage, the police investigating officer is expected to conduct information-capturing interviews from each of the two parties separately. This may take place either at a police station, a charge office or at the location where the information provider, as victim or suspect, is located. This will require the police to work on either a tablet or a laptop in the vehicle or at the office desk to capture information directly to the SAPS server. This implies that the working gadgets must be connected to the network at all times to avoid losing information because of any incident that may affect the gadgets, whether it be theft or damage. It is known that in the current age, most of the people in the country own smartphones with applications (apps) used for different purposes, including banking. So, as the banks do during banking processes, after capturing statements from either the victim or suspect, the system

must send a one-time pin (OTP) to the information provider with the information to proofread or listen to an audio reading and, if satisfied, enter the OTP in the system to approve the statement and save it in the organisational server. If there is something noticed to be rectified, the same process must be followed to avoid manipulation of information, as shown in C. Records may be updated with additional information across different activities from different officials working on the case, including police, the court and correctional

services. Again, at this stage, the server must be centrally positioned for access to all stakeholders responsible for activities or functions on the case, including court and correctional service officials. Records and data in the server may need to be backed up with cloud computing storage, particularly a government cloud, to ensure the confidentiality and security of information. At this point, records must be able to be accessed and utilised by all authorised individuals based on different functions and authorities as shown in D.

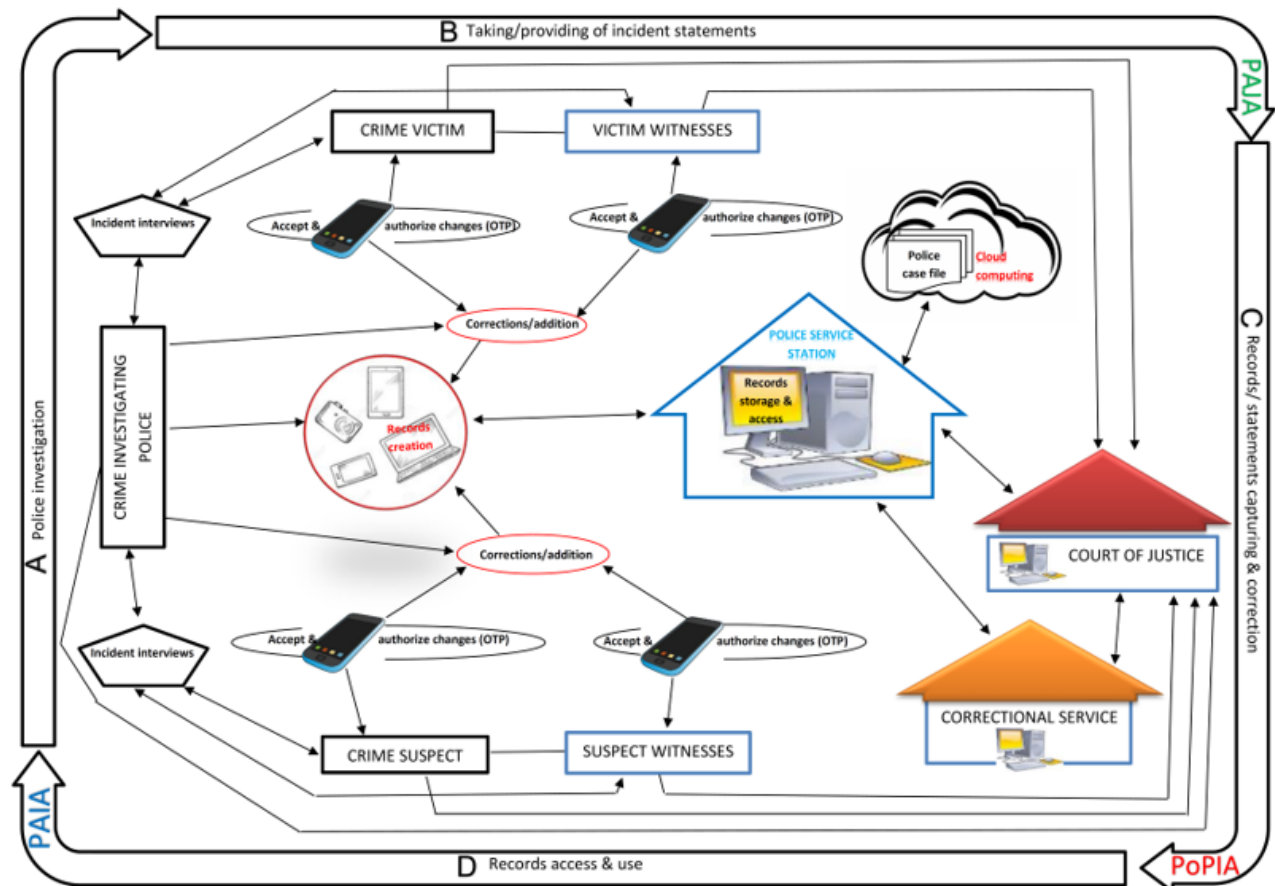


Figure 1: Framework for a Secured Police Case Records Management System to Support Judicial Judgements (Researcher 2026).

Since the system depends heavily on the legal framework for the country (De Silva et al., 2018; Jilcha and Kitaw, 2016), in developing the system, considerations must be taken into account for compliance with appropriate legislations affecting the creation and processing of information and records, especially the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA), Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPIA) and Promotion of Administrative Information Act (PAIA), and many others such as the National

Archives and Records of South Africa Act (NARSSA) and Electronic Communication and Transaction Act (ECTA). PAJA will assist in guiding users and developers on the usage of information captured for administrative accountability to clients as a victim or suspect of a crime. During system development, you must ensure that the system keeps information usable for administrative accountability. On the other hand, PoPIA will guide you on the safe collection and processing of personal information. PAIA will guide

you on controlling access to information for any reason, as captured in the system. This may technically be programmed to offer different users with different responsibilities on the workflow by different access authorities. NARSSA may also guide organisations on the general functions and activities of managing, disposing and preserving archival records. ECTA, on the other hand, will guide organisations on making electronic records and transactions in the system acceptable for legal proceedings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is hoped that the framework proposed for a secure police case records management system to support judicial judgements will help organisations in the policing and legal services to manage and keep police case records in a secure and accessible form. What is important is to ensure that records are well and securely captured, and that where they are stored is free from any tampering of any kind. Generally, records captured must be accurate, complete, authentic, reliable and valid to be used for different purposes. Records in the storage must be accessed by the right person at the right time, right place and for the right purpose or reason. It will prevent the leaking of personal information to the wrong people. This will assist the judiciary in interrupting the delay and gaps in the information that is supposed to support judgments. Cases in court will be finalised in time and with honour based on the availability of complete and accurate evidence or supporting documents. So, it is important for the department of the SAPS to relook at their information management and recordkeeping system to ensure improvements in the safety, security and accessibility of docket records and information. The new technology is here to assist and needs to be applied to make life easier. Yes, availing the new technology may be costly, but it cannot exceed the amount of loss compared to litigations relating to poor service delivery affecting citizens negatively and affecting their lives forever. It is hoped that this framework can be applicable to different countries across the world in the policing and legal service fraternity. Scholars may also use it for framing their studies as a conceptual framework.

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