

**THE PERCEPTIONS OF STATION COMMISSIONERS OF WATERBERG
DISTRICT REGARDING THE SUICIDE PREVENTION WORKSHOPS TARGETED
AT POLICE OFFICERS**

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this research report, entitled, “The perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding Suicide Prevention Workshops”, targeted at police officers, is my own work and that the report has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university. I have given full acknowledgement to the sources I have used in the research.

Sehlakwana Asnath Mashela

Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, who have already passed away, for always believing in me from my childhood stage, and to my family for being my inspiration.

ABSTRACT

The goal of the study was to explore the perceptions of the station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers. The study was conducted with the station commissioners of Waterberg District in Limpopo. The population in this study was composed of 15 station commissioners who were regarded as the sample due to the fact that the population is small. The research approach used in the applied study was a qualitative approach. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the station commissioners in order to uncover their perceptions regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops.

A theoretical background about suicide in general and police suicide was provided through a literature study. In the literature study the background information about factors contributing towards police suicide were indicated, together with methods used to commit suicide. Causes of suicide in general as compared to those of police members, were also clarified. The focus in the literature was also on gender whereby an indication was mentioned about who exactly are at risk of committing suicide. The attitude of police officers and the society's expectations and perceptions regarding police members has been discussed.

The empirical study focused on the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District in Limpopo regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers. A semi-structured one-on-one interview was held with each station commissioner on individual basis where by questions were asked about his or her perception of the Suicide Prevention Workshops.

The findings of the study revealed that station commanders appreciate the role played by social workers, chaplains and psychological services in presenting suicide prevention programmes to police officers. They indicated that at some point they fail to nominate police officers to attend the workshops because some of the subordinates are not cooperative and they might even submit sick notes in order to be excused from attending. It was also reported that if there is a shortage of personnel due to other core business of SAPS, police officers might not be nominated.

Based on the findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations were made with regard to how the suicide prevention program and workshops can be improved in SAPS.

KEY CONCEPTS

- Perceptions
- Station commissioners
- Suicide
- Suicide prevention workshops

CHAPTER 1

GENERAL ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Some people, who are experiencing stress as a result of problematic situations, ended up feeling helpless, powerless and even isolated themselves from society. Being isolated in that way has prevented them from sharing with other people, which on the other side might have made them to develop a negative attitude towards life. According to the researcher's understanding, suicidal people had the tendency to view their problematic situations as either black or white, meaning that they regarded their problems as unsolvable and saw death as the only solution. Murder and suicide were found to be common amongst members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) (De Winnaar & Taute, 2008:263). Hendricks and Byers (1996:72) indicated that police suicide, as compared to the general public was high, due to the fact that police officers have access to firearms and as a result they easily committed suicide whenever they experienced problematic situations. It was indicated by Baker and Baker (1996:24) and Hackett and Violanti (2003:58) that police officers who were experiencing stress were reluctant to report their situation, since they would have appeared to be useless and weak in front of their superiors.

Violanti (1996:59) indicated that the impact of police culture on the psychological and social functioning of police officers, has led to the increase in police suicide. The author also indicated that the police organizations inculcated in the police officers a belief to regard themselves as problem solvers, since they were responsible for eliminating crime. Due to this culture, the police officers find it difficult to seek help when they were stressed and as a result they regarded suicide as the only option. Violanti (1996:61) further made it clear that police culture had an impact on restructuring police officers' cognitive functioning. As police officers, they were not

expected to have problems or to seek help since the police image might be compromised. The researcher was of the opinion that police officers as compared to the general public were supposed to be experts in dealing with problematic situations. As a result, failing to perform according to the set standards might made both the police officer and his commander to feel helpless, and the police image would have been questioned by the society.

It has been indicated by Whisenand and Ferguson (1996:434) that police organizations were regarded as the most stressful organizations as compared to other departments. These authors also indicated that police managers were highly affected by the stress and that for them to cope; they should have maintained a stress wellness programme that will reduce stress amongst all police officials. The number of police officers who have committed suicide in Limpopo Province from 1993 to 2009 was 214 whereas the number of police officers who have committed suicide in Capricorn District (one of the districts of Limpopo Province) from 1998 to 2009 was 19 (SAPS Human Resource Statistics). In Waterberg District, five suicide attempts were reported in 2009 and 2010, whereas seven police members were reported to have committed suicide between the period 2009 and 2010 respectively.

The researcher in her duty as a social worker was expected to educate the police officers about the causes of suicide, its warning signs and the preventative measures to be taken. In focusing on the attendants' lists of the SAPS personnel who were attending the Suicide Prevention Workshops, there was a combination of police officers, administration clerks, cleaners and grounds-men. Station commissioners, as supervisors and managers of police officers were responsible for the nomination of police officers who will be attending the workshops based on the fact that the Suicide Prevention Programme has been developed as a result of an increase in police suicide.

During the informal conversations with SAPS social workers, the chaplains and the psychometrists, the station commissioners' failure to have nominated more police officers to attend the workshops was found to be a common trend that needed serious attention. Due to the nature of police work the focus seems to have been on the pressure to reduce crime, thus interventions not necessarily related to crime reduction were not taken seriously. Based on the above-mentioned factors, the researcher found it necessary to interview the station commissioners in order to determine their perceptions regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops.

Based on the above mentioned statistics, the researcher found it necessary to establish the factors influencing the station commissioners' failure to nominate more police officers to attend the workshops, as the programme has been developed as a measure to work against suicide.

1.2 PROBLEM FORMULATION

Fouché and De Vos (2005:99) indicated that the identification of the problem could be viewed as the first effort by the researcher to mould the problem into a formulated form. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:19), problems are special kinds of questions that arise for which knowledge is needed. Welman and Kruger (1999:67) mentioned that the first step in any research project is to choose a research area, and this process requires the delineation of a problem area and the description of one or more research problem(s).

Due to the increase in the suicide rate in the SAPS, the Suicide Prevention Awareness Programme was developed in the year 2000 (Reynecke & Fourie, 2001). Irrespective of the availability of the Suicide Prevention Programme within SAPS, the

police suicide is still being reported. The purpose of the Suicide Prevention Awareness Programme (2000) is to empower police officers to be able to cope with their demanding physical and mental working environment. A multi-disciplinary team approach was applied, whereby the social workers, the psychological services and the spiritual services in the SAPS were making joint efforts, to conduct workshops for police officers. During the workshops, police officers were educated about the causes, the warning signs of suicide and its prevention.

It seemed as if some of the station commissioners regarded themselves as problem solvers for police officers who were experiencing stress, and only referred them to the Employee Assistance Services (EAS) when it was too late to address their problematic circumstances. Being the social worker in the SAPS in Limpopo Province, which is divided into four districts, namely Capricorn District, Mopani District, Waterberg District and Vhembe District, the researcher was interested in conducting a research with station commanders of Waterberg district and not with the ones in Capricorn District. The main reason that influences the researcher to conduct her research with the Waterberg District and not Capricorn District is because she was not familiar with station commanders of Waterberg District and will thus be neutral in interviewing the participants. The researcher would therefore be able to present results that are valid, honest and not biased. Unlike Capricorn District, Waterberg District is composed of seventeen station commanders. A telephonic conversation was held with both the social workers and the chaplains of Waterberg District concerning the response rate of police officers during workshops, and they also complained that they were no more willing to organize workshops for police members since the response rate was always low.

As in the case of Capricorn District, the following factors were also highlighted as warning signs that police officers are experiencing problems in the Waterberg

District; alcohol abuse, high absenteeism rate and continuous bookings of sick leave days. These are some of the indicators that enabled the helping professionals within the SAPS, to assume that such police officers might be experiencing problems. According to information obtained at Registry, (one of the sub-sections of Human Resource Department), about 15 members from various components were reported to be always on sick leave on a monthly basis whereas others did not report at work for a considerable period. In confronting them, some did agree that they were indeed experiencing problems; others reacted aggressively and denied that they have problems. For those who were aggressive, the researcher would like to agree to what was reported by Hackett and Violanti (2003:67), when they indicated that police officers regarded themselves as law enforcers and problem solvers, hence they found it difficult to accept their problematic situations. As a social worker in SAPS the researcher has realized that there were those police officers who were willing to consult with the Helping Professions, but they were afraid that their commanders would regard them as failures and incompetent to deal with their own problems.

It was the researcher's opinion that the number of police officers attending the workshops should have been higher than the other SAPS personnel (e.g. administration clerks, cleaners and grounds men) based on the fact that they (police officers) were exposed to a high level of stress and they had access to firearms. The nature of their jobs also exposed them to traumatic incidents like shooting activities, death, chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS and accidents. They had to deal with violent and aggressive criminals and failure to do so might have been stressful.

According to PCM432T Police Management 1V Volume 4(1997:13), cases of suicide occurred in the SAPS as far back as 1989. It was further indicated in the report that the impact of suicide as a phenomenon required both the police officer and the

manager to participate jointly in preventing suicide. Managers in SAPS should be both pro-active and reactive in preventing police suicide. As pro-active managers they should have referred police officers to educational workshops whereby they would have been equipped with knowledge and skills of how to cope with stress and depression (National Conference on Police as victims....., 1998:151). According to the researcher's understanding of police management, station commissioners as superiors of police members, had the power to delegate duties and activities to be performed at the station level. As a result there was no way in which the police officer could have nominated himself/herself to attend the organized workshops, unless the station commissioner requested him to do so.

In reviewing the statistics of Waterberg District obtained from SAPS Human Resource Department (2010) about police suicide, 17 police officers have committed suicide from 1999 up to 2010. Most police officers have killed themselves by shooting themselves, hanging or jumping from high buildings. In reviewing police suicide statistics of Waterberg District as compared to Capricorn District from SAPS Human Resource Department (2010), the researcher has realized that in both the districts the junior non-commissioned officers in ranks of inspectors, sergeants and constables were found to be at a higher risk of committing suicide than higher ranks commissioned officers (captains and superintendents) because they were tasked to perform the police operational duties.

The non-commissioned officers were the ones exposed to the nature of police work (like shooting incidents, witnessing traumatic incidents or personal problems). The referral of cases of police officers experiencing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was found to be high with the non commissioned police officers being at the top list. According to the researcher's understanding, failure to attend to the problems at an early stage might have led to the members being exposed to PTSD, which might have contributed to suicide ideation.

Irrespective of the efforts taken by the social workers, the chaplains and the psychometrics to organize Suicide Prevention Workshops, station commissioners seemed to have failed to nominate police officers to attend those workshops. Being the social worker in SAPS, the researcher used to attend the District Core Meetings whereby station commissioners reported the level of crime combated in their stations and the success archived in ensuring that the law was being enforced. It was in those meetings where the researcher has realized that police officers were expected to perform according to the set standards.

In areas where crime statistics were found to be high, station commissioners in charge were berated by their superiors for the turn of events as it seemed to suggest that they were failing in their core duties. This message would be directly taken to the police officers on the ground, which puts more pressure on them to attempt and correct the situation. Sometimes personal reasons related to a failure to perform were often not taken into consideration.

It was the view of the researcher that in the organization the most important key performance area in SAPS was crime prevention only, and as a result, the well-being of the police officers was not often prioritized. It also appeared that the Suicide Prevention Workshops were not considered as credible in the organization as a whole, more so when crime prevention seemed to be seen as a more pressing concern than police suicides.

Based on the research findings by Baker and Baker (1996) the researcher find it necessary to interview station commissioners as police supervisors, about their perceptions regarding the existing Suicide Prevention Workshops. The findings from this research might be the first step of coming up with the appropriate support system for the affected police officers. Baker and Baker (1996:55) have emphasized

the fact that Suicide Prevention Programmes can be effective if SAPS employees were motivated to be educated about it. As a result the problem that has to be addressed by this study is the fact that police officers are not nominated as expected to participate in the Suicide Prevention Workshops that are specifically established for them.

1.3 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.3.1 Goal

The goal of this study can be formulated as follows:

To explore the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers.

1.3.2 Objectives

The following objectives have been formulated for this research:

- To provide a detailed theoretical background on suicide as a phenomenon in SAPS and in general.
- To explore the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers.
- To provide recommendations that will facilitate improvement with regard to affording police officers a chance to participate or attend the Suicide Prevention Workshops.

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTION

A research question will be applicable as compared to hypotheses in this research because of the exploratory nature of the study. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:382) a research question is mainly focused on what the qualitative researcher wants to know in his/her research. Fouché and De Vos (2005:89) have also clarified the fact that a research question should provide the answer to the question what is it that the researcher wants to achieve in the research. In this research, the research question is the following:

What are the perceptions of station commissioners regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops?

1.5 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was used in this exploratory study. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher would be able to uncover the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers.

1.6 TYPE OF RESEARCH

In this study, the researcher will use applied research. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:38) defined applied research as research whose purpose is to solve an existing problem in the community. It has been further indicated that the applied research findings can enable the researcher to come up with intervention strategies to be used in solving a practical problem.

According to Babbie (1998:338) applied research is defined in terms of its purpose. The author further indicates that the aim of applied research is to find solutions to specific concerns or problems facing particular groups of people. By using applied research, the researcher would understand the station commissioners' perceptions of the Suicide Prevention Workshops and then be in a position to formulate recommendations that would address their perceptions together with the low nomination rate. The researcher aims at providing a solution to the existing problem, based on the findings.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

1.7.1 Research design

A collective case study (Fouché & Delport, 2002:268) has been used as the researcher wanted to understand the perceptions of the station commissioners regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops.

1.7.2 Research population, sample and sampling method

Strydom and Venter (2002:198) defined the population as the totality of persons, events, organization, units, case records or other sampling units, with which the research problem is concerned. According to Trochim (2001:44) population is the group from which the researcher wishes to generalise the study and sample. The researcher regarded the population as the totality of people or objects that have characteristics that related to the topic of interest that was to be researched by the researcher. The population for this study was 15 station commissioners in Limpopo Province at the Waterberg District. As all the units of the population were regarded for participation, no sampling method was implemented as the population was too small.

1.7.3 Data collection method

By using a semi-structured interview, the researcher will be able to ask the same questions to all the station commissioners. The questions asked were divided into three categories; the profile of the participants, the respondent's knowledge of suicide, and the third category was about the Suicide Prevention Workshops (see appendix C).

1.7.4 Data Analysis

The researcher utilised Creswell's (1998) five steps in data analysis, namely, collecting and recording data, managing data, reading and writing memos, describing, classifying and interpreting data as well as representing and visualizing data.

1.8 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY

Welman and Kruger (1999:265) claimed that feasibility involved the availability and accessibility of the information and subjects of the study. Trochim (2001:26) also indicated that when determining the project's feasibility one needs to bear in mind several practical considerations. Permission to conduct the research with the station commissioners has been granted by the management of Police Social Work Service and the Senior Superintendent of Employee Assistance Services (see appendix A). Permission has also been granted to use the organization's resources such as state vehicle and office space for conducting the interviews.

Waterberg District is about 200 km away from Capricorn District and the research study took two to three weeks to be completed. Most of the police stations in this district were plus or minus 50 km away from each other. There were only two police stations that were far from the main office, and the distance travelled was 200

kilometres per single trip. The management was aware of the costs and was prepared to cover the costs to be incurred because the research study was going to benefit the organization.

Regarding the availability of participants, the researcher didn't foresee any problem since her research subjects were station commissioners. Unlike the police officers, they were always in their offices and it was not a problem to access them. The researcher liaised with them telephonically, in order to make appointments for the interviews. The permission letter issued by the management to conduct the research was also given to the participants, prior to the commencement of the interview, for confirmation that the researcher was granted the permission to conduct research.

1.9 ETHICAL ASPECTS

Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:100) defined ethical considerations as the rights of research participants to agree to participate in the research study, or to refuse to be part of it. Mouton (1996:10) mentions that the purpose of ethics of science is to provide guidelines about how people should behave in the interaction with other people during the research project. Strydom (2005:57) takes it further stating ethics are a set of moral principles that are suggested by an individual or group, are subsequently widely accepted, offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students. Ethical aspects in research are those moral values and standards that are to be observed when doing research. The following ethical aspects will be taken into consideration in this study.

- **Informed Consent**

Strydom (2005:59) defined informed consent as the participants' rights to know about the data collection methods, together with the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the research study. Research participants have the right to voluntarily participate in the research study and they should give their consent in writing. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:100) participation in research must be voluntary and the researcher should explain what the negative and positive consequences of participating in the research might be. The researcher was of the opinion that the research subjects should be informed prior to the research about what the research was all about, which data collection techniques were to be used and how the research findings will be published.

The researcher explained to the station commissioners about how demanding the research was in terms of time, and also being honest in disclosing their real perceptions of Suicide Prevention Workshops. They were also informed that they may withdraw from the research at any time if they are uncomfortable with the study (McLaughlin, 2007:62). Police culture has been structured in such a way that subordinates cannot complain about instructions given to them by their superiors, and in this research station commissioners were subordinates of the district commissioner. As a result the letter written by the district commissioner about the research has informed the station commissioners about the purpose of the research, and they voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. They were given an informed consent form to complete and an original copy has been filed by the researcher (see appendix B).

- **Harm to experimental subjects and/or respondents**

According to Strydom (2005:58) researchers should make sure that research subjects won't be physically and emotionally hurt by participating in a research. This implies that the researcher should inform the research participants about the impact the research might have on them. According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:100) at times research might involve some stressful situations which the research participants may find difficult to tolerate.

In her interview with the station commissioners, the researcher realized that some of them have witnessed suicide in the past two years at the police stations (2009-2011). It appeared to be difficult for them to deal with the past negative memories, and they became emotional. Their response was based more on anger towards the members who committed suicide, and much blame was on the management for failing to employ more EAS personnel, who would have been available at all police stations to access members. The researcher realized that debriefing was necessary and she communicated the debriefing idea with the station commissioners. Some supported the suggestion, but those who have never witnessed any suicide in their areas felt that debriefing was not necessary, so some participants were debriefed during the first week of March 2011.

- **Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity**

Strydom (2005:61) has mentioned the fact that confidentiality is the process of handling the other person's experiences and feelings in a private manner. The right of the research participant to decide about whom, what and when to reveal the information to, should be recognized and respected by the researcher. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:123) defined confidentiality in terms of reassurance by the researcher that he/she would not reveal information disclosed by the research

participants. Kaplan and Sadock (1999:12) maintained that confidentiality should always be adhered to except in cases where the subjects threaten to harm themselves or others.

The researcher's understanding of confidentiality was based on the fact that researchers should always bear in mind that it is their responsibility to treat the information revealed to them by research participants in a private manner. The way confidentiality was going to be handled, should be communicated with the research participants, so that they can feel secured. The researcher knew very well that she was not allowed to reveal the participants' information to anyone, including the District Commissioner. As a result she informed the station commissioners that their right to privacy and confidentiality will be respected. The researcher also told them that the research findings will be published but their names will not be mentioned in the research report. Kumar (2005:130) indicates that the handling of subject's identity is an important ethical consideration. The researcher informed the participants that a tape recorder will be used solely for the purpose of obtaining all the facts, but their identity will be protected as Mc Laughlin (2007:61) suggested.

- **Action and competence of researcher**

According to Strydom (2005:63) the researcher should be skilled and be experienced enough to conduct the study. She should undergo continuous supervision from the first step of writing the proposal up to the phase of conducting the research study. The researcher has completed a module on research methodology which equipped her with the relevant information, knowledge and skills to conduct the study. The study was also done under the supervision of the assigned supervisor.

- **Deception of respondents**

Deception of participants implies that the researcher gives wrong information to research participants with the whole purpose of encouraging them to participate in the research study (Strydom, 2005:60). Researchers lie about the goal of the research study, the data collection technique such as the using of tape recorders and also about the publication of research findings. Babbie (1998:442) mentioned the fact that the researcher should not hide their identities as researchers. They should openly disclose the fact that they are conducting a research study and what its purpose is.

The researcher introduced herself to the station commissioners by mentioning her identity and she gave them a permission letter from the commander of EAS, which clearly indicated the topic of research. An informed consent form was also given to them whereby the researcher's identity, topic of research, data collection method, together with the name of the university, was clearly mentioned. She clarified that their perceptions regarding the workshops were important, since they were the ones who nominate SAPS members to attend.

- **Release or publication of the findings**

According to Strydom (2005:65) research findings should be openly published in a written form so that the public, colleagues and other researchers can be able to access them. It has been mentioned that the research subjects should also be informed about the findings in an objective manner and not to reveal the details in full, so that confidentiality is not violated. Babbie (1998:443) reported that researchers should indicate to the public and their colleagues about the shortcomings and failures that have been identified during the research study.

The participants were informed that the findings will be compiled into a dissertation that will be presented to the University of Pretoria, top management of SAPS, other researchers and the public. They were informed that a manuscript will be prepared for publication in a professional journal.

1.10 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

- **Perceptions**

Perception is the process of selecting, receiving, organizing and interpreting information about the particular issue or daily life experience (Schermerhorn, Hunt, & Osborn, 1991:31). Perceptions are impressions made by the four senses (sight, smell, taste and touch), and the way these impressions are interpreted cognitively and emotionally, based on one's life experiences (*New Dictionary of Social Work*, 1995:321). The researcher understood perceptions as the way people understand social issues and the value they attach to them. In this study perceptions were on the manner in which the station commissioners value the Suicide Prevention Workshops, whether they regarded them as important or not.

- **Station Commissioner**

According to the police structure the station commissioner is regarded as the manager who has been given authority by the District Commissioner to lead and manage a particular police station. Reinecke and Fourie (2001:140) indicated that the leadership in SAPS is the process whereby the station commissioner as the manager of a particular police station, has got the power and the authority to inspire, motivate and direct the activities of the subordinates, with the whole purpose of achieving the organizational goals.

The researcher regards a station commissioner as the manager and the leader who assigns duties and responsibilities and delegates them to his subordinates. As a result the duties performed by the station commissioners are to plan, allocate resources, manage group performance, instruct and coach subordinates.

- **Suicide**

According to Hendricks and Byers (1996:280, 281) suicide is regarded as an individual's way of trying to run away from the psychological pain that he/she is experiencing by taking his/her own life. Firestone (1997:59) defined suicide as the murder of oneself with an intention to get rid of psychological conflicts. Violanti (1996:54) states that police suicide can be defined in terms of the interactional process, whereby the impact of the police environment on the psychological and the social functioning of police officers are taken into consideration. The researcher supports the ideas of Hackett and Violanti (2003:64) in their definition of suicide, when they regard it as a result of an interaction of environmental, psychological and cognitive factors. The researcher understands suicide as an act committed as a result of the person's perception of his/her problematic situations as extremely difficult to be dealt with.

- **Suicide Prevention Workshops**

According to *The Oxford Dictionary* (2003:962) a workshop is a meeting for concerted discussion or activity. Workshop is a development session for learning and taking responsible actions (Gerber, Nel & Van Dyk, 1998:5). The researcher defines a workshop as a work session by a group of people sharing ideas about ways of improving their lives either personal or work related. Suicide Prevention Workshops are organized in order to empower police officers with knowledge about the warning signs of suicide, its causes and what measures can be taken to cope with stressful events.

- **Police Officer**

A police officer is a person in the permanent employment of the South African Police Service appointed in terms of either the South African Police Service Act or the Public Service Act (National Instruction/2005).

1.11 DIVISION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

CHAPTER 1: This chapter will consist of the general orientation of the study. The goal and objectives of the study will be clearly stated as well as the ethical aspects.

CHAPTER 2: In this chapter the researcher will give a broad theoretical background on suicide as a phenomenon, both nationally and internationally. Factors leading to suicide will be discussed. Prevention strategies for police suicide as compared to those for the general population will also be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter will present the research methodology, empirical findings and interpretations.

CHAPTER 4: Conclusions and recommendations will be presented.

1.12 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- **Work related commitments**

It was not easy for the station commissioners to meet the deadline in terms of honouring the appointment confirmed with the researcher, despite the fact that an agreement was reached about a specific date for the interview. Some station commissioners would cancel the appointment on the day on which the interview was

supposed to be conducted, and others would forget to postpone. They told the researcher during a one-on-one interview that they have to be loyal and submissive to the instruction imposed on them by their immediate commanders. Whenever they were instructed to attend to an unexpected issue, there was no way they could resist the instruction since it is an order from above. This has had a negative impact on the researcher in terms of meeting the deadline for completion of data.

- **Work pressure**

Station commissioners appeared to be under a lot of pressure because their focus was much on the time to be spent in conducting the interview. Most of them indicated that they have many commitments to attend to within a limited period of time. Some of them have compromised their leisure time and they would postpone their appointments to be interviewed during their lunch time. The researcher has realized that the station commissioners were under pressure to perform according to set standards and they must not appear to be failing in their line of duty.

- **Unplanned visits from the management level**

It happened in two stations whereby managers from the provincial office paid the stations a surprise visit, and according to SAPS protocol, the high rank officials should get first preference. Under such conditions the station commissioner would firstly attend to his managers before he could proceed with the interview. This had an impact on the researcher's schedule for completion of research.

1.13 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 dealt with the researcher's topic of interest together with contributing factors that led to the formulation of the problem. The goal and objectives in this

research were clearly indicated. The research approach and methodology have also been clarified. The ethical aspects have been listed and elaborated fully, with the researcher giving her inputs about how those ethical aspects were applied in her research project. In chapter 2 the focus will be on suicide as a phenomenon both nationally and internationally.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW ON SUICIDE AS A PHENOMENON

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Suicidal behaviour is experienced at all social levels and in all age and race groups. Research conducted by Winick and Kinsie (in Lauer, 1995:72) indicated that suicide is a phenomenon that affects all people in terms of age and ethnic groups. Levin (in Fair Lady, 1993) reported “suicide should be of concern to everyone, not only because of its alarming increase, but because it is preventable”. According to Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001:10-11), suicide is regarded as a phenomenon that occurs in different patterns. It has been indicated that it affects different categories of people in all societies. Giddens (1993:12-13) mentioned the fact that people kill themselves not by accident, but through an intention and that there is always a motive behind the killing. He further indicated that it affects all societies, with the United Kingdom being regarded as the country where suicide is high, followed by Spain and Hungary in Western countries.

This chapter will be a discussion of suicide as a phenomenon from a theoretical perspective through making reference to relevant literature. Firstly, there will be a discussion of the categories of suicide, which will be followed by a discussion of different methods used to commit suicide, factors leading to suicide and specifically suicide in police departments. The chapter will conclude by looking at prevention strategies for suicide.

2.2 SUICIDE AS A NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PHENOMENON

Berg and Theron (2011:387) indicate that suicide is not a psychological disorder in itself, but is associated with psychological disorders, especially mood disorders. These authors continue suicidal behaviour results in “people killing themselves or having unsuccessful attempts at suicide”.

According to the report by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2008), one million people die each year in the world by committing suicide. The WHO report indicated that suicide can either be regarded as the second or third leading cause of death among teenagers in other developed countries. The report by WHO (2008) also mentioned the fact that suicide is regarded as the thirteenth leading cause of death for people of all ages in the world. The report further indicated that based on the fact that suicide was identified as a complex phenomenon in the world, a World Suicide Prevention Day was established on 10 September 2004. Its main priority was to sensitize the world about the causes of suicide and its impact on the society at large. On that day, governments, non-governments departments, policy makers and regional health authorities were encouraged to take initiative in coming up with measures to prevent and reduce suicide nationally and internationally. The researcher agrees with the WHO report (2008) whereby emphasis is on the fact that measures to reduce suicide should not be a concern for an individual person, but that all government and non-government departments should take efforts to put measures in place for suicide reduction.

According to Lauer (1995:443), being exposed to traumatic incidents might cause the person to be depressed and without a proper intervention, he/she might end up committing suicide. Suicide attempts were found to be high among the prostitutes who were experiencing both psychological and emotional problems. Lauer also

reported that the main cause of suicide in adolescents was the short term and the long term effects of trauma. It was indicated that adolescents who have been physically and sexually abused were likely to commit suicide. Research conducted with homosexuals also indicated that both male and female homosexuals who attempted to commit suicide indicated that a high level of stress caused by the societal reaction has contributed to some of them resorting to suicide as the best option (Lauer, 1995:349). Zastrow (2010:464) indicates that the highest suicide rate of any age group in the United States is amongst older males. According to the researcher's understanding, depression seems to be the major cause of suicide of all people from different ages.

Statistics provided by Schlebusch (2005) of the Department of Behavioral Medicine at the Nelson Mandela School of Medicine, indicated that 20 to 40 suicide attempts per hour are being reported in South Africa. According to the statistics from the South African National Injury Mortality Surveillance System, eight to ten percent of all non-natural deaths occurred as a result of suicide (The medicine doctors.....2011). In his report, Schlebusch (2005) indicated that suicide is a highly complex phenomenon that is contributed to a large extent by an interaction between psychological, social, cultural and biological factors.

The researcher is of the opinion that suicide is a burning issue that has to be attended to, by all citizens in different countries, since it affects everybody regardless of age, culture and race. It is also a fact that both the psychological, social, biological and cultural factors contributes to high suicide rate in the world, but the researcher still believes that the person's interpretation of a perceived situation will determine his/her reaction towards it.

2.3 CATEGORIES OF SUICIDE

According to Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001:10-11), there are certain categories of people that are at higher risk of committing suicide than others. For example, men as compared to women were found to be at high risk of taking their lives. Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001:10-11) further stated that the wealthy people who commit suicide are higher than the poor people. The author further indicated that suicide was found to be higher among single than married people. In terms of religion, the Catholics suicide rate was low as compared to the Protestants. It was also reported that suicide was found to be low during times of war because there is a strong bond amongst the people and the main focus is to protect each other and to win that war. He further indicated that suicide was found to be high during times of economic change and instability. Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001:10-11) mentioned that both the level of social integration and social regulation have an impact on suicide rate, in the sense that people who integrated effectively with others and whose desires and visions were regulated by social norms, were found to be less likely to commit suicide than people who are committed to themselves. Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001) classifieds suicide into four categories namely:

2.3.1 Egoistic suicide

Suicide occurs because the person feels isolated and does not integrate with the society. According to Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001), such people are likely to commit suicide because they do not have any support system and they can not disclose their concerns to anybody because they have only themselves, hence he indicated that married people are less likely to commit suicide than single people because they (single) do not have partners to share their burdens. The researcher is of the opinion that both married and single people might be at risk of killing themselves if the person can not disclose his/her problems. The ability to openly seek for help might help to reduce suicide in different people's lives.

2.3.2 Anomic suicide

Unpleasant external factors like divorce, unemployment and financial problems are some of the causes of suicide. Rapid change and economic instability might contribute to suicide rate in societies. The researcher is of the opinion that the person's perception of a particular situation will have an impact on his/her reaction towards that situation. Other people might experience lot of problems, but they might not kill themselves, whereas others might regard death as the solution to their concerns.

2.3.3 Altruistic suicide

According to Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001), there are people who values society more than themselves and such people might end up regarding suicide as a sacrifice for the good of the society. The researcher would like to compare Durkheim's opinion with police suicide. Some of them do not want to be perceived as failures in the community and they resort to suicide as the best option than to fail to protect the society.

2.3.4 Fatalistic suicide

It takes place when the person is over regulated by the society, for example, the person might feel oppressed and powerless in front of his/her superiors, and failure to cope with the stress might contribute to the person committing suicide. The researcher is of the opinion that lack of knowledge about stress management strategies would indeed contribute to suicide rate. The researcher also supports Durkheim's findings, but would like to emphasize that the way the people interprets events that happens in their lives, will determine their reactions. Others might feel encouraged to face those challenges, whereas others might regard death as the end of all sufferings.

2.4 METHODS USED TO COMMIT SUICIDE

According to the research conducted in 16 countries participating in the European Alliance Against Depression, hanging was found to be the first and most method used to commit suicide in both males and females, followed by the using of firearms by mostly males as compared to females. Poisoning by gas was found to be the third method and jumping from high places was the least method used to commit suicide (Suicide Methods in Europe, 2008). Research conducted at the University of Oxford Center for Suicide Research, also indicated that suicidal people preferred to hang themselves mostly. Firearms were ranked as the second method, over dosage and self poisoning was ranked as the third and fourth methods used.

In South Africa, the research conducted about the shocking suicide statistics reported that firearms are mostly used, followed by hanging and self poisoning as the alternatives (SA's shocking suicide statistics, South Africa). According to the researcher's understanding of suicide methods, the availability and access of the method will contribute to that method being used at that point in time. Firearms might be available for the working class people because they can afford it financially.

Males as compared to females were reported to be at high risk of committing suicide, whereas females statistics indicated that more suicide attempts are being reported than actual suicides (Smith, Segal & Robinson, [sa]). The researcher perceives males as more at risk of committing suicide than females because most males have access to fire arms as compared to females, and secondly, men do not openly verbalize their concerns. Females, on the other side, can easily cry for help and they do not have access to firearms, hence most of them prefer poisoning and drug over dosage, which might not be quick in accomplishing the mission of suicide.

In 2006 two police officers were reported to have committed suicide from two police stations in Capricorn District, whereas four suicide attempts were reported in 2007 and 2008 respectively. A case of the station commander who shot one of his subordinates and shot himself was also reported in one of the stations even though it is outside Capricorn District. Bezuidenhout (2003:107) indicated that the methods used in committing suicide is influenced to a great extent by the gender and age of an individual, the will to die and the availability of the means. He further states that males compared to females use firearms, hanging, jumping from high buildings and poisoning by gas whereas females prefer to use drugs over dosage.

2.5 SUICIDE IN POLICE DEPARTMENTS

The report by Claude Lewis about Philadelphia police officers in New York indicated that suicide is also a concern in police departments. According to the interview held with the police officers in Philadelphia, work related stress is affecting police officers negatively and most of them resort to suicide as an alternative to get rid of the sufferings. The report indicated that suicide is an alarming issue, but nobody is willing to talk about it in police departments. It was indicated in the report that police suicide statistics were falsely reported, to prevent the deceased's family from being stigmatized, and to also prevent the family from holding the police department liable for the member's death. In that way, the families couldn't claim compensation for the member's death. The report further indicated that the culture of police organizations has had an impact on the members' psychological functioning, in the sense that they become afraid to openly seek for help when they are stressed.

According to Hackett and Violanti (2003:68) the role of being a police officer has been structured in such a way that they are perceived and regarded as law enforcement bodies. According to section 108 of the Constitution of the Republic of

South Africa (1996:205), the objectives of police services are to prevent and combat crime, to maintain public order and to enforce law. Under such conditions they are expected by the media, the society at large, the legislation and the judicial system to be loyal and obedient to laws of the country. According to research conducted about police suicide in SAPS (Tears of a cop....1999-2005), police officers in SAPS were reported to have committed suicide 11 times higher than the general population in 1995. It was also indicated that the suicide rate in other provinces in SAPS was found to be higher than in others, the reason being that the level of consultation among police officers was not the same. The research conducted indicated that suicide rate in SAPS in 1995 was high in Gauteng Province and low in Limpopo province, and as a result this might have contributed to SAPS members in Limpopo experiencing low stress level and less demands than Gauteng SAPS members. The researcher would like to also confirm that the police suicide rate differs within the provinces and also within the districts. During her research, some station commissioners from Waterberg district reported that their stations have never had any member who committed suicide, whereas it was found to have occurred and still reported in other stations in Waterberg and other districts of Limpopo.

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (1996) indicated the academic training of police officers is more or less that of the military. As a result police officers at the training institutions are told to take control of everything, including the scene, the suspects and their (police officers) emotions. It was further mentioned in that article that the police officers respond to the community when the situation is unpleasant, which implies that the community regard them as professionals who have been trained to attend to anti-social acts. The police officer's main role is to take care of the community, and there is nobody to take care of them (police officers). The researcher understand the police officer's task as that of being the "master of everything" including themselves. It was also indicated that the nature of police work is inherently negative in the sense that they have to protect and ensure that any

unwanted situation is under control. They are also expected by the society to be strong, despite the fact that their job exposes them to deal with the unpleasant and traumatizing incidents.

It was further mentioned in the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) that police officers experience the internal stressors from their department and also encounter external stressors from the personal lives. Due to the military training they received at their training institutions, they become reluctant to seek for help during stressful situations because they were told to take control of everything, including their emotions. The researcher would like to indicate that such circumstances in police departments might play a big role of discouraging police officers to seek for help because they might be regarded as weak by their superiors, something that might impact negatively on their promotions. The article also mentioned the fact that police officers were taught to trust and believe in themselves, and as a result it becomes difficult for them to believe that the helping professionals will maintain confidentiality and not reveal their problems to the management.

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) also indicated that police officers completely associate themselves with the role of being a law enforcer; hence they fail to seek for help. Their perceptions of themselves as problem solvers and their pride prevent them from getting help when need arise and they resort to suicide as an option. It has been clearly stated in the article that their role as police officers end up dominating the fact that like any other human being, they are likely to encounter challenges in their lives, and they have to consult. According to Faull (2010:70), one of the police officer mentioned that as police officers, they have the tendency of engaging with one another and not with anybody who is not a police officer. It has been indicated that police officers are used to maintaining the police culture which is based on unity amongst them. The researcher is of the opinion that this culture has

made police officers to learn to rely and trust one another and as a result it becomes difficult for them to disclose and confide into another person who is not a police officer. Violanti (1996:16-22) gave an overview of police officers' failure to seek help when they encounter challenges. They are as follows.

2.5.1 Stigma of suicide

It was reported that in other departments a record of officers who committed suicide is not even kept because management regard suicide as a taboo and it is not something to be communicated with other people. Suicidal police officers also become ashamed to verbalize their concerns since they might be undermined and be judged by their colleagues.

2.5.2 The culture of police and expectations by society

The community expects police officers to be untouchable and resistant to any challenge. In that way police officers find it difficult to seek for help from other professionals since such professionals are members of society that expects police members to be resistant to problems. The personality trait of an officer also contribute to him being resistant to seek for help in the sense that he can not accept the fact that he is a human being and he might be affected by problems like any other person.

It is the researcher's opinion that the culture of police has made police officers to regard themselves as masters of everything in the sense that they seldom ask for assistance. This may lead to the abuse of alcohol as a coping mechanism as stress experienced by police officers has been regarded as the most contributing factors of high rate of alcohol consumption in police departments (The medicine doctors.... 2011). Police officers are reported to be abusing alcohol with the whole purpose of

relieving the psychological strain. Their supervisors are expected to be in a better position to detect the behavioral change in members like high absenteeism, poor performance, and carelessness in personal appearance, impatience, mood swings and restlessness.

2.5.3 Capabilities might be questioned

Caruso [sa] also mentioned that police officers are afraid that should they be seen as having problems, they will have their firearms disarmed and in that way their capabilities might be questioned by their superiors. As the social worker in SAPS, the researcher has come across incidents whereby the police officer will refuse to be disarmed, despite the fact that his problems are so severe and they put his life at stake. The fact that his commander has to facilitate the process of the firearm withdrawal seems to be installing the fear that his position as a police officer might be undermined.

2.5.4 Lack of trust in the Helping Professionals

Police officers appeared to be reluctant to seek for help due to the fact that they don't trust the helping professionals. They are afraid that their problems will be revealed to other people and that will have an impact on their dignity. It has been reported that other police members feel safe when they consult with the external mental health professionals than with the in-house providers, whereas others feel that an external helping professional does not have knowledge with regard to the way the organization operates. It is a two way process and it is a stumbling block that prevent members from accessing the EAS.

2.5.5 Job impact worries

Police officers do not seek for help since they think that their consultation will imply that their mental stability is not in good condition and their chances to be promoted

might be jeopardized. According to Hackett and Violanti (2003:68) police officers do not want to be declared weak by their superiors because they are afraid that they might be encouraged to have stress leave and that might jeopardize their chances for promotions. They also don't want to be assigned to be doing desk duty only and no longer conducting crime prevention patrols, which, according to them, is a core business of police personnel. If one can no more take part in crime prevention, his/her dignity and professionalism might be questioned.

2.5.6 Mistrust of the Psychological field

Police officers have the perception that only mentally ill people must be attended by the psychologists, and they become reluctant to utilize the services of the psychologists.

2.6 FACTORS LEADING TO SUICIDE

The real or imagined losses like the termination of a romantic relationship and loss of freedom have been identified as possible triggers of suicide. Firearms are also regarded as one of the contributing factors towards suicide in the sense that it has been indicated that they account for nearly 60% of suicide deaths per year (Caruso [sa]). Key factors that cause suicide according to Schlebush (2005) were reported to be feelings of hopelessness, fear and stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, depression due to social problems, substance abuse, mood disorders and acute stress due to financial problems or marital problems. According to Caruso [sa] untreated mental illnesses like depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder were reported to be contributing to suicide. The following factors have been regarded as causes of depression which leads to suicide; chronic illnesses, loss of hope, exposure to physical verbal and sexual abuse, a serious loss and trauma resulting from involvement in a serious accident. Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and

Larson (2006:233) elaborate on the above indicators and add factors associated with high risk of suicide as:

feelings of despair and hopelessness, previous suicidal attempts, concrete, available and lethal plans to commit suicide (when, where and how), family history of suicide, perseveration about suicide, lack of support systems, feelings of worthlessness, belief that others would be better off if the person was dead, advanced age (especially for white males) and substance abuse.

James and Gilliland (2005:545) state police officers constitute a:

distinct occupational culture and closed ecosystem because of their authority roles, their segregation from the rest of the society, irregular work schedules, the reactive nature of their job, the constant exposure to the negative side of life, the constant emotional control they must maintain, and the definite manner in which they must judge right and wrong.

In view of James and Gilliland's view, Zastrow (2010:306) takes it further saying that police do not have sufficient resources to do their jobs effectively. Research conducted in 2000 (Caruso [sa]) has revealed that causes of police suicide in South Africa were found to be: depression, hopelessness, substance abuse, moodiness and aggression. Work-related stress was found to be the leading cause of the above mentioned behaviours, with the accessibility of the firearm as the contributing factor towards police suicide. According to Hendricks and Byers (1996:72) police officers as compared to the general public, are at a higher risk of committing suicide. Factors contributing towards suicide rate in police organizations are amongst others, access to weapons which increase lethality, exposure to occupational stress, marital problems, alcohol abuse, exposure to corruption scandals in their working environment which in turn lead to perturbation and public scrutiny. According to the National Association of Chiefs of Police in New York (Kates, 2011), police officers were found to be killing themselves at a higher rate than the general population. The author also indicated that the firearm was mostly used to commit suicide, and it is believed to be one of the contributing factors towards high suicide rate in police departments. The other factors that might be leading to high suicide rate in police

departments include, amongst others, police' interaction with negative community that is not abiding by the law, working shifts and long hours, being placed far from home where by the intimate relationship becomes negatively affected, and lastly, the abuse of alcohol and drugs used by police officers as a coping strategy.

Violanti (1996:51) has also indicated that police suicide is associated with availability of firearms, exposure to traumatic incidents like injuries and deaths, shift work, criminal justice inconsistencies, social strain and a negative police image. Violanti (1996:54) continues that police suicide might also be caused by an aggression directed inwards due to the fact that police officers are obliged to obey instructions from their commanders, irrespective of how strict they are. It is the view of the researcher that suicide is regarded as an act of self-annihilation that may be a result of the person's exposure to stressful events in life. Such stressful events might be loss of a loved one either through death or divorce, unemployment, chronic illness like HIV/AIDS, trauma resulting from gruesome incidents (murders, serious accidents, and disasters), crowd violence, and shooting incidents. James and Gilliland (2005:545) indicate that job stress of police officers occurs because of "burst stress" meaning; "they can go from a long period of tedium and boredom to an immediate high-adrenaline moment". These authors indicate that over the long run, that "roller-coaster ride" is extremely stressful.

Hackett and Violanti (2003:58) further mentioned depression as one of the illnesses that contribute towards police suicide. According to these authors police officers who are experiencing depression as an illness, are afraid to report their condition, based on the fact that should they mention it, they will appear weak, unstable and helpless in front of their superiors. The researcher is of the opinion that the stigma associated with the member's cry for help, together with some of the standing orders or National Instruction (for example, not allowed to take leave if crime is high in your area), are some of the factors that make police officers to be depressed in the sense that they

are not allowed to challenge them. Under such conditions, Hackett and Violanti (2003:62) reported that depressed police officers end up going for traditional treatment and consulting with the non-credentialed therapists to provide unconventional treatment. According to these authors, the traditional treatments and the non-credentialed therapists are not always successful in healing depression and this might come to the situation whereby the depressed police officer commits suicide. The researcher has come across cases that require a psychological intervention, but the member will refuse to be referred and he will emphasize that his pastor or his traditional doctor will attend to him and the depression will be healed. The researcher supports the findings of Hackett and Violanti with regard to the fact that police officers consult with non-credentialed therapists for help, and it appears to be failing since the depression will continue. The research conducted by Marks (1995) indicated that there are stressors in particular that are experienced by police officers that are believed to have been brought on by the introduction of democracy. They are as follows.

2.6.1 Changes in SAPS

Police officers in the apartheid era were using the strict methods to get the criminals to confess, whereby they were allowed to detain, torture and harass the arrestees in order to get the truth. Currently, due to the fact that people have the right not to be harassed because we are living in a democratic world, police officers are believed to be unable to cope with the changes brought by democracy, and the whole situation contributed to the increase in their stress levels. The Bill of Rights (in The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996) ensure that police officers have to continue to serve and protect the same community that is not abiding by the law, and the same community that might put the police officer's life at risk, is the very same community whose identity and privacy has to be respected by the SAPS.

2.6.2 Maintaining equity in SAPS

During the previous apartheid period, the whites were seen to be having top management posts whereby decision making was highly in their own hands. With democracy being in place, policies relating to equity were implemented and blacks were therefore also given the high management posts. As a result, the police department that was strictly controlled by the Whites was transformed into the situation whereby both Whites and Blacks are occupying the same posts and the decision making has to be shared amongst them. The changes brought by the implementation of both The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 and the Bill of Rights might have led to some of the Whites experiencing stress, which might have led to some of them feeling hopeless and helpless.

2.6.3 Community police forums

Police departments are expected to establish community police forums whereby a partnership has to be maintained between the police officers and the community. In their line of duty as police officers, they have been informed that they have to be strong and independent law enforcers who have to maintain order in the community. Police officers who were trained early before 1994 might find it difficult to cope with the current situation of working in partnership with the community, since they were taught that they have to solve the problems of the same community, which according to the recent changes, is regarded as a tool in assisting the police to arrest criminals.

2.6.4 Daily police work

The daily police work is reported to be the major cause of depression in the sense that they have to attend to unpleasant situations like witnessing the traumatizing incidents, hence the need for constant debriefing. Due to the way they were trained, police officers might feel isolated and desperate in the sense that they were told to be self reliant, strong and independent. It becomes difficult for them to share their concerns and negative experiences they encounter in their line of duty because they

were not told to do so. It was reported that they end up feeling not understood by their families and this might lead to marital problems, high divorce rate and despair, which in turn might lead to suicidal thoughts. The research findings in this report revealed that 180 police officers committed suicide in 1994, and it might be an indication that stress was too high to deal with.

Police officers with low ranks like that of Constables up to the Warrant officers have been regarded as the ones who are maintaining order and safety in the society, and the findings revealed that they do not get recognition in terms of the type of work they do. Based on the fact that they are the employees who face the anti-social community, they are not praised for the job well done; they might end up feeling frustrated and hopeless. The police departments are reported to be facing the situation whereby police officers are been killed at a higher rate by the very same community that has to be protected by them. At the current moment, a number of police officers who got killed in communities by the criminals is still being reported, especially in Gauteng, Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces. The researcher agrees to what was said by Marks (1995) and she strongly believes that police officers' jobs expose them to stressful situations.

2.7 SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGIES IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICES

The role of police is rapidly changing and expanding. James and Gilliland (2005:578) indicate in most communities "police departments are being tasked with more and more responsibilities in addition to the purview of traditional law enforcement". Today they are exposed to crimes in which individuals pose a serious threat to themselves or others, due to their "own anger, fear, vulnerability, depression or lack of emotional control". It thus makes good sense to support police officers in their changing roles to cope in their work environment. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995:301) state it clearly that people in the helping professions are

committed to “affirming life” and helping people to “strive and thrive” because they are called upon to “hold clients’ hopelessness”, while assessing immediate and real danger.

Findings by Baker and Baker (1996:69) indicated that research to be conducted in future should focus on supportive measures that can be initiated in police departments in order to reduce police suicide. As a result, the attendance of Suicide Prevention Workshops need to be reviewed and the supervisors of police officers need to be the first to attend the workshops, so that they can serve as motivators and will be in a better position to encourage their subordinates to attend the workshops. The researcher is of the opinion that despite the fact that police departments are sort of military in nature whereby rules and regulations are strict; the management has to participate in putting measures in place that will reduce police suicide. Although the Suicide Prevention Program has been put in place, it seems as if there is a lot to be done by managers of police officers in encouraging members to access the Suicide Prevention Workshops. The researcher supports the findings by Violanti (1996:16-22) as she has realized that some police officers refuse to attend the awareness sessions and the workshops. They will walk out of the lecture room when the session is still in progress. Some refuse to be referred when they have problems and pretend that their problems are under their control. Some are being referred very late and by that time the problem would be difficult to manage.

It has been indicated that both the government and non-government departments should make joint efforts in educating communities about suicide, its warning signs and symptoms and how it can be prevented. Research conducted revealed that the strategies for suicide prevention should include the following.

- To have awareness campaigns that will educate people about how to take care of themselves. Members of the community or various departments should be

taught the skills about how and when to refer themselves to the helping professionals. According to the researcher, the focus should be on educating employees or society about the importance of early identification of problems and obtaining knowledge about where to go for help.

- Suicide prevention in workplaces should focus on efforts taken by the multi-disciplinary team (social workers, chaplains and psychologists) to improve coordination and collaboration amongst them. The strong bond amongst them might contribute to employees not undermining some professions and their services can be effectively utilized. The researcher's opinion is that the EAS personnel should always evaluate their professional relationship and check its impact on the services they are rendering and on the employees. Professionalism should always be maintained.
- In workplaces the management should be able to track suicides and suicide attempts and keep record. In this way the suicide statistics will determine the type of preventative measures to be put in place in reducing suicide. Every department is expected to undergo training about suicide prevention, so that its employees can be educated about the causes and the warning signs of suicide and how to assist a colleague with problems and those with suicide ideation. It has been emphasized that suicide prevention programs should be responsive to the needs of different people in terms of age, culture and the type of organization the person is working for. The station commissioners valued the importance of the workshops and emphasized that they should continue to be rendered, since they have helped to reduce suicide in police, but they mentioned that the contents of the manual needs to be updated to respond to the members' problems. According to Erasmus, Loedolff, & Nel (2006:228), training of personnel in most departments fails because of lack of motivation among employees to attend training, management not supporting the training programs, employees not given rewards for the training attended, insufficient time to execute training programs and work environment failing to support new behaviours learned in the training.

A social worker, chaplain and psychologist work collaboratively during the workshop. The researcher is of the opinion that education is the key to success. If people can attend the talk shows and the awareness campaigns held in departments and communities, everybody can be able to have a positive attitude towards life and that will enable him/her to seek help when stressed. Hackett and Violanti (2003:8-11) reported that prevention strategies can be effective in police departments if the following measures are put in place:

- **The role of the police supervisor in Suicide Prevention**

Supervisors have to be trained about when and how to identify an employee with problems. The supervisor is the one responsible for monitoring the subordinates and with proper training, he/she can be in a position to assist a troubled employee and refer him/her to the helping professionals before he could even think of taking his life. The researcher is of the opinion that Suicide Prevention Workshops should firstly be attended by SAPS management, so that they can be able to understand and put themselves in the shoes of the member experiencing problems. The members would also realize the importance of the workshops and they won't decline the nomination. Baker and Baker (1996:69) indicate that research about police suicide in future should focus on the kind of support that can be initiated within the police organizations in order to reduce police suicide.

According to Baker and Baker (1996:72-74), early identification of suicidal signs by supervisors can help to reduce suicide in the sense that preventative measures will be put in place at an early stage. The Suicide Prevention Program of SAPS includes the warning signs that police members have to recognize and preventative measures to be implemented to assist the suicidal colleague. Despite the knowledge and information contained in the manual, police officers still continue to kill themselves. Having realized that a member seems to be experiencing problems, the station commissioners should be able to schedule an appointment with the troubled

employee, so that the member can be advised about the availability of EAS. The supervisor should offer his support from the moment he recognize a problem, in referring the member to EAS and by checking with the member as to whether he attends the sessions, up until the member believes that his problems have been dealt with (Baker & Baker, 1996:74).

According to the researcher's experience, some supervisors seems to be failing to recognize that the member has a problem, hence they fail to disarm the member having a gun, whereas others will refer the troubled employee to EAS when the problem is so severe. Others seem to try their efforts to solve their subordinates' problems, despite the fact that they are trained police officers and not trained mental health professionals. The researcher believes that supervisory training for supervisors might be the first strategy to be implemented since that might help to capacitate them with knowledge about what and how to assist a troubled employee. If supervisors can be empowered through training, they will know about how to approach a member with problems and such approach can also motivate members to attend the workshops.

Supervisors have to reassure the members who are experiencing problems that assistance is available from EAS, and the member has to be mandated to consult with the helping professionals. The supervisor's support should be seen from organizing with the therapist, arranging transport and getting feedback from the therapist about the members' honouring of appointments. The researcher is of the opinion that encouragement and mandating of the members to consult should start from above since it is the supervisor's role to offer care and support for the subordinate, so that the same subordinate can help to achieve the mission of the organization.

- **SAPS policy**

According to the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010), police departments should have policies in place that will include general workplace programs and a health plan whose purpose will be to motivate members to consult with the mental health practitioner. Baker and Baker (1996:69-71) indicate the departmental policy of police organizations should be drafted in such a way that it will encourage and motivate police officers to seek for professional help when they encounter challenges. The researcher believes that the policy of SAPS can play an encouraging role and police officers might change their attitude and learn to consult when they encounter problems. It is the researcher's opinion that the SAPS policy should include the importance of mental health and also the availability of internal resources like EAP. The statement encouraging members to consult with the EAP should be clearly stated in the policy and the policy should be put in such a way that every employee will have access to it.

- **Knowledge about suicide**

In SAPS the record of members who committed suicide is being kept at Human Resource department, and it has led to the development of the Suicide Prevention Program, so that members can be educated about suicide. However, the researcher is of the opinion that the top management has a role to play in making the program to be effective. They have to openly communicate the importance of consultation with the EAS personnel, and also put an emphasis on the attendance of the workshops.

According to the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010), suicide prevention in police departments should focus on educating both the police officers and their families about how to cope with stressful situations, and the ability to identify the causes and warning signs of suicide. Secondly, supervisors should be taught to identify

behavioural change in police officers at an early stage, and refer that troubled employee to EAP. Thirdly, the management should take efforts to encourage police officers at training institutions to consult with helping professions when they experience problems, than to tell the new recruits that they must take control of everything. The fourth strategy indicate that as much as police officers are informed about officer survival skills, they should also be guided about how to handle their problems at work and at home.

All police personnel should be taught about suicide and its warning signs, depression and how to deal with potential suicides. In SAPS, workshops about Suicide Prevention are organized and presented, with the emphasis on suicide causes, warning signs and how to prevent it. The only concern is that the turnover is sometimes not good, and police personnel end up not knowing what to do when they are stressed. The researcher would like to indicate that it is the attitude of police personnel that has to be dealt with, so that they can see the importance of attending the workshops. In SAPS, the EAP personnel are organizing the Suicide Prevention Workshops whereby police officers are nominated to attend the workshops, and they are educated about causes of suicide, warning signs of a suicidal person and preventative measures. The family members of police officers are not included in the workshops.

Record of employees who committed suicide should be kept and the focus should be on its impact on the emotional well-being of the surviving colleagues. The research conducted about police suicide prevention (Smith et al., [sa]), revealed that police suicide continue to be reported, despite the availability of Suicide Prevention Programs in police departments. An indication was therefore stated about what has to be done to overcome the problem of program failure. According to the research, police officers must be told both at the training institutions and at their police organizations that they must consult with the therapists when they encounter

problems. They must not be told that they can consult “if” they feel like, but that they must and have to consult for the sake of their health.

It was mentioned that the prevention program should not focus on “police suicide”, but on “police mental health.” Efforts have to be made to train police officers about Emotional Self Care Training, whereby police officers can be empowered with knowledge based on making them aware of themselves and preparing them to be ready before anything terrible happens to them. The research findings revealed that the goals of the Police Mental Health should be as follows: to reduce the occurrence of PTSD, substance abuse, misuse of sick leave, accidents, grievances and suicidal thoughts. The second goal is to empower police officers with knowledge of how to deal with stress and trauma, and not wait for the member to be traumatized before trauma management can be presented to him/her.

A prevention program should clearly indicate that seeking help is a sign of strength, and not a weak point. This message is always communicated by social workers, chaplains and psychologists, but it seems as if it is not considered by everybody because despite their efforts of being there for members, suicide incidents are still being reported. The researcher believes that the commanders has a role to play in encouraging members to take care of their mental health, and this message has to be communicated at the parades since that is when police officers gather for the planning of operational duties.

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) emphasize that the training institutions of police departments should be structured in such a way that they will incorporate suicide prevention training, emphasize the importance of mental health and communicate the importance of seeking for help when they encounter psycho-social problems. Police departments are expected to have mental health consultation plan

that will motivate the members to pay regular visit to the helping professions. It was also indicated that the police departments should liaise with the external consultants who are conversant with police culture and language as well as the work related stressors, to come and attend to members with problems. It was believed that consultation with the external service providers might help to encourage members to consult, as compared to the internal service providers, who are often regarded as the spies of the management by the subordinates.

According to the researcher's opinion, consultation with the external service providers might not work if the police members do not see the importance of seeking for help. The researcher and other EAS personnel have been doing lot of marketing at the station level, but the attendance of workshops is still not good. The researcher would suggest that the message about the importance of mental health consultation should start at the training institutions, and the training modules should also include modules about mental health. It will also be advisable if one of the supervisors and managers' key performance areas can be to have a session with the subordinates about consultation with mental health professionals.

Suicide Prevention Gatekeeping programs should be attended by first line supervisors since they interact on daily basis with police officers. They should be trained about identifying suicide warning signs at an early stage, actively communicating with the suicidal employee about the importance of mental health consultation and ensuring that the troubled employee gets the necessary support.

- **Police culture**

It has been indicated that police culture has been formulated in such a way that it encourage police officers not to trust anybody with regard to solving problems, but to

take control of any situation, despite how hard it is. Some police officers criticized the debriefing sessions since they believed that the focus is more on the police members' feelings about a traumatizing incident that was witnessed by the police member. According to them, there should be a concrete decision to be implemented so that police members do not experience the same stressful situations. The researcher is of the opinion that the police officers would like to see the culture of police changing from seeing members as masters of everything, to allowing and motivating them to accept that they are human beings who are likely to encounter problems in life, irrespective of them being police officers.

To get rid of police members' denial of their problematic situations, the management and supervisors are expected to play the non-punitive role. Baker and Baker (1996:71, 72) indicated that supervisors should tell their subordinates that seeking professional help will not affect their promotions and that their jobs will always be secured. The supervisors should also emphasize that consultations with the helping professionals will remain confidential and their problems will be dealt with in a professional way. Police officers should be informed that someone is always available to help them deal with their problematic situations. The researcher would like to indicate that this message should also be communicated at the SAPS training institutions since those are the place where the newly recruited police members are reached in large numbers and that is where the police military training is being put in place. SAPS social workers are tasked to spend a week at training institutions where by pro-active programs are presented to the new police students. It is during this moment when social workers will inform them about the availability and the importance of getting help when the need arise.

Marks (1995) stipulates the culture of SAPS has to be structured in such a way that the training officers at the training institutions and the supervisors and managers at the provincial and station level should encourage police members to regard

consultation with the therapist as strength and not a weakness. It is the attitude of management that has to change, and the members will easily adapt.

- **Employee Assistance Services**

Marks (1995) indicates that the SAPS is expected to employ more personnel for EAS so that police members can have access to them whenever the need arise. Police officers also have a role to play, which is to change the attitude of regarding themselves as problem solvers of their situations. This can be achieved if the training institutions of SAPS prepare the trainees about the nature of the demands of police work, and that the best way to beat the demand is to have a mental health check plan. According to the researcher, police officers are given pocket books wherein they write their daily activities, and that pocket book is signed every day at the parade by the superior official in charge of the parade. The researcher believes that as much as management mandate police members to have their pocket books checked for the day, the same procedure can be used to mandate them to have their mental health check plans reviewed and signed by each commander in order to check his/her number of consultations with the mental health professional. It might help to reduce depression and suicidal thoughts in members.

Hacket and Violanti (2003:64) have emphasized the fact that even if the department's Employee Assistance Programme can encourage police officers to treat their depression; it might not help if department's attitude does not encourage treatment for depression. Dryden and Feltham (2002:48) are adamant that if there is a sign of severe depression such as "hopelessness coupled with agitation or a lack of supportive friendships" attention should be given to that person's frame of mind and available support systems. Hepworth et al. (2006:223) take it further indicating that when a person "exhibits severe depressive symptoms of hopelessness, it is

critical to evaluate suicidal risk so that precautionary measures can be taken". Kleinke (1998:91) refers to it as "directing people towards professional help".

Oher (1999:147) stressed the point that careful attention should be paid to suicide risk. In SAPS, the employee assistance practitioners are rendering pro-active programs like Suicide Prevention, Substance Dependency, Stress management, Life Skills, HIV/AIDS, Disability and Colleague Sensitivity programs to all SAPS personnel. The Suicide Prevention Program is the one program that is presented by social workers, chaplains and psychological services. It was stated clearly that all the stakeholders in the multi-disciplinary team have to jointly educate members about suicide prevention with the whole purpose of reducing suicide in police departments.

James and Gilliland (2005:583) stated crisis intervention programs should be planned and implemented by persons from different "disciplines, perspectives, cultural and training backgrounds". This is in line with the functioning of the multi-disciplinary team of the SAPS. Beside the roles played by social workers, the chaplains have their spiritual empowerment programs that they render to police personnel. The same applies to the psychological services. Except for the pro-active programs, the EAP personnel are also attending to the concerns of individual members on a short term basis and refer to external service providers if is necessary. The workshops are organized on a monthly basis and police officers are requested to attend the workshops.

According to Faull (2010:146-156), police officers in SAPS confirmed that indeed the nature of police work is so demanding and it exposes them to stressful situations like witnessing shooting incidents and traumatic accidents. Some of those police officers mentioned the fact that the stress was extremely high before the Employee Assistance Personnel was employed, since there was nobody to talk to.

- **Self-help groups**

The research conducted by Marks (1995) revealed that police work is stressful in nature and that SAPS departments should have stress management measures in place that will help to alleviate stress experienced by police officers. According to these research findings, one of the stress management strategies in SAPS should be to establish self-help groups that will be comprised of police officers. The purpose of this group will be to create a safe and supportive environment amongst themselves, where police officers will discuss events and problems they encounter as police officers, together with the impact on their personal well-being. These self-help groups should be established at the station level and the group members will decide as to whether the social worker will facilitate the group or not. This might help since the negatively affected members will learn from other productive members about the coping strategies to be utilized in times of distress.

Police officers should be trained about listening and communication skills and also about counselling. Police officers can support one another in terms of distress since they understand the nature of police culture far much better than any other person. According to the researcher's understanding, the peer support might be effective provided that the working relationship between the supervisor and the subordinates was already based on trust and care. If there is a history of tension and conflict among the employees, peer support might not work.

The last goal was to continuously empower police members through self-care programs. It was indicated that the training should be an ongoing routine, with a mental health check plan as part and parcel of the training. The mental health check plan is meant to motivate and encourage police officers that they should visit the mental health professionals the same way they do with their general practitioners.

- **Marketing of EAS**

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) state that posters and pamphlets that have information about self-care programs should be distributed among police personnel. There is a Standing Order that instructs all South African police personnel to watch the police television program since that is where all issues affecting police services are discussed. In that way, the message about the importance of consultation with the helping professions will be loud and clear to everybody. The researcher is of the opinion that the top management at national level should be supporting the commander from EAS with regard to the utilization of EAS personnel.

The researcher believes that the failure to attend the workshops might be a contributing factor towards police suicide since the police personnel remain misinformed about how to deal with a stressful situation. Some of the nominees for the workshops decline to attend the workshops and such personnel won't be knowledgeable about stress management techniques. The researcher would like to emphasize that the police attitude has to be dealt with first before they can be encouraged to utilize EAS.

- **Evaluation of the program**

Suggestions were made that the program developers should also evaluate the impact of the program, to check as to whether the program has helped to reduce police suicide or not, so that decisions can be made about how to improve the contents of the prevention program. It was also suggested that more awareness workshops have to be arranged, so that education about Suicide Prevention reaches everybody.

According to the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) EAS personnel should be evaluated and rated based on the number of sessions he/she had with the subordinates on a monthly basis, and the record of the number of members referred to the helping professions. In that way supervisors and managers will feel responsible for encouraging and motivating members to get professional help.

The researcher is of the opinion that the Police Mental Health Check plan might help to reduce police suicide if the trainees are taught about it at the training institutions, and not only once, but it should be a module on its own that will be read and presented by the trainers to the new recruits police trainees. The researcher believes that the trainers should prepare the trainees about the type of problems that the trainees are likely to encounter in their line of duty as police officers and what has to be done to prevent those problems from affecting both their psychological and personal lives.

2.8 SUMMARY

In chapter two the focus was on getting the background information about suicide as a phenomenon, both nationally and internationally. Literature concerning suicide as a phenomenon in USA and Europe was studied and compared with suicide in South Africa. Suicide methods both nationally and internationally were identified and compared. Factors contributing towards suicide in general and in police suicide were indicated. In chapter three the focus will be on the research methodology applied in this research study, together with the empirical findings, data analysis and the interpretations.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, EMPIRICAL FINDINGS, DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter three, the researcher will discuss the empirical findings derived from the study. The study focused on the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshop targeted at police officers. The research methodology applied in this study will be discussed, followed by the empirical findings.

The station commissioners of 15 police stations from various clusters were interviewed. The total population of the study consisted of 15 station commissioners and was regarded as the sample as the population was too small to implement sampling.

3.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.2.1 Research approach

A qualitative approach will be used in this exploratory study as the researcher prefers to know more about the meaning the research subjects attach to a social setting. With the qualitative approach, the researcher formulates the research question and the meaning that the unit of analysis attaches to the phenomenon and regarded as important (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:156). Babbie (1998:36) defines qualitative data as non-numerical in the sense that the researcher wants to know about people's experiences and perceptions of the situation. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher will be able to uncover the perceptions of station

commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshop targeted at police officers.

3.2.2 Research design

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:22) a research design refers to the procedure that the researcher will follow in collecting data about the identified problem. It refers to the strategies used to inquire about the topic of interest, and the individuals or the instruments to be used in collecting data. Fouché and De Vos (2002:137) define research design as the plan that indicates how the hypothesis or research question will be answered or measured. According to the researcher's understanding, research design is a plan that the researcher will follow in collecting information that will enable her to come to conclusions regarding the research topic.

Creswell (2007:53-74) identifies five approaches of inquiry that could be used to design qualitative research namely; narrative-, phenomenological-, grounded theory, ethnographic- and case study research. According to Creswell (1998:61), a case study can be regarded as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a bounded system, or single cases or multiple cases over a period of time. The emphasis is on arriving at a complete description and understanding of the constructs being studied, despite the small numbers of persons involved (Struwig & Stead, 2001:8). In this study, a collective case study (Fouché & Delport, 2002:268) will be used as the researcher wants to understand the perceptions of the station commissioners regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshop. Since the station commissioners are the superiors of the police officers, they are supposed to nominate the police officers to attend these workshops. According to Fouché (2005:272), the case being studied may refer to a process, activity, event, programme or individual, or multiple individuals.

3.2.3 Data collection method

In exploring and describing the case, detailed data collection methods are required. These may include participant observation (Strydom, 2011:328), interviewing (Greeff, 2011:341), document study and secondary analysis (Strydom & Delport, 2011:367). Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:95) define interviews as a qualitative data collection method that attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view, and to unfold meaning of participant's experiences. The researcher will use semi-structured interviews in order to gain insight into the perceptions of station commissioners regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshop targeted at police officers. Hadley and Mitchell (1995:179) described an interview schedule as questions or themes that need to be answered in interviewing the research participants. The researcher will write down questions to be asked, so that she knows exactly what to focus on when interviewing station commissioners. By using a semi-structured interview, the researcher will be able to ask the same questions to all the station commissioners.

With the use of the semi-structured interviews, the researcher will have a set of predetermined questions in an interview schedule, but the interview will be guided by the schedule, rather than being dictated by it (Greeff, 2002:302). With the semi-structured interview, the participants will also have the opportunity to discuss issues beyond the questions confines (Struwig & Stead, 2001:98).

Pilot testing of the interview schedule (Strydom, 2002:215) was done with two station commissioners to ensure that it will yield the needed data. These station commissioners did not form part of the main study. The pilot testing was appropriate in the sense that it sensitized the researcher on issues like gender and race that should be indicated and explored in the interview schedule, so that a clear picture about police suicide in terms of males as compared to females, and also across different ethnic groups can be explored. The researcher, with the consent of the participants, used a tape recorder during the interviews. Data collected will be safely

stored for 15 years at the Department of Social Work and Criminology according to the policy of the University of Pretoria.

3.2.4 Data Analysis

According to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:137) data analysis is the process of interpreting the research findings after the data collection process has been finalized. Mouton (1996:111) has clarified data analysis as the process whereby themes and patterns are identified from the data collected. He also mentions that in analyzing the data, the researcher wants to arrive at conclusions about whether the research study has facilitated the process towards bringing a solution to the identified problem. Data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data (De Vos, 2002:339). Creswell (1998:170) indicated five steps to be followed in data analysis, namely, collecting and recording data, managing data, reading and writing memos, describing, classifying and interpreting data as well as representing and visualizing data. The steps can be briefly discussed as follows.

- **Collecting and Recording Data**

Recording of information is when the researcher plans beforehand about the manner in which notes can be taken during the process of interviewing the research participants (De Vos, 2002:340). Notes might be taken during the process or after the researcher has left the venue where the interviews were conducted. In this research project, a small notebook was used for recording interviews held with each station commissioner. The date on which the interview was conducted, together with keywords of what transpired during the interview were written down. A well-tested tape recorder was used in addition to the written notes.

- **Managing Data**

According to De Vos (2002:343) managing data is the first step of analyzing data away from the site. The researcher decides how she categorizes or classifies the data collected. For example, the data collected can be classified according to key words, or be grouped together in folder files, computer files and index cards. In this research project, the researcher wrote down key words after each interview conducted with a station commissioner. Having interviewed all station commissioners, the key words that shared the same meaning were grouped together. The researcher also listened to interviews from the tape recorder and then compared what was said on the tape with what has been written in the notes. This enabled the researcher to categorize themes, sub-themes and key words.

- **Reading and Writing Memos**

The researcher should re-read the transcripts written down in the notebook so that she could have the whole picture of an interview in her head (De Vos, 2002:343). The researcher reviewed the notes taken during the interview and compared them with what has been recorded on the tape recorder. This process was reviewed several times until the researcher was in a position to have a clear interpretation of the research findings. By reviewing the notes collected during interviews, the researcher was able to identify themes.

- **Describing, Classifying and Interpreting**

De Vos (2002:344) regards this step as the one whereby the researcher identifies themes that are similar and those that are divergent. The researcher categorized the identified themes together in order to detect their relationship and their similarities. During interpretation, the researcher is making sense of what she has learned from her research findings. The researcher comes up with her own opinions regarding

the research findings. During this step the researcher focused on the existing relationships among the themes and also on their similarities. By linking and grouping themes together, it was easier for the researcher to formulate her own understanding of the findings obtained from the interviews.

- **Representing and Visualizing**

According to De Vos (2002:344) the researcher should present the data in such a way that other people beside the research subjects can have a clear image of the information. For example, figures or tables can be used to present the data collected. In this research, figures and tables were used to present specific information concerning the profile of the participants. Data were also presented and interpreted in words. The researcher formulated the meaning of the research findings by grouping the same key words and themes together.

3.3 PRESENTATION OF DATA

The demographic details of participants are presented in the form of figures and tables followed by a discussion and analysis of the information presented.

3.3.1 SECTION A: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

The following table indicates the number of years spent working for SAPS, years spent as a station commissioner and the total personnel reporting to a particular station commissioner.

- **PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS**

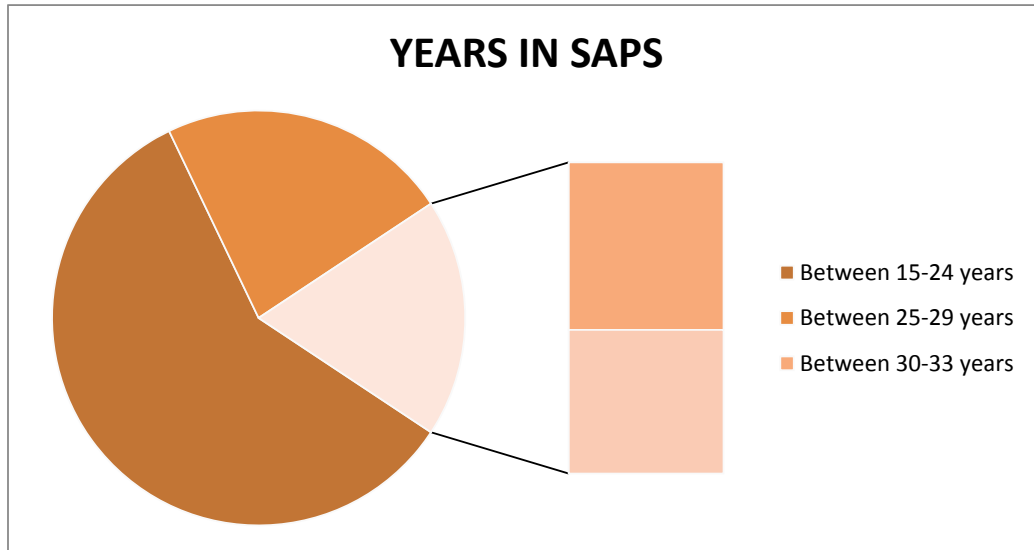
TABLE 1: PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

Participants	Years at SAPS	Role as Station Commander	Staff component
1	19 years	6 years	61
2	24 years	7 years	124
3	33 years	10 years	267
4	29 years	7 years	84
5	25 years	13 years	140
6	24 years	5 years	46
7	21 years	12 years	200
8	28 years	10 years	105
9	15 years	5 years	41
10	22 years	6 years	63
11	22 years	8 years	163
12	27 years	10 years	88
13	32 years	6 years	151
14	25 years	8 years	190
15	17 years	9 years	144

A total of 15 station commissioners were interviewed. The number of years served for SAPS ranked between 15 to 33 years of service. There is no consistency in the allocation of the staff component concerning experience as a station commissioner. This means that years experience as a station commissioner does not necessarily means responsibility of a larger staff component. The above-mentioned table can be illustrated through the following figures.

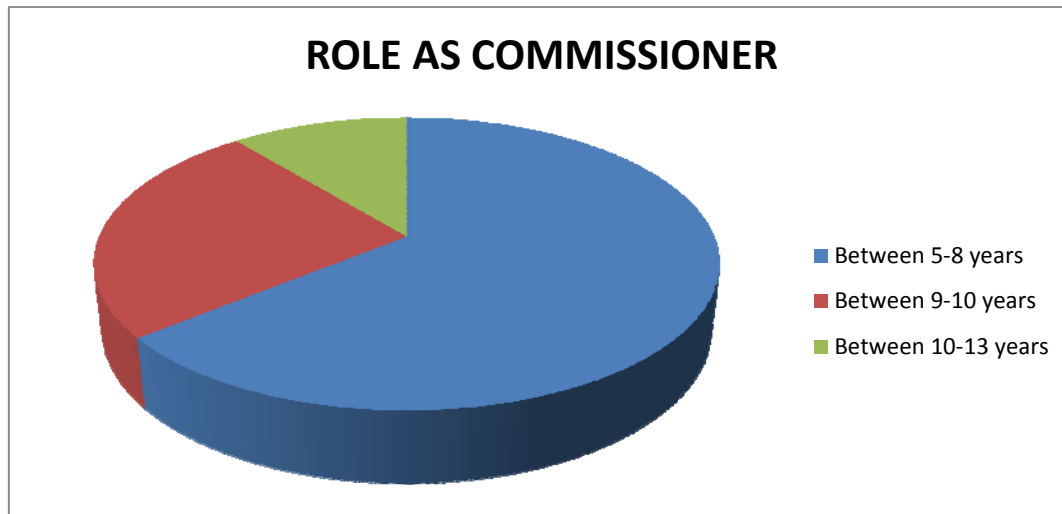
- **YEARS OF SERVICE INSAPS**

FIGURE 1: PIE CHART OF YEARS OF SERVICE IN SAPS



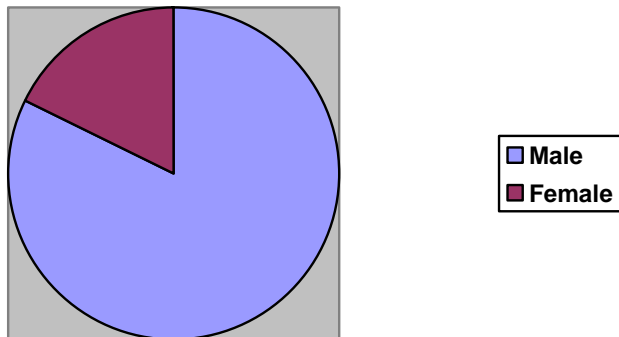
The figure above indicates that eight participants (53%) represent those station commissioners whose years of service is between 15-24 years. Their ranks start from the Captain to Lieutenant Colonel. Five participants (33.3%) represent station commissioners who worked for SAPS for the period between 25-29 years. They are occupying the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and they also had lot of experience regarding police management and its impact on employees' psychological functioning. Two participants (13.3%) represent those station commissioners who worked for SAPS for a period between 30-33 years. They are occupying the rank of Colonel. Their experiences as SAPS employees enable them to command as many members as possible. They have information with regard to police culture and the impact it has played on police members' perceptions on themselves, the organization and towards society as a whole.

FIGURE 2: PIE CHART OF ROLE AS A COMMISSIONER



Nine participants (60%) were between 5-8 years in terms of their experience as station commissioners. Four participants (27%) represent the station commissioners with experience between 9-10 years as managers. Two participants (13.3%) represent station commissioners who have been managing the stations for 11-13 years. These statistics is of concern to the researcher as it may indicate that the majority of the station commissioners are still getting used to the culture of the SAPS.

FIGURE 3: PIE CHART OF GENDER



Ten participants were males (67%) and five participants were females (33%). Two White males (13%), ten African males (67%) and three African females (20%) were interviewed.

3.3.2 SECTION B: KNOWLEDGE OF SUICIDE

Data obtained from participants were broken down into themes and sub-themes and found to be the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshop. “Identifying salient themes, recurring ideas or language and patterns of belief that link people and settings together is the most intellectually challenging phase of data analysis” (De Vos, 2005:338).

TABLE 2: THEMES AND SUB-THEMES

The table below sets out the different themes and sub-themes identified.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Perceptions on police suicide	<p>Understanding of suicide</p> <p>Methods of suicide</p> <p>Gender and suicide</p> <p>Prevention of suicide</p>
Causes of police suicide	<p>Personal problems</p> <p>Work related problems</p> <p>Utilisation rate of the Suicide Prevention Workshop</p>
The Suicide Prevention Workshop	<p>The impact of the Suicide Prevention Workshop</p> <p>Reduction of police suicide</p> <p>Upgrading of the Suicide Prevention Workshop</p> <p>Enrichment of the Suicide Prevention Workshop</p>

THEME 1: PERCEPTIONS ON POLICE SUICIDE

The first theme identified in the data collected was the perceptions on police suicide. The researcher divided understanding of suicide, methods used to commit suicide, gender and suicide, and prevention of suicide as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Understanding of suicide

According to the participants people kill themselves intentionally as a result of their exposure to problematic situations and failing to openly disclose about the problems. The following are statements from participants with regard to their understanding of suicide.

- “Suicide is an act of taking your own life.”
- “Failure to disclose and deal appropriately with personal problems can lead to the person being highly stressed, where by the end result will be to kill him/herself.”
- “People who kill themselves are feeling hopeless and helpless about life.”
- “Unavailability of family, colleagues and friends of a troubled member in assisting with problems, can lead to that person killing him/herself due to lack of encouragement and support.”
- “Person, who is secretive about his/her problems, ends up killing himself because he/she regards his/her problems as either black or white.”
- “Suicide is an intentional method of self killing as a result of an exposure to problematic situations.”
- “Killing one-self intentionally.”

The above statements correlate with Berg and Theron (2011:388) who state that suicide may result from intense feelings before, during and after certain traumatic events. The participants indicated that people who kill themselves feel hopeless and

helpless about life, and death is regarded as the only permanent solution to escape from the problems. These statements are in line with the categories outlined by Durkheim (in Giddens, 2011:10-11), indicating that egoistic suicide occurs when people cannot disclose about their problems because they are isolated and maybe selfish. Such people end up not having any support system to rely on and they regard death as the solution. Anomic suicide occurs when people encounter lots of problems, whereas fatalistic suicide takes place when the person feels oppressed and he/she feels hopeless and powerless, and regard death as the solution. Faull (2010:70) indicated that police suicide is still occurring because police officers have learnt from the training institutions that they have to trust and rely on themselves, which makes them to be isolated and reluctant to disclose about their problems to other people because that person is not a police officer. According to Schlebush (2005), the person's exposure to the psychological, social, cultural and biological factors can contribute to the person taking his/her own life. The research findings correlates with the literature consulted as it is indicated that failure to deal with problems can contribute to the idea of suicide and to suicide itself.

Sub-theme 2: Methods of suicide

There seems to be a strong belief that exposure to stressful situations, in conjunction with the accessibility of a firearm, contributed a lot towards suicide rate in SAPS. The participants indicated the method commonly used by police officers in killing themselves is a firearm. They indicated that a firearm is easily accessible and it is quick in performing the suicide act. The extracts below give an indication of the responses.

- “Firearms.”
- “Jumping from high buildings.”
- “Medication overdose.”
- “Hanging.”

In reviewing the record of police officers who committed suicide in Capricorn and Waterberg Districts, the researcher discovered that the majority of those suicidal deaths were accomplished through work firearms, therefore it is agreed that accessibility of firearm might also contribute to high police suicide. Bezuidenhout (2003:107) mentioned that the will to die and the availability of the means to die contribute to high suicide rates in SAPS. According to Hendricks and Byers (1996:72) the suicide rate amongst police officers is contributed to the exposure to traumatic incidents and to a large extent to access to weapons which increase lethality. Violanti (1996:51) also indicated that police suicide is associated with the availability of firearms.

Sub-theme 3: Gender and suicide

All station commissioners reported that suicide is still occurring in SAPS. The station commissioners also reported that suicide was extremely high during the years 1993-2004. They indicated that presently suicide and suicide attempts are still being reported in other districts (including their districts). The view of participants on gender and suicide is illustrated by the following quotes from the responses.

- “Males are at high risk of committing suicide.”
- “Males have pride and as a result they fail to disclose about their problems.”
- “Females can easily seek professional help in times of problematic situations.”
- “Females know how to cope with stressful situations.”
- Males as compared to females have pride and jealous, and they like to pay revenge by killing their spouses.”
- “As compared to females, males are weak and they can’t take efforts to solve problems. They’d rather kill themselves and everybody whom they regard as an obstacle and cause of problems in their lives.”
- “One of my warrant officers killed himself with his firearm at the police station in 2011.”

- One of my subordinates killed himself in a bush, 5 km from his police station, in June 2010.”
- “Despite the availability of the Suicide Prevention Workshop, suicide attempts and suicide acts are still being reported, especially amongst male police officers.”

Suicide statistics in SAPS reflected that the number of male police officers who have committed suicide is higher than female police officers. This correlates with Lauer (1995:349) and Zastrow (2010:464) who indicate that the suicide rate amongst men is higher than amongst women. This is also highlighted by Smith et al. ([sa]) who state that males compared to females were reported to be at high risk of committing suicide, whereas females statistics indicated that more suicide attempts are being reported than actual suicides.

Sub-theme 4: Prevention of suicide

The participants indicated that the managers have to take the initiative in encouraging the police officers to make use of the internal service providers, which is the EAS. The following are statements from participants with regard to the prevention of suicide.

- “People should be encouraged to disclose about their problems to their partners, relatives, pastors and to the helping professions.”
- “Awareness campaigns and talk shows about how to cope with stressful situations.”
- “Motivational speakers who will talk about the importance of life.”
- “Managers should take initiative in encouraging subordinates to get professional help during difficult moments, especially with the internal helping professions.”

- “The Suicide Prevention Workshop has to be organized on a monthly basis.”
- “Sensitization about the causes of suicide has to be conducted continuously.”
- “The Suicide Prevention Workshop has to be presented in the language that can be easily understood by all the participants.”
- “The chaplains in SAPS have to spiritually empower police officers by preaching the gospel of God on weekly basis at the police stations.”
- “Education about early identification of problems will enable people to get support from the concerned and caring support systems.”
- “All police personnel should be educated about early identification of problems and the warning signs of depression or suicidal tendency, what to do, when and how to refer that person to the helping professionals for assistance.”
- “Police officers have to be trained as peer educators who will help in assisting a troubled police officer, will help to reduce suicide in the sense that police officers would take initiative in assisting a colleague.”

The responses are in agreement with the view of Hackett and Violanti (2003:8-11) that prevention strategies can be effective if supervisors can be trained about when and how to identify a troubled employee and what is suppose to be done under such circumstances. Baker and Baker (1996:69) are sensitive in highlighting that the supervisor has to reassure the members that consultation with the helping profession will not impact negatively on issues of promotion and job security. The researcher also supports this view as the station commanders are the immediate commanders of the subordinates and their involvement in their members' lives might help to improve the working relationship, and in that way the troubled employee will be able to co operate with the supervisor during his referral to EAS. Baker and Baker (1996:69-71) are of opinion that the policy of the police departments should be drafted in such a way that it will encourage and motivate police officers to seek for professional help when they encounter problems. Marks (1995) concludes that the establishment of self help groups that are comprised of police officers at the station level can help to reduce police suicide.

THEME 2: CAUSES OF POLICE SUICIDE

Respondents indicate that both personal and work related problems have an impact on suicide. Suicide amongst police officers from lower ranks such as constables, sergeants and warrant officers, are higher than officers occupying the rank of captain and above, because they are the one who has to do the operational duties of police work such as arresting criminals, witnessing terrible accidents or involvement in shooting incidents. The focus under this theme is on factors that contribute towards police suicide whereby both the personal- and work related problems have been clarified as contributing towards police suicide. The possible reasons for the low utilization rate of the Suicide Prevention Workshop are also discussed.

Sub-theme 1: Personal problems

Both the participants and the literature consulted have revealed that personal problems contribute to suicide idealisation and to its accomplishment. The participants mentioned the following as the causes of suicide.

- “Family problems.”
- “Pride of police officers prevents them to disclose about their problems.”
- “Financial problems and mismanagement.”
- “Misuse of alcohol.”
- “Distant relationship.”
- “Chronic illnesses like HIV/AIDS.”
- “Untreated mental illnesses like depression.”

The researcher believes that there is a correlation between Durkheim’s classified types of suicide and her research findings as the station commissioners reported that some of the deceased members who committed suicide wrote in their notes that they had a lot of pressure, including financial problems. This concurs with the research conducted by Schlebusch (2005) that depression, stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS, substance abuse, stress resulting from both marital and financial problems, were identified as some of the causes of suicide. The research findings about the causes

of suicide (The medicine doctors.....2011), also revealed that feelings of hopelessness, depression and aggression have contributed to the suicide rate in police departments. Durkheim (in Giddens, 2001:10-11), has indicated that people kill themselves because of economic instability and rapid change.

Sub-theme 2: Work related problems

Work related stressors like shifts, long working hours, distant relationships, witnessing traumatic incidents and corruption by some police officers can cause the police officer to kill him/her self.” The following are statements from participants with regard to their work related problems.

- “Working conditions like exposure and witnessing of traumatic incidents.”
- “Investigation of criminal cases exposes the police officer’s life to be at risk.”
- “The pressure from management to be productive and perform according to set standards causes stress and depression.”
- “Poor time management leads to an inability to be competent, and that on its own depresses the police officer because it is regarded as misconduct.”
- “No room for negotiation if a police officer fails to perform according to set standards.”
- “Police culture has made police officers to regard themselves as strong, competent, experts and problem solvers. It becomes difficult for them to seek help when needed.”
- “Unfair blame by top management on station commanders for mistakes made by other police officers.”
- “Lack of promotions.”
- “Being placed at the police station which is far away from the police officer’s home contributed to lack of trust between the spouses, which in turn causes domestic violence.”
- “Rules and regulations that govern police departments. A junior police officer is not allowed to question or challenge the decision taken by the senior officer. For example, the station commander can never defy the instruction of the Provincial Commander.”

- “Top management is not supportive of challenges experienced at the station level. Instead of offering support and acknowledging the job well done, they always want to identify a query or a mistake and they will be harsh on you. They are not empowering.”
- “The suicide rate is due to shortage of EAS personnel to assist.”

The researcher is of the opinion that exposure to both personal and work related problems can contribute to an act of suicide being committed, if the problems are not dealt with accordingly. Unfortunately, the police culture seemed to have played a major role in making police officers to regard themselves as the problem solvers of the community, and as a result it becomes difficult for them to seek for help from the same community that relies on them for solutions and safety.

The responses from the participants are consistent with the findings of Faull (2010:146-156) after the interviews that were held with South African Police officers, revealing that the nature of police work is so demanding and it exposes them towards stressful situations like witnessing shooting incidents and traumatic incidents. Violanti (1996:51-54) also indicated that exposure to traumatic incidents, criminal justice inconsistencies, social strain and negative police image contributed towards police suicide. It was further indicated that the culture of police organizations has been structured in such a way that police officers must always comply with the instructions imposed on them by their supervisors/commanders, irrespective of how strict they are. Hendricks and Byers (1996:72) in conclusion mentioned the fact that exposure to stressful situations and corruption scandals by police officers in their working environment which in turn lead to perturbation and public scrutiny, contribute towards suicide incidents. The research conducted indicated that the police work is so demanding and stressful since police officers in their line of duty, have to witness the traumatic incidents and comply with the instructions from their commanders that cannot be challenged.

Sub-theme 3: Utilisation rate of the Suicide Prevention Workshop

Superiors of police members are encouraged to mandate or instruct the attendance of EAP services. The responses of the station commissioners reported that they (station commissioners) appreciate the importance of the Suicide Prevention Workshop; hence they nominate their subordinates to attend them. However, the following extracts indicate possible reasons for the lack of attending the Suicide Prevention Programme.

- “Some police officers don’t attend the workshops without a valid reason.”
- “We are willing to nominate the police officers to attend the workshops, but they (police officers) refuse to be nominated.”
- “Some police officers go to the extreme of asking us about the reason they got nominated and not other colleagues.”
- “Subordinates often refuse to be nominated for the workshops without valid reasons.”
- “Subordinates like to send the message that they can handle their concerns during their own time and not through us (their station commissioners’ requests).”
- “Police officers are reluctant to consult with the therapists.”
- “We support and see the importance of the Suicide Prevention Program, although we all have the challenge of employees refusing to be nominated to attend the workshops, hence we end up replacing them with clerks and cleaners.”
- “Due to their quasi-military training, police officers may regard themselves as champions in dealing with problematic situations from the community. Therefore they may possibly rely more on themselves and that is the reason they become reluctant to seek help when they encounter problems.”

The above-mentioned responses give the researcher the impression that those who got nominated to attend, might be thinking that they have already being classified as a troubled employee incapable of dealing with their concerns, and as a result they will try to fight back by declining the nomination for attending the workshop. These responses are in line with The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (1996) indicating that police officers at the training institutions are told to take control of everything, including the scene, the suspects and their (police officers) emotions. It was further mentioned that the police officers respond to the community when the situation is unpleasant, which implies that the community regard them as professionals who have been trained to attend to anti-social acts. The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) continue that due to the military training police officers received at their training institutions, they become reluctant to seek help during stressful situations because they were told to take control of everything, including their emotions. The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) also indicated that police officers completely associate themselves with the role of being a law enforcer; hence they fail to seek help. According to Hackett and Violanti (2003:68) police officers do not want to be declared weak by their superiors because they are afraid that they might be encouraged to have stress leave and that might jeopardize their chances for promotions.

3.3.3 SECTION C: SUICIDE PREVENTION WORKSHOPS

THEME 3: THE SUICIDE PREVENTION WORKSHOP

The third theme identified in the empirical data concerns the Suicide Prevention Workshops. The following sub-themes were identified; the impact of the Suicide Prevention Workshops on police officers, the role of the Suicide Prevention Workshop in reducing suicide and recommendations in terms of upgrading these workshops.

Sub-theme 1: The impact of the Suicide Prevention Workshop

The Suicide Prevention Program was developed in the year 2000 as a result of an increase in police suicide. During the Suicide Prevention Workshop, SAPS members are being taught about how to identify and assist a suicidal person and also the prevention of suicide. The following statements are mentioned by the participants as their perceptions of the impact of the Suicide Prevention Workshop on police officers.

- “Workshops must continue to be rendered because they provide knowledge about suicide.”
- “The commanders have to nominate and encourage police officers to attend the workshops because they educate them about the warning signs of suicide and how to deal with it.”
- “The workshops would be very effective if they were held at each police station because all members of the same police station would be reached.”
- “Workshops are good and as station commanders we also have to attend them but we can’t due to workload and demands of police work.”

These excerpts are in correlation with the view of Baker and Baker (1996:69-71) that police suicide can be reduced if all police personnel can be taught about the warning signs of suicide and how to deal with depression. The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) takes it further that police departments should focus on educating both the police officers and their families about measures to be put in place in order to cope with stressful situations, and to be able to identify a troubled police officer at an early stage.

Sub-theme 2: Reduction of police suicide

The station commissioners indicated that suicide was very high at certain times in SAPS. It seems that indeed SAPS members might have been experiencing a high level of stress and it contributed to an increase in the suicide rate. The participants

indicated that the workshops are useful in the sense that somehow they have helped to reduce suicide, however, they still believe that as station commissioners they still have a major task to perform. With regard to the reduction of police suicide the participants made the following comments.

- “Suicide can be reduced if the commanders/supervisors create a good working relationship with their subordinates so that they (subordinates) can be able to disclose and share their concerns with them.”
- “The suicide rate has deteriorated a little as compared to the early 1990’s.”
- “There are times when police officers killed themselves at a high rate, especially in 1995 up to 2003. Two suicide incidents occurred in my area in 2006 and 2008. The workshops have helped to reduce suicide.”
- “Police suicide seems to have deteriorated in other districts, whereas it still occurs in other clusters and districts.”
- “Police suicide was high in the year between 1999 and 2004. The workshops have reduced suicide a little.”

The responses correlate with Baker and Baker (1996:69) who reported that early identification of suicidal signs by the supervisors will help to reduce suicide in the sense that preventative measures will be put in place at an early stage. It was also mentioned that supervisors should be able to assess their subordinates’ problems and even schedule an appointment with the helping professional for assistance. The researcher also believes that the station commanders as the managers of police officers can play a major role in reducing police suicide if they are trained about suicide prevention so that they can be able to assess the problems experienced by their subordinates and refer them for assistance.

Sub-theme 3: Upgrading of the content of the Suicide Prevention Workshop

The participants mentioned that suicide reduction is the responsibility of everybody and that education about suicide will help to reduce it. The following statements are an indication of the participants' responses for upgrading the content of the Suicide Prevention Workshop.

- “Sustainability of relationships and marriages to be included in the Suicide Prevention Manual.”
- “A chapter about financial management to be included in the Suicide Prevention Manual because financial problems are one of the contributing factors towards police suicide.”
- “Trauma management must be taught during the workshops.”
- “The impact of substance dependency must be included in the Suicide Prevention Manual.”
- “The attendance of the workshops can improve if we (station commissioners) become the first employees to attend the Suicide Prevention Workshop, so that we can understand exactly what is supposed to be done to assist a suicidal or troubled employee.”

These statements concur with Baker and Baker's (1996:69-71) assertion that all police personnel should be taught about the warning signs of suicide and measures to deal with depression. It has also been mentioned that supervisors have a role to play in encouraging members to seek help and to be sensitized about how to deal with problems. The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (2010) takes it further indicating that police officers as peer supporters should be trained in effective communication and listening skills so that they can be able to communicate effectively with their colleagues and without being judgmental.

Sub-theme 4: Enrichment of the Suicide Prevention Workshop

The participants indicate their views through the following statements.

- “Motivational speakers need to be invited during the workshops and their roles should be to motivate members about the importance of life and problem solving skills.”
- “Social workers should be employed and placed at each police station.”
- “Members to be allowed to decide about the topics to be dealt with during Suicide Prevention Workshops so that their needs can be attended to.”
- “A need analysis should be done prior to the workshops so that police officers can be allowed to indicate the type of problems they encounter.”
- “The prevention strategies for police suicide should not only focus on police members, but also on their family members, so that they (family members) can be able to recognize the warning signs of suicide, and seek help.”
- “Station commissioners have to attend the workshops so that they can be able to encourage and motivate police officers to do the same.”
- “The Suicide Prevention Manual to be taught at the SAPS training institutions as a separate module to the newly recruited trainees, before it can be taught at the station level.”
- “The EAS personnel should be invited by the station commissioners during the station lectures that are held on a monthly basis, in order to have sessions about suicide prevention.”
- “The police TV program that is watched by all SAPS personnel on Wednesdays, should also allow the Head of EAS at the National level to present the Suicide Prevention Programme. It is an instruction that each and every SAPS employee has to watch the Police TV and many employees can benefit from this program.”
- “More awareness campaigns have to be organized in order to educate SAPS members about the importance of life.”
- “A lot of marketing still needs to be done about the importance of attending the workshops.”

These statements concur with Hackett and Violanti's (2003:8-11) assertion that police supervisors have to be trained about how to identify a troubled police officer, and what to do to enable him/her to get help. Baker and Baker (1996:69) also indicated that the research to be conducted in future should focus on supportive measures that can be initiated in police departments in order to reduce police suicide. The research conducted by Marks (1995) revealed that SAPS has to employ a lot of social workers who can be placed at all police stations in order to be able to attend to police officers' problems immediately.

3.4 SUMMARY

In chapter three the station commissioners' perceptions of police suicide were explored, whereby issues affecting their nomination strategies were discussed, together with the causes and methods used to commit suicide. The issue of gender in relation to police suicide was also discussed, as well as the members who might be at risk in terms of the ranking structure. The manner in which the Suicide Prevention Workshop can be upgraded was also discussed. The following chapter deals with conclusions and recommendations about how the Suicide Prevention Workshop can be upgraded to increase the attendance of the workshops by police officers.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

An empirical study of a qualitative nature was undertaken in this applied research with an attempt to find an answer to the research question: What are the perceptions of station commissioners regarding Suicide Prevention Workshops? The goal of the study was to explore the perceptions of station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshop targeted at police officers. Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews with 15 participants.

This chapter will serve as the final evaluation of the research process and results. In order to enable the researcher to provide an effective research report, certain conclusions and recommendations will be made.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of the empirical study.

- The station commissioners have a clear understanding of the concept and methods of suicide (pages 31-32).
- The availability and the accessibility of the firearm as a working tool were reported to be playing a major role towards police suicide. The station commissioners confirmed that the guns were the most common method used by police officers to commit suicide (pages 32).

- The station commissioners have given a positive input with regard to the Suicide Prevention Workshops and they indicated that the workshops are educational in nature in the sense that they equip members with knowledge about the warning signs of suicide and its prevention (pages 31-33).
- Both personal and work related problems have an impact on suicide (page 34-35).
- The Suicide Prevention Workshop should also have peer educators. The responsibility of the peer support will be to support their colleagues during stressful situations and to encourage them to seek help (page 33-34).
- Although the station commissioners support the existence of the workshops, some of them seem to be experiencing problems with their subordinates as they (subordinates) refuse to be nominated for the workshops (pages 35-36).
- The station commissioners were able to make important contributions to the reduction of suicide amongst police officers (page 36-37).
- Despite the poor attendance of the workshops by police officers, the station commissioners seemed to be willing to improve and promote the attendance of Suicide Prevention Workshops; hence they reported that they have to be the first managers to attend, so that their subordinates can be encouraged to also attend (pages 37-38).
- Police work is demanding and stressful, as a result station commissioners emphasize the importance of consultation with the EAS personnel for assistance with regard to handling of problems (pages 37-38).
- Police officers should be allowed to decide on the topics to be dealt with during the Suicide Prevention Workshops, so that the types of problems they encounter in life can be attended to in the workshops (pages 37-38).

4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to facilitate improvement with regard to affording police officers a chance to participate or attend the Suicide Prevention Workshops.

- The nature of the working relationship amongst the station commissioners and their subordinates needs to be explored.
- The station commissioners as supervisors should be trained in suicide prevention, so that they can identify the troubled employee and be able to encourage their subordinates to attend the workshops.
- Suicide Prevention Workshops have to be conducted on a monthly basis to try and curb the suicide rate in SAPS.
- Awareness sessions and meetings have to be held with the top management at both the national and provincial level in order to sensitize them about the importance of marketing the EAS during the Police TV Program watched by all police personnel on Wednesdays. This will sensitize the police officers about the importance of EAS in terms of stress management and reduction.
- The Suicide Prevention Program has to be reviewed annually to stay focused on relevant issues as indicated by police officers.
- Regular evaluations need to be done of the impact of the Suicide Prevention Workshops on the reduction of police suicide.
- The Suicide Prevention Program has to be educated at the SAPS training institutions so that the trainees can learn whilst at the college about how to deal with stressful situations.
- Marketing of the EAS be done on a monthly basis to sensitize members about the pro-active programs rendered, and to promote the availability and visibility of EAS personnel.

- Self help groups/peer support groups that are comprised of the EAS functionaries, station commissioners and police officers should be organised and held at the station level on a monthly basis as a way of offering the moral support to troubled employees.
- The attitude of SAPS members can be changed if self-help groups can be introduced to the members by management. There should be a policy that will encourage the development of such groups and an emphasis should be made that those groups have to work in partnership with the EAS personnel.
- The self-help group members should be trained about early identification of problems, warning signs of suicide and when and how to refer a troubled member. In this way police officers experiencing problems will be able to confide with their colleagues who in turn will refer them to EAS.
- Station commanders should act as role models of police officers in providing them with information about the importance of disclosing about their problems and also about the EAS.
- The role of station commanders in suicide prevention can help to reduce the occurrence of police suicide, provided that the working relationship is based on love, care, trust and support.

4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The following suggestions can be made for further research.

- Determine the reasons of police officers to fail to attend workshops.
- Explore the manner and the approach of station commissioners used in referring troubled police officers.
- Perceptions of subordinates of their superiors and the services rendered by the EAS.
-

4.5 SUMMARY

The goal of the study was to explore the perceptions of the station commissioners of Waterberg District regarding Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers. This goal was guided by the following objectives.

- To provide a theoretical background on suicide as a phenomenon both nationally and internationally. This objective was achieved in chapter 2.
- To explore the perceptions of Waterberg District regarding the Suicide Prevention Workshops targeted at police officers. This objective was attained in chapter 3 whereby the empirical findings are presented in detail. The data collected through semi-structured interviews were clearly analyzed, presented and interpreted.
- To provide recommendations that will facilitate improvement with regard to affording police officers a chance to participate or attend the Suicide Prevention Workshops. This has been achieved in chapter 4, where the researcher presents the recommendations based on the findings.

The researcher will therefore conclude that the goal and objectives of this study have been accomplished. It is evident that the Suicide Prevention Workshop is playing a major role in reducing suicide in the South African Police Services.

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Appendix A: Permission letter

Appendix B: Letter of consent

Appendix C: Interview schedule

Appendix D: Letter from editor