

**The Experiences of Police Officers Presenting with the Symptoms of Depression Within  
the Gauteng South African Police Services (SAPS)**

**by**

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## Declaration Statement

I, **Micaela Mooloo (13093534)**, hereby declare that this mini dissertation, which I submit for the degree of Master of Arts in Research Psychology at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been previously submitted by me at any other university.

Signature



Date

October 2022

## Abstract

The policing occupation is viewed and known globally as extremely high-risk and stressful work. The South African police context is characterised by high crime rates and constant organisational transformation that admittedly influences and dictates the meandering roles which police officers have to take. Constant exposure to the elements of critical incidents and trauma makes police officers susceptible targets to developing mental health problems such as depression. The purpose of this study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the experiences of depression among police officers in the South African Police Services (SAPS) in the Gauteng province. A qualitative approach was adopted to explore those experiences. Purposeful sampling was employed to select four Black African male police officers. The data collection methods were semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observations to understand the subjective experiences of depression by police officers. The findings revealed a culture of silence on mental health, external interference and an environment filled with organisational challenges. They showed further that police officers suffer from a lack of concentration, absenteeism, irregular sleeping patterns, disruptive interpersonal skills, and displaced anger as outcomes of depression. Thus, the study supports the view that depression is detrimental both to the personal and professional life of police officers. Therefore, it is recommended that the focus be on increased educational awareness on mental health, more access to professional psychological help, and a more supportive managerial structure within the South African Police Services in the Gauteng province.

Key words: Depression, police officers, South African Police Services, experiences.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that major depressive disorder is the second most prevalent disease in the world thus illustrating that mental health is a global concern. Interestingly, the scientific brief of WHO (2022) posits that the prevalence of anxiety and depression increased by a significant 25 per cent globally during the first year of the COVID 19 pandemic. Since police officers experience a variety of adverse exposures, they are ranked as being at high risk of developing depression leading to possible suicide. This topic has been the issue of intense debate, and a plethora of studies exist (Allison, 2019; Marshall et al., 2021; van der Velden et al., 2013) attesting to the vulnerability of police officers. This vulnerability increases the susceptibility of police officers to severe psychological health problems, such as depression (Stogner et al., 2020; Tsehay et al., 2021). Adding to the literature and studies on policing, this study has delved into the subjective experiences of depression with regard to the causes of depression, its effects, and the coping skills of law enforcers.

Being in the police has long been recognised by both experts and ordinary individuals as a stressful and emotionally taxing profession that places police officers in dangerous and compromising situations (Queirós et al., 2020; Rothmann & Pienaar, 2006). This may range from terrorist attacks on a national scale to domestic violence in urban areas (Cumming et al., 1964; Magnavita et al., 2018; Purba & Demou, 2019; Webster, 2013). Thus, the chronic prevalence of depression in the police force owing to the strain on officers arising out of stressful situations, is an issue that requires research attention. Mental health problems of officers have exceeded that of the general population, even before having to cope with the additional pandemic concerns of uncertainty and stress (Hartley et al., 2011). Therefore, the study intended to explore the experiences of police officers diagnosed with depression within the Gauteng province SAPS.

Previous research studies (Baldwin et al., 2019; Ermasova & Ermasova, 2020; Wassermann et al., 2019) have almost exclusively focused on the stress and psychological/physical health of police officers while other related studies have focused exclusively on occupational stress in the force (Acquadro Maran et al., 2015; Agolla, 2009; Gutshall et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2019). Although many studies exist about depression among police officers (Husain, 2020; Jenkins et al., 2019; Kutu et al., 2009; Santa Maria et al., 2018), research in understanding the subjective experiences of depression by police officers remains limited and the topic insufficiently explored. In order to fill this knowledge gap in the literature and to enhance understanding of depression among law enforcers, this research study investigated the experience of depression by police officers.

In this chapter, the motivation for the research is discussed in terms of the background of the study, which explores the presence of depression within the police environment. The research's justification, aim, and objectives are also discussed. The research questions and the theoretical framework are followed by an overview of the research methodology. Finally, the structure of the dissertation is provided, as well as a summary of the chapter.

## **1.1 Background**

Significant political and socioeconomic transformation has taken place in South Africa. The transformation that occurred in South Africa after 1994 impacted police officers across the country (Newham, 2000). This included a few police centres being closed, resulting in police services losing members who had specialised knowledge, experience, and skills (Polity, 2013). This transformation and change contributed to an increase in violence and crime resulting in police officers encountering and experiencing a variety of stressors related to their duties, such as witnessing colleagues die during their duties, dealing with domestic violence recovering bodies from accident scenes, or responding to and dealing with cases involving child battery (Gulle et al., 1998). These occurrences, coupled with unlawful actions, brutality, and disruptive

protests, increased the workload for police officers, which may have resulted in police officers experiencing depression.

As reported by the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021), depression affects approximately 3.8 per cent of the population. This figure includes a significant number of people who are tasked with safeguarding society, such as firefighters and police officers, among others (Kamkar et al., 2019). Moreover, research studies discovered that police officers are more likely than the general population to suffer from depression with a prevalence rate of 10.6 per cent to 14.6 per cent (Wickramasinghe et al., 2016). The occupational stressors that are present in the police work environment intensify the risk for officer mental health morbidities such as suicide, to the extent that Perkins (2016) described police suicide as an epidemic in South Africa. High-speed car chases, the experiences of loss and trauma, physical confrontations, and protecting the people you serve are a recipe for stress and ultimately, depression. It is quite apparent that suicide owing to depression within the SAPS occurs at high levels. An alarming four to one ratio occurred between 2012 and 2013, when 115 officers committed suicide and 29 were murdered in the line of duty. Based on calculations from the SAPS 2012–13 report and Statistics South Africa, the number of police deaths by suicide was 73.9 per 100 000 officers (Perkins, 2016).

Researchers (Civilotti et al., 2022; Mokgobu, 2010; Njiro et al., 2021) argued that the many causes that expose police officers to the high risk of suicide, depression and mental illness are significant contributing factors. A study on the predictors of depressive symptoms in police officers claimed that police work is one of the most stressful occupations because trauma exposure places the individual at a higher risk of developing depression (Wang et al., 2010). Numerous causative factors trigger the SAPS officers to be at an increased risk of experiencing depression. These include strenuous work shifts, the limelight of public scrutiny, lack of support from both managers and family, job pressure, and administrative/organisational

pressure (Kamkar et al., 2019; Purba & Demou, 2019). This study endeavoured to explore how these stressors play a role in causing depression amongst police officers and how it impacts their livelihoods.

The Marikana Commission of Inquiry brought attention to the high incidence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder among South African police officers, both of which are known to be precursors to suicide. According to the report, of the 153 000 (estimated) SAPS personnel, 10 000 officers suffered from depression and 2 700 from post-traumatic stress disorder (Perkins, 2016). Depression among police officers is a common mental disorder; however, the silence within the police culture discourages the acknowledgement of depression (Burns & Buchanan, 2020; O'Connor, 2019). Depression is recognised as a serious, worldwide public mental health concern and the climate within the force does not adequately address it; thus, it is against such a backdrop that this research study endeavoured to give added understanding of the experiences of police officers diagnosed with depression.

Furthermore, there is a considerably close connection between depression and burnout in the workplace (Mushwana et al., 2019; Nkosi, 2019; Queirós, 2020). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 21), 'psychological stress, therefore, is a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. Based on this argument, the concept of stress in the workplace is defined as a 'pattern of physiological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses that occur when workforces are presented with demands not matched to their knowledge, skills, or abilities and more specifically which challenges their ability to cope' (Patel et al., 2017, p. 1). The most striking feature of this is the detrimental impact of occupational stress on the worker's productivity, performance, and well-being (Quick & Henderson, 2016). Therefore, owing to the occupational stressors present within the police

work environment, there is an increase in the risk of mental health morbidities such as depression among police officers (Purba & Demou, 2019).

## **1.2 Justification, Aim and Objectives**

### ***1.2.1 Justification***

Most studies conducted have focused on the stress sources for police officers and their profound effect on their health and job performance (Arujunan et al., 2021; Chikwem, 2017; Queirós, 2020). From these studies, evidence exists of depression in the police work environment and associated absences; however, there is limited research about the experiences, understanding, and coping with depression among police officers (Purba & Demou, 2019; Sallis & Birkin, 2014). This indicated a need to comprehend and understand the diverse experiences that exist among depressed police officers, which the researcher attempted to explore. The scarcity of studies on the experiences of depression by police officers has necessitated the present study. This study has endeavoured to contribute towards an in-depth understanding of how police officers experienced depression in their workplace.

As mentioned in the preceding discussion, studies (Galanis et al., 2021; Purba & Demou, 2019; Queirós, 2020) revealed that police officers respond to and witness some of the most tragic events that occur within the South African society. The related job stress can have a pivotal impact on their mental well-being, which can accumulate throughout their career (Ismail et al., 2015; Mensah, 2021). Moreover, depression is costing the country 4.2 per cent of the GDP owing to ‘presenteeism’ and unproductive employees. Thus, both the economic and humanistic consequences of depression are considered more than significant reasons why this social issue needs to be investigated to assist in understanding its destructive and sometimes fatal consequences (Bassa-Suleman, 2017). This study intended to contribute directly to the literature that explores the phenomenon of depression from the experiences of

the police officers themselves. The repercussions of depression on the individual, their coping mechanisms, their fears, anxiety, and any other difficulties they may experience as police officers surfaced in this study; thus, aiming to create a greater awareness when addressing depression in the police work environment. By identifying these aspects of depression, the research may be useful and of benefit to the SAPS as it contributes to knowledge and the further understanding of the functioning of police officials diagnosed with depression. Although the context of policing is South African, occupational stressors are generic globally and since depression is a worldwide concern, more insight is required to address its consequences. It is apparent that on a macro and a micro level, internationally and in South Africa, police officers are susceptible to a variety of stressors that trigger the occurrence of depression. On a macro level, the roles and responsibilities of police officers place them in stressful situations that impact their mental health significantly. However, on a micro level, the working environment of the SAPS is characterised by high crime rates, murders of police officers, poor working conditions, and increasing violence. As Stuurman (2022) proclaims, the SAPS is in perpetual crisis since South Africa is known to be the most unequal country in the world. The SAPS has a history of a long and brutal colonial and apartheid past (Stuurman, 2022). These components have an impact on the mental health of police officers, thus giving rise to depression (Mushwana et al., 2019). Keeping this in consideration, the following section outlines the aim and objectives of the study.

### ***1.2.2 Aim***

This study aimed to explore the experiences of depression by police officers in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

### ***1.2.3 Objectives***

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To gain insight into SAPS officers' subjective experience of depression in the Gauteng province
- To understand how day-to-day occupational stressors contribute to the depression experienced by SAPS officers in Gauteng.
- To explore the coping strategies that SAPS police officers in Gauteng adopted to cope with their depression in the work environment.
- To make recommendations for the management of depression among SAPS officers in Gauteng.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions:

#### ***1.3.1 Primary Research Question***

What are the subjective experiences of depression by police officers in the Gauteng province SAPS?

#### ***1.3.2 Secondary Question***

What occupational stressors does SAPS officers in Gauteng view as the cause(s) of their depression?

How do police officers cope with depression in their work environment?

What recommendations can be made to manage depression among SAPS officers in Gauteng?

## **1.4 Concept Clarification**

Depression is a common mental illness relating to a mood disorder that causes feelings of melancholy, dejection, loss of desire and interest for everyday life, and persistent despondency (Agrawal & Singh, 2020).

Police culture is a term that defines the organisational culture in policing, which is structured by a specific set of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours exhibited by those in law enforcement (Biggs et al., 2014; Violanti et al., 2017).

Psychosocial factors is a term that refers to the influence of the police social culture and environment on officers' emotions, behaviours, and general psychological-being (Jenkins et al., 2019; Patterson, 2016).

Stress is a term that refers to a state of physical, mental, and emotional strain or tension brought about by psychosocial factors (Alsentali & Anshel, 2015; Jenkins et al., 2019)

Stressors are any event, force or condition that causes physical or emotional stress. Stressors may be internal or external influences that require coping mechanisms or adjustment on the side of the afflicted individual (Gunderson et al., 2011).

## **1.5 Theoretical Framework**

This research aimed to describe, identify, and capture police officers' subjective lived experiences of depression in the Gauteng province of South Africa. To achieve this aim, a phenomenological theoretical approach was adopted. A phenomenological approach assumes that one's experiences must be shaped by the context in which they are experienced. Therefore, the subject of consciousness focuses on the phenomena and occurrences that arises from an interaction with the outside world (Willig, 2013).



The purpose of phenomenology is to define and describe what is significant and meaningful about an experience through a description of what was experienced and how it occurred (Neubauer et al., 2019). During the process of discovering and defining the phenomenon, phenomenology aims to capture the essence of the individual's experience (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). This theory primarily reflects on and examines the phenomena that arise in acts of consciousness as well as the structures of consciousness. A positive relationship exists between perception and objects (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Experiences are created by human consciousness, which requires perceiving and conceiving of an object or an event. According to the phenomenological theory, consciousness is an integral part of our existence and exists in co-dependence with our bodies; therefore, we are regarded as individuals with embodied consciousnesses (Broomé, 2011; Wertz, 2011; Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). It has been suggested by Broomé (2011) that consciousness is a synthesis of one's experiences through intentionality, a core principle of phenomenology. Intentionality enables objects to appear as a phenomenon, meaning that the 'self and the world are inseparable components of meaning' (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28).

The concept of intentionality theorises that how an item appears as a perceptual phenomenon is dependent on the 'perceiver's context, angle of perception, as well as their mental orientation, such as their wishes, emotions, and preconceived notions' (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015; Willig, 2013, p.84). Thus, intentionality mirrors the relationship between the object and the appearance of the object in one's consciousness. In this approach the self and the world are viewed as essential elements of meaning (Willig, 2013). The act of experience is related to the meaning of the phenomenon (Yüksel & Yildirim, 2015). Thus, the essence of the phenomenon under study is derived from the act of police officers experiencing depression in their work environment. Moreover, this study was concerned with understanding the experience of depression of police officers. From this point of view, it was assumed that each

police officer has a distinctive experience of depression, and even the same experience can be described differently by each officer. These individual experiences would help in determining the similarities and in attempting to understand the fundamental nature of the phenomena.

## **1.6 Description of Research Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach to describe life experiences and situations by attaching meaning and significance to these encounters (Burns & Grove, 2003). The richness and depth of description gained from a qualitative approach provides a distinct appreciation of the reality of the experiences as it emphasizes the dynamic, unique, and all-encompassing aspects of the human experience (Magidi, 2014). Therefore, these unique perspectives of individuals made a qualitative approach relevant as the researcher intended to capture and record the experiences of police officers and their reactions and coping preferences to manage depression.

### ***1.6.1 Participants***

The study utilised purposeful criterion sampling, which involved the selection of participants based on how relevant they were to the study. The study consisted of four Black African male participants who presented and experienced symptoms of depression in their work environment (Creswell, 2009; de Vos, 2002; Palys, 2008). To assist in the recruitment of participants, the researcher consulted a gatekeeper employed as an officer in the Gauteng province SAPS. The researcher shared the request for participation information letter with the gatekeeper, who then disseminated this letter together with the researcher's contact details via email to his/her colleagues. Since the researcher did not receive any feedback, the researcher then visited several police stations to obtain participants. In order to conduct this study, the researcher obtained permission from the station commanders.

The population of this research included police officers from the Gauteng province SAPS. Police officers of different ranks operating at a station level were recruited. These were constables, sergeants, and captains. Those recruited were administered a pre-screener script, Beck's Depression Inventory-II, which is a self-reporting questionnaire used to assess depression severity in normal and psychiatric populations. Scores above 20 indicate depression; thereafter, from the population a sample of four police officers who scored 20 or above on the inventory were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview.

The following inclusion criteria were used:

- All participants must have experienced depressive symptoms, scoring 20 or above on the Beck's Depression Inventory.
- All participants should be able to speak and read in English.
- All participants must be full-time police officers in the Gauteng province police (should be working at SAPS for one year or more).

In applying these criteria, the sample became more homogenous, with all participants having experienced the phenomenon being studied (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

### ***1.6.2 Methods of Data Collection***

Face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews were used as a data collection tool. The data documentation method incorporated audio recordings of the semi-structured interviews, after receiving consent from participants (Creswell, 2009; de Vos, 2002; Silverman, 2006). Through semi-structured individual interviews, the researcher gathered information about each participant's experiences with depression related to their work environment (Mack et al., 2005). Through the semi-structured interview police officers redefined and reframed the topic, illuminating elements that the researcher has not considered or was not aware of (Willig, 2013).

Throughout the data collection, the researcher utilised naturalistic observations as an added data-generation method (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The reason for this found in Giorgi's (2009) claimed that phenomenologically orientated questions that may reveal 'abstract' responses. Paying heed to Giorgi's (2009) concerns, the researcher remained observant to determine whether the participants were displaying any non-verbal cues (Fry, 2016). Observations were advantageous as they permitted the researcher to identify what participants were feeling or were reluctant to talk about. The corresponding data documentation method was field notes. Field notes entailed taking notes of the observations made (Creswell, 2009), thereby enriching interview data. As the researcher entered the workplace in search of participants and administered the Beck's Depression Inventory-III, the observations of the surroundings and environment in which these police officers work, gave the researcher first-hand experience of the setting and work environment, thus creating an awareness of the phenomena in question. The researcher had the opportunity to observe the policemen in their natural settings, which added depth to the research findings.

The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic and strict safety protocols were adhered to in compliance with the South African regulations. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in a well-ventilated room, where the interview was conducted by the researcher and a single participant at a time, with social distancing always maintained of at least one and a half metres from one another. KN95 masks were provided at no cost to the participants, and all parties were required to wear the mask over their mouth and nose for the entire duration of the session. Each participant was also provided with a bottle of hand sanitiser and was encouraged to use it frequently throughout the session. The temperatures of all participants were taken with an infrared thermometer before the session to ensure that and temperatures were within the normal range of 37.4 degrees Celsius. For a researcher, the health and well-being of the participants are of the utmost importance.

### ***1.6.3 Data Analysis and Interpretation***

In the present study, the subjective experiences of police officers were extracted using the thematic analysis by Clarke and Braun (2013) alongside the descriptive phenomenology method of Giorgi (2009). A significant and initial aspect of the data analysis is phenomenological reduction: bracketing (Giorgi et al., 2017), which inhibited the researcher from making any judgements or having any preconceived ideas (Whiting, 2001). This stance was adopted for the study and was maintained throughout the data analysis procedure as far as possible. The conclusions that were drawn were consistent with the responses obtained from the semi-structured interviews. During data analysis, the researcher engaged and familiarised herself with the data, generated units/initial codes of meaning, identified themes, and reviewed the themes in relation to each other. A subsequent step involved defining and naming the themes appropriately. When conclusions were made regarding police officers' experiences with depression, the themes that were utilised related to this issue.

### **1.7 Outline of the Chapters**

In this section, an outline and summary of the contents of each chapter of this mini dissertation is provided.

Chapter One introduced the research topic. It provided the background to the study regarding depression amongst police officers. This chapter explored the rationale of the study, which was followed by the purpose and aims, clarification of relevant key concepts as well as the theoretical and methodological choices utilised for the study.

Chapter Two provides a brief literature review of all sources consulted for this study. It explores available literature on depression in the context of the police work environment. In particular, the experiences of police officers with depression are discussed.

Chapter Three provides a discussion of the phenomenological theory on which this research is based. This chapter outlines the basic principles and concepts.

Chapter Four includes a detailed exploration and discussion regarding the methodological choices of the study. The research design, sampling of the participants, methods utilised for collecting data, and methods used to analyse and interpret the results are included.

Chapter Five presents the findings of the research study about the aims and objectives. The findings are presented in themes, which emerged from the data analysis.

Chapter Six concludes the research study. A discussion of the themes that emerged from the interview material is presented. Moreover, this discussion is related to the literature, and the aims and objectives of the study. This chapter summarises the study by providing recommendations on strategies to be implemented by the SAPS to assist officers experiencing and suffering from depression.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter introduced the research topic and presented an overview of the study. Thereafter, the chapter discussed the background of the study and its justification. In addition, the research aims, objectives, and research questions were presented, followed by operational definitions and the clarification of key concepts relevant to the study. Furthermore, the theoretical framework and research methodology were outlined. Finally, the layout of the chapters was provided. The next chapter provides an extensive literature review, grounded on the experiences of depression by police officers.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of what depression is, followed by a thorough analysis of the pertinent literature and factors to help comprehend organizational and administrative pressures and their relationship to depression among police officers. Depression is one of the psychological problems with the highest diagnosis rate (Brown et al., 1997, Davies et al., 1995; Ollendick & Yule, 1990). Although the prevalence of depression has increased over the years, limited qualitative research has been conducted on the experiences of depression among police officers in the police profession in a South African context. The police profession involves police officers engaging in tasks that require a different level of mental, physical, and emotional ability to respond effectively. This can predispose police officers to experiencing personal, operational, and organisational stressors. Several authors (de Terte et al., 2014; Steinkopf et al., 2014; Violati et al., 2013) have expressed a concern that the police profession, culture, and overall organisational stressors can contribute and lead to severe emotional, psychological, physical, and mental health problems such as depression.

### 2.2 The Concept of Depression

Depression is a mood disorder, characterized by a constellation of symptoms that are not in response to normal life circumstances (Park & Zarate, 2019). Mood disorders cause disturbances in a person's cognitive, behavioural, somatic, and emotional state. The severity of depression's signs and symptoms ranges from feelings of sadness, guilt, and worthlessness to deep despair, complete hopelessness, and suicidal ideation, which could lead to suicide (Spielberger et al., 2003). An individual experiencing persistent depression experiences physical and psychological symptoms such as fatigue, insomnia, weight gain or weight loss,

frequent crying, and chronic pain (Penninx et al., 2013). To be diagnosed with depression, symptoms need to persist for at least two weeks.

According to the DSM IV, to make a diagnosis of depression, an individual must experience the five or more of the following symptoms within the same two-week period and at least of the symptoms should be either loss of interest or pleasure or a depressed mood:

- Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day.
- Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities most of the day, nearly every day.
- Significant weight loss when not dieting or weight gain or decrease or increase in appetite nearly every day.
- A slowing down of thought and a reduction of physical movement (observable by others, not merely subjective feelings of restlessness or being slowed down).
- Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day.
- Feelings of worthlessness or excessive or inappropriate guilt nearly every day.
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate, or indecisiveness, nearly every day.
- Recurrent thoughts of death, recurrent suicidal ideation without a specific plan, or a suicide attempt or a specific plan for committing suicide.

Aligning to the aim of the study, the Becks Depression Inventory-II, which is a 21-item self-rated scale used to measure the severity of depression consistent with the symptoms of depression as presented in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). From the abovementioned, it is evident that depression is a complex, multifaceted psychological disorder that consists of several underlying dimensions. There is a general agreement that acute and chronic life stressors can cause psychological and physical reactions



(Schneiderman et al., 2005). As one of the study's objectives, understanding how the day-to-day occupational stressors affect police officers will be explored.

Depression is often found in police officers especially those who have spent many years in the force (Mushwana et al., 2019). The South African Police Services have implemented an Employee Health and Wellness (EHW) programme to assist in the identification and diagnosis of behavioural, emotional distress and enrich employee mental, occupational and physical well-being. The EHW programme allows police officers to self-refer or alternatively, family members or colleagues can refer a SAPS employee if they think they can benefit from the services. Station Commanders are thoroughly trained to recognize troubled and distress employees and are encouraged to refer these employees to EHW. The wellness programme was established to offer various essential services such as psycho-social and spiritual interventions. The Psychological Services department offers psychometric testing and assessments, as well as clinical interventions and therapy for depression that the member might experience. The services offered through the EHW is aimed at promoting and enhancing the social functioning and well-being of SAPS employees (Jacobs, 2022). The primary objective of these psychological services implemented by SAPS was to assist police officers to utilize adaptive and proactive coping strategies instead of the common maladaptive strategies used such as suicidal ideation, domestic violence, and substance abuse (Wassermann et al., 2018).

### **2.3 Police Culture**

The variables within a law enforcement setting range from organisational issues to task-related stressors, and somewhere between bureaucratic red tape and the lack of resources, a culture exists that is unique to the police work environment (Nkosi, 2019). This study explored the police culture and chose this variable as a point of departure merely to set the tone for a thorough understanding of the unique work environment to which officers are exposed.

Although a study by Cojean (2020) sought to provide comprehensive information about the environmental factors that affect the lives of police officers, the culture in the force has been the product of categorised organisational stress and occupational stress (Nkosi, 2019).

In an attempt to define culture, the literature revealed, according to Robbins (1993), that culture is a system of shared meaning in which associates of a group share the same perceptions. McGuire et al. (2002) defined culture as shared beliefs of a society. Odey (2010, p. 1) provided a more holistic definition of culture when he posited that culture is ‘the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people’. For this study, the culture in SAPS will be explored in its entirety, drawing from the definitions above. Culture creates a belief system of characteristics that influences one’s attitudes and perspectives. This study focused on the characteristics that occur on the continuum between organisational and occupational stressors, which decides the culture that exists in the police force.

To understand the mental health aspect surrounding law enforcement, it is crucial first to understand the multiple factors of traditional police culture. Although police culture is likely to vary, police officers do share a common set of beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviours (Cordener, 2017). Burke (2019) indicated that the attitudes held by police officers are coping strategies adopted in response to the internal and external stressors they experience. Values such as solidarity, unity, or attitudes of having a general mistrust of citizens are ways that police officers have adopted to cope with stress and danger followed by stressful traumatic events. This police culture consists of a set of beliefs and expectations that dictates how they should go about completing their tasks, how to interact with each other or the public, and what type of relationships they should have and maintain. The situations that police officers find themselves

in does not differ much from country to country, which leads to the conclusion that police culture is similar to the concept of policing being universal (Terpstra & Schaap, 2013).

On a micro level South African policing has a different cultural landscape characterized by corruption and criminality. However, the controversial issue debated under the topic of policing communities include whether we need a “war on crime in the community” or a “war on crime within the force itself.” This concept of corruption disrupts public faith because the police officer who acts illegally dishonours himself, the law, and the justice system he represents. Some acts involve receiving monetary bribes, abusing their authoritative privilege or concealing criminal activities (Williams, 2002). Furthermore, when the police organization fails to punish travesties of justice, they inadvertently encourage a culture of corruption that breeds discrimination, deception and greed. The discussion on the culture of corruption and criminality within the police organisation is too vast to explore in this research but failing to mention this controversy will not do justice to this study. To connect this culture to depression in the force illustrates that the police officers are under continual public scrutiny and since the police are viewed as a yardstick by which the public measures authority, their acts are closely monitored and are under public surveillance thus contributing to stress by just wearing a badge. Corruption culture has roots in many police institutions including SAPS (Burger, 2011) and in order to understand police corruption and criminality, which is a global concern with serious social consequences, its contributing elements should be further explored as there exists extensive public disagreement (Burger, 2011; Williams, 2002).

From the onset of police officers’ careers, they have been coached to conceal and camouflage their emotions. According to Papazoglou and Andersen (2014), the principles of emotional suppression, isolation, and stoicism are usually present in police culture. Being a police officer means displaying and exercising a high degree of control, maintaining an aloof demeanour, and suppressing emotions (Lennie, 2019). Losing control of their ability to

maintain stoicism or talking about emotions is deemed unacceptable and could potentially threaten their career development and growth (Lennie, 2019; Sweeney, 2022). A police officer is portrayed in this heroic image as being emotionless, possessing integrity, an intimidating posture that demands respect, and has an intimidating tone of voice (Rufo, 2017). Therefore, police culture is also complicit in creating the stigma that exists concerning mental health issues; hence, many police officers are hesitant to seek help.

For many police officers, being an officer means being brave, courageous, and able to handle everything that comes your way. The mere idea of seeking or of requiring help for mental health concerns demonstrates a sign of weakness (Burns & Buchanan, 2020). Additionally, police officers fear that speaking out will result in negative consequences (Burke, 2019). Furthermore, the police work environments are also known for its male-dominated culture that accentuates the notion that a man suppresses and ignores signs of distress, anxiety, and mental health problems (Harris et al., 2015). Moreover, officers who decide to seek psychological assistance and support will be labelled, ridiculed, and stigmatised as weak or incompetent (Karaffa & Koch, 2016; Royle, 2014). This police culture of masculinity, emotional self-control and stigma towards mental illness contributes to officers being hesitant towards seeking help for emotional or mental distress (Lane et al., 2022; Royle, 2014).

A major trait of police work necessitates officers of the law to suppress emotions related to shock, horror or despair. On the other hand, they are also expected to show compassion and understanding towards victims of crime. This requires the skill of continuously switching between empathetic and emotionless, and sometimes a situation requires assertiveness which can result in cognitive confusion (Maloney, 2014). The added pressure of confidentiality about work issues and the suppression of emotions are elements leading to stress and isolation (Maloney, 2014).

Police officers will avoid seeking mental health treatment because they fear and expect to be ostracised, have their weapons revoked or be overlooked in times of career advancements and promotions (Burns & Buchanan, 2020; Stuart, 2017). Furthermore, Lennie (2019) argued that police officers understand that speaking out may be interpreted as showing a loss of emotional control, and weakness and could result in the inability to maintain order and authority, and eventual ‘career suicide’ (Stuart, 2017, p.1). In addition, police officers fear being avoided and shunned by colleagues, as Corrigan et al. (2014) articulated. There is a stigma of being identified as vulnerable and being labelled for the reason of seeking mental health treatment.

In a previous study, Karaffa and Koch (2016) examined the effects of public stigma and self-stigma on attitudes towards other police officers seeking mental health treatment. The results demonstrated a negative association between attitudes regarding seeking out professional psychological assistance and self- and public stigma. Furthermore, the study found that police officers were more likely to engage in mental health programmes and resources in an environment that was less stigmatizing and more accepting (Karaffa & Koch, 2016). Thus, researchers such as Laverson (2007), cited in Marsh (2019), recommended that adopting policies and guidelines to educate police officers about the psychological effects of work-related stress would be beneficial to police organizations. Furthermore, these officers should be educated and trained on the steps and instructions to facilitate a supporting culture using applicable and available resources and interventions.

## **2.4 The Nature of Policing and Occupational Stress**

According to Adegoke (2014), occupational stress has a detrimental impact on the daily living and psychological well-being of police officers. Occupational obligations can be extremely stressful, and many jobs such as policing are prone to severe demands in terms of

responsibility, time, and performance, which result in police officers experiencing an unusual degree of stress (Adegoke, 2014). Owing to the nature of policing and being repeatedly exposed to stressful incidents, police officers experience uncomfortable emotional reactions, which affect their behaviour (Mangwani, 2012). The organization and the individual are both impacted by this ongoing workplace stress. On an individual level, it causes poor mental health, burnout, work–family conflict, maladaptive coping strategies, and even suicide. On an organisational level, it impacts job performance and improper interactions with citizens, such as using excessive force and engaging in counterproductive work behaviours.

Policing, according to traditional societies, is perceived to be a job which is considered an exclusively male occupation (Yalley & Olutayo, 2020). This gender prejudice manifests various types and levels of occupational stressors. Research results by Lindsay (2001), and Akinnawo and Kayaking (2010), proclaimed that in addition to the occupational stressors, an individual's impression and perception of their occupation is a reliable indicator of their work attitude and psychological well-being. Furthermore, in traditionally male-dominated professions such as police work several patriarchal rules and policies exist that place female officers at a disadvantage, thereby contributing to occupational stress.

According to an article by Redman (2018), Daniel Mattos, a law enforcement veteran for more than 30 years, describes the psychological impact of police work as follows:

*By the very nature of what we do as police officers, we are unavoidably exposed to a host of toxic elements that can be likened to grains of sand that ever so gradually are placed on our psychological backs. As time goes on, the sand increases in volume. Without the proper tools to remove it, the weight can become unbearable. In fact, in some cases, the sand becomes so heavy that it can collapse officers. The result of the sand's weight takes a heavy toll on us; substance abuse, anxiety, depression, failed*

*marriages, and other emotional and physical ailments that rise well above societal averages plague our profession.* (Redman, 2018, p. 2)

The above quotation describes the continuous exposure to negative elements that police officers encounter which, over time, has an overwhelmingly negative impact on their psychological health. It is a profession that is ‘plagued’, which confirms that this occupation indeed poses a mentally high-risk threat. The negative coping behaviours mentioned and the negative effects, both physically and emotionally, can impede officer resiliency in the aftermath of traumatic occurrences indicating that police work is hypothesised to be a substantial source of stress and serve as a significant stressor for officers.

Depression in the police work environment may be intensified and compounded in the lives of police officers by multiple factors. Apart from the severity of the effect of workplace depression, according to Stander et al. (2016), there is the employee’s sense of being trapped in an unhealthy and unsatisfying work environment. Numerous police officers do not see a ‘way out’. The nature of the police culture with its ‘cowboys don’t cry’ mentality, and its emphasis on physical toughness means that officers are unlikely to express their anger, fears, and frustrations at work (Khan, 2007). Although multiple factors theoretically compound a depressed employee’s dilemma, what it ultimately reveals is that depressed employees find themselves in what feels to them like an ‘inescapable double-bind’. Therefore, policing is deemed to be one of the most psychologically dangerous occupations worldwide (Queirós et al., 2020; Stogner et al., 2020).

The nature of police work tends to inflict a high degree of stress and the multiplicity of stressful situations can affect the mental, physical, and interpersonal relationships of police officers (Selokar et al., 2011). Occupational stress, especially among officers, is known to increase the occurrence of depression (Burke, 2019). Police work requires officers to be placed in high-intensity, dangerous situations, resulting in notable occupational stress and fatigue,

obstructing their response and performance (Hope, 2016; Jonyo, 2015). The occupational stress experienced by police officers can reduce productivity, encourage absenteeism, lower employee morale, cause both physical and emotional problems, and ultimately, lead to poor satisfaction with life (Purba & Demou, 2019). Long-term and acute exposure to occupational stressors have been associated with altered perceptions, diminished ability to solve problems and deterioration of the working memory (Gutshall et al., 2017).

As mentioned, the duties of police officers cause them to bear witness to a surplus of stressful events. They are exposed to human remains, interviewing vulnerable populations, finding themselves in situations where they are unable to help, or they are exposed to scenes that are reminders of previous traumatic incidents (Conn & Butterfield, 2013). Furthermore, police officers are faced with added stressors that include the quality of their work environment, relationships with colleagues, and access to mental health resources. Work conditions in policing are constantly changing, characterised by efficiency demands, heavy workloads, and strenuous hours, together with job insecurity, creating increased pressure. As a result of the constant exposure to catastrophic events as part of the daily grind of police work, psychological issues such as depression can develop (Allison, 2019; Civilotti et al., 2022).

## **2.5 The Prevalence of Depression in the Police Work Environment**

Owing to the stressful nature of police work, police officers are susceptible to an increased risk of mental health problems such as depression (Nelson & Smith, 2016; Violanti et al., 2009). Therefore, the prevalence of depression among police officers is expected to be higher than that of other occupational groups (Violanti et al., 2009). According to Tafet et al., (2004), there is a long history of research linking chronic psychosocial stress to depression's onset and progression. Conclusions of studies conducted by Storch and Panzarella (1996), and Burke (1996), which investigated stress in the police fraternity indicated that the profession causes or



exacerbates psychological and physical conditions like alcoholism, depression, burnout, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide and early retirement (Burke, 1993; Storch & Panzarella, 1996). SAPS members contend with pressures that may lead them to view their work as stressful and taxing, such as the conflict between freedom and societal regulations, as well as policing and monitoring communities in violation of strict legal restrictions (Violanti, 1983; Paulsen, 2008).

Throughout their careers, police personnel are routinely exposed to trauma (Arble et al., 2017; Maguen et al., 2009). The culmination of these traumatic events can mean the onset of mental health conditions and have been known to hinder the resilience of police officers to mental illness (Burke, 2019; Conn & Butterfield, 2013).

The prevalence of these negative symptoms could potentially be attributed to a lack of departmental support and provision of appropriate interventions. According to Dantzker (2011), police officers have mastered the skill of containing their thoughts and emotions when confronted with a distressing sight or a traumatic scene. Although police officers may not outwardly display fear or sadness, the psychological impact of these traumatic incidents can be profound for years to come. When police officers avoid the destructive effects of ever-present traumatic and stressful incidents this can reduce job satisfaction and police productivity significantly. Furthermore, mental health conditions among police officers are associated with various other issues such as police suicides, domestic violence among police officer couples, maladaptive coping strategies, and alcoholism (Violanti et al., 2017). Police minister Bheki Cele disclosed that 30 police officers had died by suicide between April 2020 and March 2021, with another 37 police officers committing suicide between April 2021 and January 2022. Multiple variables exist that drive police suicides including depression, poor coping skills, relationship challenges and financial difficulties (Carpenter, 2021). It is these comorbidities

that underlie the aim of this study: to investigate the depression variable in the Gauteng province South African police culture.

Mushwana et al. (2019) measured depression triggered by the stressors within the police profession. According to Pearlman (in Haskell, 1999), police officers are vulnerable because of aspects concerning the nature of their profession and consequently, they experience indirect traumatisation in the SAPS. This study ascertains that, owing to their close contact with survivors or victims of trauma, their mere exposure makes them vulnerable to developing depression. Therefore, this research study offers important insights into the subjective experiences of depression by police officers. The study revolved around the issue of depression in the workplace and how exposure to trauma by police officers can hurt their mental health.

## **2.6 The Experiences of Police Officers Diagnosed with Depression**

In a study on exploring burnout in the South African Police Services, Nkosi (2019) attributed a lack of resources to meet the high demands of the job as some of the causes of burnout. This refers to organisational structures within the force. Does the argument then prevail if depression is caused by the danger that officers face or by the organisational structures? Do the different sources of stress affect the severity of the depression? This research is intended to shed light on this phenomenon.

Depression does correlate with burnout and is viewed as a secondary symptom. Although this can occur in any profession, the dynamics of police work itself can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and eventually to depression (Nkosi, 2019). The work-related causes of stress in SAPS can be attributed to insufficient management support, biased promotions, poor working environments, prejudiced disciplinary procedures, poor interactive relationships with colleagues, and low salaries (Mushwana et al., 2019). All these factors play a role in challenging mental awareness.

It can be argued that police officers have sworn to protect the community, but the paradox is that the badge becomes a heavy burden because it threatens the officer's mental well-being. This study intended to highlight the job stresses that eventually lead to a state of depression and how officers address and express this phenomenon.

The consequences of psychological dysfunction because of constant job stress can be moderate but can progress over time, which impairs well-being. This moderate slow progression leaves employees unaware or unwilling to acknowledge its importance. According to Violanti et al. (2006), police officers are more likely to succumb to the effects of depression, suicidal ideation, and PTSD. Owing to the police culture, the identification of emotional stress resulting from occupational distress is rarely encouraged by law enforcement, as it is considered a sign of weakness. This reluctance causes police officers not to seek early professional help, which consequently is the main reason that mental illnesses are the leading cause of retirement in the police force (Summerfield, 2011; Tuckey et al., 2012).

The constant exposure to traumatic events causes psychological, physical, and neurological symptoms (Marsh, 2019), and threatens the one factor police officers who are guaranteed to have, which is control over their environment and situation (Burke & Patton, 2006; Hope, 2016). Police officers experience symptoms of fatigue, nightmares, lack of concentration, irritability, and substance and alcohol abuse. Furthermore, the disruption in sleep quality impacts the cognitive ability of officers, which includes response times and reactions to and during critical incidents (Marsh, 2019).

Studies conducted (Bi et al., 2022; Garbarino et al., 2019; Mayers & Baldwin, 2006) have shown a strong association between sleep quality and depression. According to Seidel et al. (2009), sleep quality is considered a vital indicator of the quality of life. Owing to occupational stress, police officers are more likely to experience poor sleep quality. An interesting research study by Charles et al. (2011), investigated sleep quality amongst police

officers. The research findings revealed that depression was substantially associated with poor sleep quality in both male and female police officers. The results indicated that as scores on depressive symptoms increased, the sleep quality of police officers worsened.

Additionally, Fox et al. (2012) conducted a study to examine the association between decreased productivity among police officers and maladaptive coping strategies, PTSD, and depression. The research demonstrated that among police personnel, PTSD, depression, and alcoholism were common. Moreover, police officers were hesitant and refused professional mental health treatment owing to negative impacts on their careers and fear of vulnerability amongst their peers (Craddock & Telesco, 2022; Fox et al., 2012). According to Violanti et al. (2009), most police officers suffer depressive episodes for two weeks or longer. Furthermore, the authors point out that many also experience co-occurring concerns such as eating disorders, workplace obstacles, relational/familial issues, troubles in social settings and work challenges.

Adding to this literature, a study conducted by Mangwani (2012), revealed that South African police officers who have been diagnosed with depression have faced numerous workplace issues and have struggled to cope with stress and strain. According to Mangwani (2012), the problems experienced in the police work environment which were associated with depression are departmental trials against the police, disciplinary hearings, and criminal charges. Therefore, police officers who have experienced multiple problems were susceptible to PTSD, tension, depression, frustration, loneliness, and sadness before committing suicide.

This current study differs from the abovementioned studies in that it is aimed to explore depression among police officers in the Gauteng province SAPS. The dearth of research on this subject, particularly in the South African setting, served as the impetus for this study. The research findings will hopefully be of benefit to the SAPS as it contributes to the body of knowledge and further understanding of police officers' experiences and the impact on the nature of their careers.

## 2.7 Coping in the Police Environment

It is well known that police personnel shy away from mental health services and resources (Olson & Wasilewski, 2016). Furthermore, misperceptions and misconceptions exist among police officers regarding what psychotherapy is and how it can impact their professional careers. (Richard, 2017). According to Hartley et al. (2014), within police culture, police officers are not open to discussing either work-related or personal issues, nor are they likely to address stress, depression, and suicidal thoughts as they are fearful of the stigma that is cultivated in police organisations.

A process of reducing stressors through cognitive and behavioural attempts is coping. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping strategies to assist police officers in handling stress have been widely investigated and there a large body of literature that exists on different strategies that yield positive outcomes (Mushwana et al., 2019; Queirós et al., 2020; Wassermann et al., 2019). Being employed in the police service is inherently emotionally and physically demanding. To deal with the stressors, police officers use a variety of coping methods. As Folkman (2011) argued, an individual's appraisal is based on the assessment of available coping resources. Furthermore, the effectiveness of a coping technique depends on the environment in which it is used, including the skill that is applied. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1986).

The way police officers experience and respond to stressors can be complex. Moreover, police officers would desire to exert control and adopt some form of coping mechanisms, which are frequently harmful, and the police officer might not seek the necessary psychological support (Kaur et al., 2013). Subsequently, if police officers develop maladaptive coping strategies in response to stressors, they become normalized, resulting in permanent emotional strain because of these escapist behaviours. These unhealthy coping strategies include impulsive and violent behaviour both on and off duty, excessive substance abuse, chronic

absenteeism, workplace violence and family issues (Ménard & Arter, 2013; Mushwana et al., 2019). These poor behaviours place police officers at heightened risk of physical and psychological consequences (Mushwana et al., 2019). Maladaptive coping strategies can manifest in several ways; however, these strategies are destructive causing mental or physical health to be negatively impacted. The preceding sentence reinforces the cognitive appraisal theory, which refers to responses and reactions to stressors that have an impact on their coping skills and personal perceptions and reactions (Hofman et al., 2020). Therefore, the psychological difficulties of police officers, such as depression, may be the response to traumatic and stressful encounters in the work environment.

According to Rothmann and Pienaar (2006), the main coping strategies adopted by police officers are either problem-focused or emotion-focused. Problem-focused strategies are likely to result in positive outcomes such as reducing suicidal ideation and promoting overall well-being (Rothmann & Pienaar, 2004; Rothmann et al., 2011). Additionally, proactive stress management is practiced by police officers who use adaptive coping mechanisms including exercise and seeking out mental health resources. However, Mushwana et al. (2019) argued that police officers are more likely to make use of maladaptive coping mechanisms such as consuming excessive amounts of alcohol and drugs, taking prescription medication, and overeating. Violanti et al. (2016) indicated that the stressful encounters and experiences that occur while on duty follow the police officer home. Thus, as intended in this study, it is crucial to understand that the stressors encountered and experienced by police officers while on duty do not end after their work shift.

Previous studies by Mushwana et al. (2019) and Wasserman et al. (2019) indicated that police officers have always been using and developing coping methods of interpreting and processing stressors that will result in a long-term impact on their well-being. From this, when police officers are faced with perceived stress, alcohol consumption was the most commonly

used maladaptive strategy (Can & Hendy 2014; Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Piotrowski, 2016). Additionally, this coping strategy is more common than reaching out to peers, co-workers, or family members. Due to the lack of support and encouragement for asking for help from others in the police organization and culture, police personnel may prefer drinking alcohol as a coping mechanism. (Chopko et al., 2013; Frank et al., 2017). According to Thomas et al. (2014), the consumption of alcohol is a temporary short-term solution and further contributes to feelings of helplessness, isolation, and hopelessness. Some of the main indicators of the development of suicidal ideation and suicide are these feelings of despair (Violanti et al., 2016).

Police leaders rarely recognise the long-term effects of psychological, mental, and emotional health, which results in police officers' resiliency decreasing and their adopting maladaptive coping methods to deal with depression (Mash, 2019). Emotional coping strategies, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), are seen as maladaptive coping responses. This includes police officers hiding their psychological suffering from their family and organisation and, instead of seeking help, causing officers to lose control, struggle, or lose their competitive edge (Biggs et al., 2014). Moreover, Violanti (1992) argued that avoidance is considered the least effective coping strategy.

To add to this literature, Rothmann and Jordaan (2006) further highlighted that, in many African police environments, using withdrawal and avoidance as coping strategies, which has strong maladaptive potential in the police context, is associated with high levels of stress and burnout. Avoidance has been associated with psychosomatic symptoms such as psychological stress and depression (Aaron, 2000; Moller, 2008). Furthermore, police officers who have used avoidance coping displayed cynicism and exhaustion in addition to feelings of inadequacy and feelings of lower professional efficacy, which are contributing factors to developing depression (Myendeki, 2008; Nortje, 2003). These maladaptive coping strategies could potentially result in police officers engaging in destructive and aggressive behaviour or using excessive force or

questionable actions. Maladaptive coping, like alcohol or drug abuse, may result in even more adverse long-term consequences (Anshel, 2016). Thus, encouraging a police culture and environment for police officers to seek help can increase the likelihood of supporting police officers not to use maladaptive coping strategies, and assisting them in identifying symptoms of depression.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the literature was reviewed related to the experiences of police officers. The nature of policing and organisational stressors was discussed and the way this affects the mental health and experiences of police officers was elaborated upon. The literature discussed in this chapter reviews the components within the police work environment that influence and contribute to the mental health issues of police officers such as depression, and further identifies the gap in research regarding police officers diagnosed with depression. Therefore, further analysis can assist in the development, creation and implementation of appropriate mental health intervention programmes that address the organisational and occupational stressors within the police culture.

Chapter Three will focus on the theoretical framework which underpins this research study, highlighting the basic principles. This study embraced the phenomenological approach as a theoretical framework for explaining the experiences of police officers diagnosed with depression.



## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 3.1 Introduction

The present study is grounded in the principles of phenomenology as a theoretical framework and research design. This chapter discusses the basic principles of phenomenology and why phenomenology is a useful and appropriate approach. The relevance of understanding the experiences of police officers with depression is highlighted.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework: Phenomenology

German philosopher Edmund Husserl founded phenomenology. Phenomenology was formulated as methodological approach and theoretical framework for examining lived experiences of a particular phenomenon (Creswell et al., 2007; Giorgi et al., 2017). Known as transcendental phenomenology, Husserl's theory was designed to be applied across the broad spectrum of social sciences and philosophy (Cilesiz, 2011; Wertz, 2011; Willig, 2013). The phenomenological inquiry seeks reality in an individual's narratives of their subjective experiences of and feelings about specific phenomena to create in-depth descriptions of these phenomena (Cilesiz, 2011). According to this theory, each individual's subjective experience of the world is reflected in their descriptions of their experiences. This philosophical method of inquiry is concerned with phenomena, which is the object of a conscious subject's experience as it presents itself (Aspers, 2009; Cilesiz, 2011). In this approach, experiences are examined for their texture and quality. As the researcher wanted to know how police officers experience depression in this study, these elements are significant. It is these in-depth understanding of experiences that place this study within the qualitative sphere of research.

### 3.3 Brief History

Edmund Husserl's ideas were developed from the Cartesian dualist ontology of realism and idealism, where he accentuated the essences of objects and ideas while acknowledging that there is a natural and real world before consciousnesses of it (Smith & McIntyre, 1982). According to realism there are things that exist without human consciousness being aware of them, constituting a world of objects to be perceived and discovered. On the other hand, idealism is grounded in the premise that the external world is not independent of cognisant minds. As a result, although conscious subjects and their objects are distinct, they interact, and this interaction has significance (Kockelmans, 1994). Phenomenological research is a systematic attempt to unpack, investigate and describe structures of lived experience to gain a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of the experience of a certain phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985; Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). It offers clarification of the selected phenomenon and highlights the voice of individuals who are experiencing that particular phenomenon. As van Manen (1990, p.100) defined it: 'Phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning of structures, of living experience'.

Throughout the 20th century, phenomenology gained popularity as a philosophy, leading to several interpretations and applications of this theoretical framework. Owing to the present study's psychological background, Husserl's phenomenological method was chosen as the research method due to its psychological applications. Among the two phenomenological approaches, interpretive and descriptive phenomenology, the latter was selected for the present study. A primary focus of this research was to capture the subjective lived experiences of police officers with depression as they were presented (Broomé, 2011; Willig, 2013).

### 3.4 Basic Principles

A specific phenomena's in-depth understanding and description, as well as the discovery of the essence of people's subjective lived experiences of that phenomenon, are the goals of phenomenological investigation. According to Husserl (1969) and Moustakas (1994), essence is the quality or condition of an experience that is either common or universal. It is what makes an experience what it is and, without an experience it would not be what it is. Therefore, every experience is a manifestation of its essence. It is through these manifestations that we can comprehend and understand the essences. In the present study, each police officer's experience of depression is grounded in their unique experience and manifestation thereof, which the researcher investigated through phenomenological enquiry. It has been argued by Cilesiz (2011) that the essence of an experience cannot be fully explored empirically. Therefore, research results are not universal, but rather the essence at a particular moment and place as manifested by participants' unique experiences and viewed through a researcher's perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, in the present research study, the researcher investigated police officers' experience with depression and arrived at the essence of the experience of that depression through numerous individual experiences (manifestations) (Cilesiz, 2011).

As discussed above, phenomenology focuses on the essence of ideas. This can only be known through conscious experience, which has a material component (Cilesiz, 2011). The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of police officers with depression. According to Husserl (1969) and Moustakas (1994), every experience has two interrelated dimensions: noesis and noema. Noesis relates to the act of experience such as feeling, perceiving, thinking, or remembering. The latter refers to the object of action such as the perceived, the thought, or the remembered. Together, the noesis and noema create the consciousness of a specific experience. Any existing noema corresponds to noesis and vice

versa. This crucial relationship between conscious subjects and their objects is known as intentionality (Audi, 2001; Crotty, 1998). All experiences are intentional. Consciousness is always consciousness of an object and consciousness of an object requires a subject (Kockelmans, 1994). Therefore, in order to investigate consciousness, it is necessary to be aware and recognize that it is both intentional and non-sensorial. There is no physical experience associated with it, as it is deliberate. The present researcher acknowledged that dreams and images can be produced by acts of consciousness that differ from conventional worldly perceptions and may also be different from awareness of one's lived experiences. The present study is concerned with how objects that are displayed in one's consciousness determine the experience of the police officers, irrespective of whether or not the objects are real.

Furthermore, every individual experience is made up of textures (differing outside appearances) and structures (what might account for or underlie the textures). As every experience is a manifestation of its essence, this can be studied by observing several manifestations through the process of imaginative variation, which can be described by investigating the structures underpinning the textures of that essence (Moustakas, 1994). The premise of this perspective is that depression is an individual unique experience, and the same experience can be characterized in numerous ways. This qualitative study's reflexive nature, informed by phenomenological principles, allowed the researcher to unravel the meaning participants created in relation to depression. Chapter Five outlines these meanings and are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Six.

### 3.5 Descriptive Phenomenology

A descriptive phenomenology involves both a philosophical approach and a set of methods devoted to addressing how the lived world is experienced by individuals and identifying the meanings of that world (Heath et al., 2015). In line with this assertion, descriptive phenomenology is used as a theory and as a research method to explore and describe the essential meaning of a phenomenon of interest, which was the experience of depression by police officers directly involved and experiencing it (Giorgi, 1997). According to Broomé (2011), through the descriptive phenomenological approach, the participant's lived experience is described, focusing on their perspective without the use of deception. Descriptive phenomenology focuses on highlighting and keeping the voice of the participants without withdrawing their viewpoint through the analysis. Instead, the researcher's interest is captured by the subjective psychological perspective of the participant (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). Through engaging deeply with reality, descriptive phenomenology aims to reach true meaning (Laverty, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004). When employing this approach, the researcher is primarily interested in actual existing consciousness rather than potential existing consciousness. (Giorgi et al., 2017).

In descriptive phenomenology, participants' subjective experiences are not just observed in their behaviours and reactions, but also reflected in feelings, impressions, thoughts, understandings, and interpretations. In descriptive phenomenology, bracketing is a critical assumption, which means that any biases, presuppositions, or assumptions that the researcher may have should be put to one side (Gearing, 2004). This concept aims to keep what is already known about the studied phenomenon, in this present study, depression, separate from the participant's description. According to Husserl (1931), bracketing assists to gain insight into commonalities of any lived experience. These features were known to be universal essences

and were considered to constitute the true nature of the phenomenon being studied which, in the present study, is depression (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter described how the phenomenological theoretical framework is aimed at understanding the significance of everyday lived experiences and phenomena experienced by individuals consciously (Polifroni & Welch, 1999). Phenomenology is the study of experiences, which aims to gain a deeper understanding of our everyday lived experiences offering the elucidation of plausible insights (van Manen, 1990; Willig, 2013). In light of the lack of awareness of the nature of police work, phenomenology offers an approach that seeks to identify the nature of phenomena, their essence (Husserl, 1931). Through the concept of phenomenology meanings of phenomena are clarified by analysing individual's descriptions of phenomena (Drew, 2004). In addition to explaining phenomenology and describing the descriptive phenomenological approach, a brief history was presented.

Chapter Four will provide a delineation of the methodological choices adopted for this study. In addition, the selection of participants, data analysis, information on the quality criteria, and the ethical considerations utilised will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

In chapter Four the methodology utilized in the current study is discussed in relation to the theoretical framework described in the previous chapter. In this chapter, the research methodologies used in this study are discussed along with the justification for the methodological decisions made. This study employs a qualitative research approach and the strategy used is descriptive phenomenological research. Consequently, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, allowing the researcher to gain insight into the phenomenon under study through interaction with the participants. To analyse the material from the interviews, a thematic analysis is outlined incorporating Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological psychological method of data analysis. Furthermore, this chapter explains the measures employed to ensure the credibility of the study. The chapter concludes by discussing the research from a quality perspective and the ethical considerations that were taken into account.

### 4.2 Research Approach

#### 4.2.1 *Qualitative Research Approach*

Qualitative research is interested in focusing on gaining an in-depth understanding of how individuals make sense of their world and the experiences within their worlds (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research compliments the purpose of this research study, which is to explore the experiences of police officers suffering from depression. This approach allows the participant's subjective meanings and experiences to be heard and for a comprehensive record thereof to be produced (Willig, 2013). A qualitative research approach enhanced the researcher's understanding of each police officer's experiences and meanings of suffering from depression (Christensen et al., 2015; Creswell, 2009). Subsequently, as the key concern was to

understand the phenomenon of depression from the unique perspective of the participant, the researcher required an insider's perspective to be able to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question.

Adopting a qualitative research methodology assured thick detailed descriptions of participants' opinions, feelings, and experiences, and ultimately led to the description of their meanings. The richness and depth of description gained from a qualitative approach provided a distinct appreciation of the reality of the experiences as it highlights the dynamic, individual, and holistic aspects of the human experience and attempts to capture those experiences in their entirety (Magidi, 2014). Therefore, these abovementioned perspectives made a qualitative approach relevant as the researcher intended to capture the experiences of police officers concerning depression. As Creswell (2009) asserted, qualitative research is advantageous as it provides a holistic understanding of a specific phenomenon.

The purpose of this study was to gather an in-depth understanding of the experiences of depression among police officers in the Gauteng province SAPS. Employing a qualitative methodology allowed the researcher to explore and capture the depth and richness of information that developed as the interviews unfolded. In addition, this methodology was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to identify issues from the participants' perspectives and to capture the experiences the participants deemed important. Utilising this method empowered the researcher to explore the participants' personal experiences as police officers.

#### ***4.2.2 Research Design***

Aligning with the purpose of this study, the researcher adopted a descriptive phenomenological stance. A descriptive phenomenological design was necessary to capture the true lived experiences of the participants. Descriptive phenomenology has been selected as it focuses on exploring and studying everyday examples of human life and illuminates 'the



whatness' and essence of a phenomenon (Finlay, 2011). A phenomenological research approach lends itself best to this study because this study required a research design and methodology that explicitly described and understood the phenomenon being investigated which, in this case, was depression amongst police officers.

Thus, a descriptive phenomenological research design was used to examine the distinctive lived and shared experiences of law enforcement personnel who had been diagnosed with depression. This approach was used for three main reasons. First, only police officers suffering from depression were able to express what their experiences are like. As Fischer (1984) argued, making use of actual experiences is necessary to capture the essence of a particular phenomenon fully. Second, this approach allowed the researcher to identify thematic commonalities and differences between police officers and to explore how the meanings attached to these experiences are internalised (Creswell, 2013; Reynolds et al., 2018). Third, a phenomenological design allowed the researcher to describe police officers' experiences through an individual lens by using their vocabulary, which reduced researcher bias (Creswell, 2013).

By using descriptive phenomenological design, the researcher was able to shed light and bring awareness to police officers suffering from depression, which is based on the concrete descriptions of their lived experiences. This approach does not rely on participants to produce articulated views but instead makes use of their unique, complex, and multi-layered lived experiences as a source of knowledge. It is intended to elucidate direct exploration, analysis, and description of participants' subjective lived experiences (Dennis, 2014; Willig, 2013). Moreover, as the researcher was concerned with the individuals' interpretation of events as they presented themselves, this design explored the individuals' unique lived experiences. This was particularly important when researching a mental condition such as depression.

Descriptive phenomenology required the researcher to suspend all personal beliefs, attitudes, and suppositions to focus on the participants' experiences of the phenomenon and to identify the essences of the phenomenon (Neubauer et al., 2019; Willig, 2013), which were achieved through the concept of bracketing, as described in Section 5.2. Researchers are required to stay close to 'what is given to them in all its richness and complexity' (Finlay, 2009, p.10).

Using a descriptive phenomenology allowed the researcher to seek the essence of the distinct experiences and knowledge of police officers. The nature of descriptive phenomenology provides a logical design which can unearth phenomena that are proven to be difficult to define and clarify, such as depression. Thus, employing this research design provided an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, offering an articulation of its essence and nature. The researcher was able to describe that police officers use a universal structure or essence to make sense of their experience. This was achieved through the interpretation of the feelings, perceptions, and beliefs of police officers to clarify their experiences of depression.

### **4.3 The Becks Depression Inventory II**

The Becks Depression Inventory II has been one of the most common instruments used globally to assess symptoms of depression and their severity in both adults and adolescents. The Becks Depression Inventory II is a 21-item self-report measure that assesses depression symptoms in accordance with the diagnostic criteria listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders (DSM IV). Higher scores on the BDI II are indicative of higher levels of depression. Results of studies have depicted that the BDI-II displays satisfactory internal consistency and test-retest reliability (Kojima et al., 2002). Furthermore, a study conducted by Makhubela and Mashegoane (2015) concluded that the BDI-II is a reliable and valid instrument that can be utilized to assess the severity of depressive symptoms. The validity

and reliability of the measure especially within a South African context made it appropriate to be employed in the current study. Moreover, the BDI-II is an instrument that is easily accessible, which supported the researcher during the research process. Furthermore, the high validity in differentiating between depressed and nondepressed participants assisted the researcher in ensuring that the relevant participants have been selected for the study.

#### **4.4 Sampling of Participants**

When describing and explaining sampling, Emmel (2013, p.1) shared:

*Sampling is the act of defining a population from which a sample can be drawn and of which the sample will be representative and ensuring that every person or thing from this predefined population has the chance of inclusion of greater than zero and can be measured.*

A prerequisite for studying the essence of lived experience is selecting research participants who have significant, substantial, and meaningful experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Polkinghorne, 1989). To identify cases for investigation, purposeful criterion sampling was adopted in selecting participants. This entails selecting participants according to the relevance of the study by including a selection criterion. Police officers were selected for this study who were experiencing depression in the context of their work environment. This was ensured by conducting a pre-screener in that participants needed to score 20 and above on Beck's Depression Inventory-II to be able to proceed to the semi-structured interviews. Purposeful criterion sampling is advantageous as it involves the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell et al., 2011; Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful criterion sampling, as suggested by Creswell et al. (2007), was appropriate for this study because it was important for the participants to have experience with depression.

The process to obtain relevant participants was challenging. The researcher attempted to collect data over several months, administering twenty-two pre-screener scripts across 3 police stations, however participants were not obtaining the minimum score to proceed with the research process. When the researcher obtained four participants who had met the minimum requirements on the Beck's Depression Inventory-II, the researcher initiated the interview process. After three interviews, similar experiences were coming through it became apparent that the data saturation could be reached after four interviews. Given the practical difficulties experienced, time and access to participants, and more importantly, the researcher was interested in the lived experiences of individuals who experienced the same phenomenon, the sample size of four participants was deemed enough to provide an in-depth view of their experience. This was in line with Stark and Trinidad (2007) who posited that a sample range of 1 to 10 participants is acceptable in phenomenological studies when lived experiences of individuals who experienced the same phenomenon are explored. During the course of interviewing the researcher observed a trend in responses and similar themes arising across the interviews, thereby obtaining data saturation. The participants were sharing the same ideas, patterns, and opinions. This coincides with the key component of qualitative research to obtain small sample sizes that are homogenous in nature. Therefore, instead of interviewing a population consisting of various characteristics, this research study focused on segmenting participants based on similar psychographic qualities. This ensured that the study focused on exploring themes and ideas from police officers experiencing depression.

Owing to the idiographic nature of descriptive phenomenology, a small sample was selected, since phenomenological inquiry does not aim for empirical generalisations or for the establishment of functional relationships, but instead, phenomenological inquiry makes it possible to generate plausible insights, bringing us closer to direct contact with the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1990). The aim was to investigate differences

and similarities in personal accounts of a relatively homogenous group of participants to identify and describe in-depth a shared essence of experiences within a specific group (Sallis & Birkin, 2014). The population of this research consisted of police officers from police stations in the Gauteng province who suffered from depression. Police officers were recruited from various police stations in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

The following inclusion criteria were employed:

- All participants must experience depressive symptoms, scoring 20 or above on Beck's Depression Inventory.
- All participants should be able to read and speak in English.
- All participants must be full-time police officers in the Gauteng police force (should be working at SAPS for one year or more).

The above criteria formed the basis for the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth exploration (Emmel, 2013). In applying these criteria, the sample became more homogenous, with all participants having experienced the phenomenon being explored (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). All participants in the study were Black African male police officers having a record of being in service for more than two years.

#### **4.5 Recruitment**

Owing to the sensitive nature of the research as well as the use of police officers as participants, permission was requested and obtained from the SAPS to conduct the research (Appendix A). To assist in the recruitment of participants, the researcher consulted a gatekeeper (station commander) from the Gauteng province SAPS. Gatekeepers are significant mediators for accessing research study settings and participants (Andoh-Arthur, 2019). The gatekeeper informed potential participants about the nature and purpose of the study through the dissemination of the research information sheet (Appendix B) as well as reiterating that

participation in the study was completely voluntary. The interviewer's contact information was provided and those police officers who were willing to participate were asked to contact the interviewer. This proved to be extremely challenging because the researcher was not contacted by anyone. To combat this, the researcher went in person to various police stations in Pretoria and Johannesburg to recruit participants. This was done upon receiving permission from the station commanders. Upon arrival at the police station the researcher approached several police officers explaining to them the aim of the study. The researcher provided a letter to all participants which outlines the purpose of the study. Each participant was assured that the research was completely confidential and anonymous allowing them to give an honest account of their individual experiences. Potential participants were recruited in their personal capacity and not through the SAPS. After explaining the study, potential participants approached the researcher in person to voluntarily participate. Additionally, the researcher assured other police officers that they could also contact her privately if they would want to participate. After administering the pre-screener, the researcher telephonically contacted the participants that met the minimum requirements to proceed to the interviewing phase. Due to the nature of police work shifts, some police officers were interviewed during the day and others during the evening over a period of two weeks. Therefore, the dates and times for the interviews were arranged with each individual participant.

#### **4.6 Method of Data Collection**

In the initial phase of data collection, Beck's Depression Inventory-II, which is a self-reporting questionnaire for evaluating the severity of depression in normal and psychiatric populations, was administered to police officers. Scores above 20 indicated depression and four police officers who scored 20 or above on the inventory qualified to participate in the study.

The second data collection method included face-to-face, semi-structured individual interviews, and naturalistic observations. This method of data collection provided participants with the opportunity to talk about their experiences. In order to ensure that the interviewer never lost sight of the original research questions, an interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that allowed the participant to redefine the topic under investigation. Beck's Depression Inventory-II, as well as the semi-structured interview, were conducted at a convenient time that suited participants and took place in a quiet room to ensure privacy. This was based on convenient locations for the police officers and was either conducted in a private office at the police station or in a third-party building. Additionally, the researcher consulted with a psychometrist to assist in the interpretation of the scores.

The data documentation method utilised for the semi-structured interviews was audio recordings. Audio recordings are relevant to the proposed study in that they will serve as reminders of the participants' state of mind and feelings at the moment that the interviews took place; consequently resulting in an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon at hand for the researcher (Willig, 2013), with the corresponding written transcripts along with field notes gathered from the naturalistic observations (Christensen et al., 2015; Creswell, 2009; de Vos, 2002; Silverman, 2006). In addition to the audio recordings, the second data documentation method was verbatim transcripts. The data for the study was extracted from the recordings, which were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Verbatim transcripts refer to the spoken words being accurately converted into written text (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006).

During data analysis, the data gathered were compared from several sources through a process called triangulation, which is the collection and comparison of data from multiple sources. Using varied sources of data collection enhances the trustworthiness and authenticity of the present research study (Creswell, 2009; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

#### ***4.6.1 Semi-Structured Interviews***

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to elicit rich expressions from participants, while at the same time not losing sight of the main focus of the research (Silverman, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are based on pre-set questions which explore the phenomenon being researched but also allow for probing of answers by posing follow-up questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Willig, 2013) (see Appendix E for the pre-set interview questions). Interview questions, as illustrated in Appendix E, aimed to establish the credibility of the data in this research since this research study focuses on the participants' accounts of their attitudes, motivations, and subjective behaviour (Aspers & Corte, 2019). Interviewing in a semi-structured manner through the use of open-ended questions allowed police officers to express their views and experiences openly and freely (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Semi-structured individual interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into each informant's attitudes, knowledge, and experiences about depression in the context of their work environment (Magidi, 2014). During the interview, the researcher explored and investigated a range of ideas, experiences and feelings that police officers have towards depression. This allowed the researcher to uncover the factors that influence the attitude and behaviour that they experience owing to depression. According to Giorgi (2009), and Kleiman (2004), cited in Whiting (2001), phenomenological interviews consist of in-depth open dialogue and questions which maintain a focus on the experience, thereby recreating many dimensions of that experience. This ultimately assisted in providing a richly detailed context that shapes that experience.

Cohen et al. (2002) maintained that knowledge is generated between humans through conversation and interaction, and it is experienced in interviews. Furthermore, conducting face-to-face interviews was advantageous in that non-verbal cues and behaviours were observed. These non-verbal cues added to the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Willig,



2013), for example, hesitancy to answer a certain question or breaking of eye contact with the interviewer when a sensitive issue was raised by the researcher. The smooth running of the interview was aided by the researcher observing and picking up on this non-verbal behaviour.

#### ***4.6.2 Naturalistic Observations***

Throughout the data collection of semi-structured interviews, the researcher utilised naturalistic field observations as an added data-generation method (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2018). Natural field observation is a fundamental technique used in qualitative research; the researcher closely observed naturally occurring behaviour. These naturally occurring observations allowed the researcher to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The reason for using naturalistic observations was to reveal ‘abstract’ responses (Giorgi, 2009).

The unique characteristic of observation as a research process is that it provided the researcher with the prospect of collecting ‘live’ data from naturally occurring phenomena (social situations). The investigator viewed directly what was happening in the situation instead of depending on second-hand accounts. The observations assisted to produce more valid and authentic data than would have been the case with intervened methods (Cohen et al., 2002).

Utilising naturalistic observations allowed the researcher to identify non-verbal nuances, which were indicative of what police officers were feeling or were hesitant to discuss. The researcher remained observant to determine whether the police officers were revealing any nuances. These nuances were revealed during the break sessions when the researcher observed signs of emotional distress such as tearing up, frowning, or sighing from the police officers. The researcher continuously reassured the individual that he was not compelled to answer if there were feelings of uneasiness. These naturalistic field observations were built on the participant’s direct experiences. They were able to inform participants’ feelings and behaviours

and to enhance the verbal interview data retrieved from participants (Creswell, 2009; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Naturalistic observation assisted in generating new ideas as it provided the researcher with the opportunity to study the total phenomenon under investigation since it often suggested avenues of inquiry which were not considered prior to the interview (McLeod, 2015).

The corresponding data documentation method used for the naturalistic observations was field notes. Field notes entail taking notes of the observations made, thereby possibly enriching verbal interview data (Creswell, 2009). To increase the credibility of the field notes, the researcher recorded observations timeously after the interview had occurred (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Ensuring that field notes were completed timeously enabled the researcher to document observations with depth and accuracy (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). These fieldnotes assisted the researcher in gathering data and analysing behaviour patterns from these notes, as will be explained in the next section.

#### **4.7 Analysis of Data**

The researcher adopted inductive thematic analysis for the analysis of the descriptive qualitative data. In addition, the researcher applied the descriptive phenomenological method proposed by Giorgi (2009). This dual method was useful in the present study to identify and extract themes from the interviews conducted with police officers suffering from depression. The analysis of the data involved a five-step process, based on some principles of phenomenological philosophy, which will be explored below.

A significant and initial aspect of the data analysis is for the researcher to assume a phenomenological attitude, where the researcher 'brackets' her everyday knowledge to look at the data from a clear and fresh viewpoint (Broomé, 2011, Giorgi et al., 2017). By adopting this stance, the researcher was able to describe the participants' experiences from their perspective by distancing herself from her own experiential, cultural, and theoretical presuppositions about

depression. The concept of bracketing is derived from Husserl's 'epoché' to describe phenomenological reduction with the intention being 'suspension of belief' from the outer world, which inhibits the researcher from making any judgements or having any preconceived ideas (Whiting, 2001). This stance was adopted for the study and was maintained throughout the data analysis procedure, as far as possible.

The second step in the data analysis required that the researcher read the entire set of naïve descriptions from the data collected to gain a sense of the whole experience (Broomé, 2011; Giorgi et al., 2017). During this step, the researcher engaged and familiarised herself with the data by listening attentively to the audio recordings and making notes. This process allowed the researcher to immerse herself in the data. The researcher remained in the phenomenological attitude to ensure that the participants' experiences were described the way they were phenomenologically experienced.

In the third step, meaning units were demarcated based on what participants expressed. These initial codes and meaning units that were generated allowed the researcher to gain a condensed overview of key points and common meanings that recur in the data. This allowed the data to be dealt with in manageable portions. This process was accomplished by constantly reading over the transcripts to identify areas of the interview and discussions which highlight the participants' experiences about the phenomenon under investigation. Once the units had been isolated, the researcher denoted the theme that overshadowed each unit (Giorgi et al., 2017; Whiting 2001). In answering the research question, the meaning units identified parts of the narrative description that were relevant to the researcher's research interests.

In the fourth step meaning units were converted into psychologically sensitive descriptive, expressive terms. During this step, an analytical change was made to the data, and the meaning units were transformed into the third person while maintaining the true meaning

expressed. The researcher analysed the codes and meaning units, thereby creating patterns, and generating themes. The themes created are broader than codes. The researcher made connections between the various themes. Similar themes were clustered together. Additionally, the researcher identified relationships across themes. The researcher maintained a phenomenological attitude. Each of these transformations was a description of how the meaning units were experienced and understood by the participants from their perspective without any explanation of why they were experienced in that way.

A fifth step in the analysis involves synthesising the psychological components of experience into a general psychological structure (Broomé, 2011; Giorgi et al., 2017). During this step, the researcher named and defined each of the identified themes. When the researcher defines the themes, this involves creating a succinct and easily understandable name for each theme that relates to understanding the data. It is important to acknowledge that the psychological components cannot be independent of each other but are instead part of a cohesive whole. These components were developed as a result of observing the transformations of all the participants convergent meanings. Next, an analysis of the identified themes was carried out, and the results were formulated into a descriptive paragraph.

#### **4.8 Reflexivity in This Study**

The research results yielded through qualitative methodologies are heavily reliant on the researcher's role and individual skills as well as being influenced by researcher bias (Anderson, 2010; Christensen et al., 2015; Creswell, 2009; Willig, 2013). To mitigate the potential disadvantageous effects of unacknowledged researcher bias, and to enhance the quality and credibility of the study, the researcher practised reflexivity throughout the entire research process. Reflexivity entails the researcher being constantly aware of their actions, perceptions, and role in the research process. These elements have been handled with the same

critical scrutiny as the rest of the data generation (Christensen et al., 2015; Creswell, 2009; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Willig, 2013). To achieve reflexivity, the researcher employed the notion of bracketing, where the researcher set aside any personal repertoires of knowledge, values, beliefs, and experiences about the subject matter, which allowed the accurate description of participants' lived experiences when experiencing depression (Chan et al., 2013). The researcher did not allow her previous knowledge or experience with depression to influence the study or interpretation of the results. The researcher was also reflexive concerning relationships and interactions of the study participants. This research study applied both personal and interpersonal reflexivity to comprehend how data was created through the data gathering process. Personal reflexivity concerns how researchers reflect on their personal backgrounds which may have influence on the research process whereas interpersonal reflexivity alludes that the personal dynamics between the researcher and participants and the interview setting can influence knowledge creation. The researcher had specific knowledge and personal experience with depression with its impact, therefore any preconceived ideas relating to depression were acknowledged and reflected on to limit any prejudice of bias that could combat the researcher from hearing the authentic voice of the participant. An additional measure of reflexivity included the researcher making notes of her observations during data collection, including any personal reactions that were induced. Furthermore, it was expected that police officers found it difficult to express themselves, therefore the researcher was aware of participants' mental and emotional state throughout the interview process. When analysing the data the researcher considered these emotional and mental states of the participants. The sole responsibility of the researcher was to collect data and represent the participant's authentic experiences that they provided during the interviews, without the addition of the researcher's view. This required the researcher to maintain reflexivity and be transparent to maintain an awareness of personal biases and keep it at bay.

## **4.9 Measures to Enhance the Quality of the Research**

Rigour in qualitative research concerns the quality, thoroughness, and accuracy of a research study. To strengthen rigour in this study, the researcher made use of thick descriptions, which provided a detailed account of the research process and context throughout all phases of the research. To establish trustworthiness, the four-dimension criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were adopted: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

### ***4.9.1 Credibility***

Credibility involves establishing that the research findings represent plausible or credible information from the perspective of the participant in the research (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Moon et al., 2016;). In this study, it was the police officers' experiences with depression. To achieve credibility, the researcher made use of referential adequacy, which means using various sources to document research findings (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher utilised methods that involved triangulation (using audio recordings and observational notes), member checking, and peer debriefing to ensure and strengthen the credibility of the research study.

Triangulation involves the use of multiple sources of information to reduce any potential bias associated with a single source (Hadi & Closs, 2016). In this research study, the data were collected from different police officers using both face-to-face interviews and naturalistic observations. Furthermore, the researcher conducted member checking, which allowed the researcher to verify the accuracy of data analysis and research findings (Carlson, 2010). Peer debriefing was adopted as a further strategy to enhance the credibility of the research study results. Peer debriefing requires the researcher to discuss the research methodology, data analysis, and interpretations continually throughout the research process with a peer who is not directly involved in the research process (Hadi & Closs, 2016).

Throughout this research study, the researcher engaged in regular consultations with her supervisor where all aspects of the study were discussed.

#### ***4.9.2 Transferability***

Transferability refers to the degree to which findings in one study can be generalised or transferred to other research contexts or settings (Moon et al., 2016). To enhance the transferability, rich and thick descriptions of the research process and context were provided. The researcher furnished sufficient details regarding the settings, inclusion/exclusion criteria, sample characteristics, and data collection and analysis methods. By adopting this strategy, another researcher will be able to determine the extent to which the conclusions made by the author were transferable and applicable to other studies (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

#### ***4.9.3 Dependability***

Dependability refers to the stability and consistency of the research findings over time and the degree to which others can replicate the study and yield similar results (Moon et al., 2016; Willig, 2013). To demonstrate dependability, the researcher maintained an audit trail which documented the entire research process. This information will be available to researchers to enable the application of this study for future research.

#### ***4.9.4 Confirmability***

Confirmability concerns objectivity in data and research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability strategies are used to ensure that research findings are guided by the experiences of participants as opposed to the bias, motivation, or interest of the researcher (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Moon et al., 2016). To ensure the confirmability of research results, the researcher provided an audit trail by documenting the processes of data generation and interpretation. Furthermore, when applying the phenomenological approach, the researcher must eliminate any prejudices or biases through a technique known as bracketing (Creswell,

2009). Multiple triangulation techniques were used to lessen any potential bias. Thus, the triangulation procedure involved the utilization of field notes, member checking, interview, and audio recording information.

#### **4.10 Ethical Considerations**

Research ethics refers to the set of widely accepted moral principles and rules that guide research. Conducting a research study that involves human participants brings to light multiple ethical principles that need to be adhered to (de Vos, 2002); therefore, the following ethical considerations are pivotal to this research study.

##### ***4.10.1 Professional Ethics***

Before the start of the study and before recruiting participants, appropriate procedures were followed. Ethical clearance was applied for and obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria. In addition, documented consent was obtained from the SAPS. The research proposal of this research study was submitted to the SAPS to allow for review. The SAPS research department granted permission to allow for the commencement of the research.

##### ***4.10.2 Research Ethics***

###### ***4.10.2.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation.***

Before the onset of the data collection phase, written informed consent was presented and discussed with participants. Informed consent is based on the notion that participants should be fully informed of all aspects of the study including the risks and benefits, the processes and procedures as well as any incentives that may influence their willingness to participate (Christensen et al., 2015; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The researcher presented participants with an information sheet which highlights the complete nature of the study. The consent form and information sheet contained references to the study purpose, participant



criteria, study agenda, interview length, study risks and benefits. The voluntary nature of the participants' involvement in this study was emphasised. Participants were made aware that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any consequences or penalties (Silverman, 2006). Participants who agreed to participate in the study signed the informed consent sheet (Appendix C and Appendix D). A consent letter acknowledges that participants' rights will be protected during data collection and must be signed before research can commence (Creswell, 2014). The researcher's contact information was provided to participants should the participants have any further queries.

#### *4.10.2.2 Confidentiality.*

Owing to the sensitive nature of the study, ensuring participant confidentiality was a priority. Confidentiality refers to not disclosing or divulging any of the information obtained from participants during the study (Christensen et al., 2015). The semi-structured interviews took place in locations that allowed privacy for each participant. The audio recordings of the interview were kept in a password-protected file until transcribed. The results of the data analysis, as displayed in Chapter Five, were shared with participants for approval before publication. In addition to confidentiality, the anonymity of participants was also guaranteed. Anonymity refers to eliminating or disguising the identity of participants (Farrimond, 2017). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and to establish anonymity during the dissemination of the results of the study. Before data collection, the aforementioned ethical principles were explained thoroughly to participants.

#### *4.10.2.3 Protection from Harm.*

The researcher upheld the principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence which aim to ensure the well-being of participants by acting in their best interests, causing no harm, and minimising the risks involved (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Owing to the sensitive nature of the research topic, the researcher closely observed participants for any signs of emotional distress

during the interviewing process. If participants experienced any kind of discomfort or emotional distress while the interview was being conducted, the interview was immediately stopped. Furthermore, participants were encouraged to consult a counsellor at the SAPS or to contact South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) should they require assistance. In addition to this, participants were debriefed at the end of the research study, when they were provided with a platform to express any thoughts, opinions, or emotions about the study.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

This chapter outlined the methodological considerations for designing, implementing, and analysing the present study. An overview of qualitative approaches and phenomenological design was provided, as well as an explanation of sampling method. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observations. There was a detailed explanation of the five-step data analysis process. Furthermore, the research quality was discussed, and how the researcher attempted to maintain this quality throughout the process. Chapter Four concluded with a discussion of the ethical considerations adhered to. The next chapter presents the experiences of the participants and the research findings.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

### 5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the experience of depression by police officers in the Gauteng province SAPS. To arrive at this understanding, the reaction to and understanding of police officers of the police culture were explored. In addition, understanding how the mental health of police officers was affected by the nature of their job was examined through the experiences of the police officers who were interviewed. This chapter explains the analysis of the interview findings using thematic analysis in conjunction with Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological method. Furthermore, the process is explored of how the researcher maintained a phenomenological attitude and reflexivity during both data collection and analysis. From the analysis, four main themes emerged which are discussed. The themes relate to the experience of depression by police officers. In addition, participants also shared their unique coping mechanisms and recommendations on what needs to be implemented within the SAPS to address mental health from their perspective.

### 5.2 Phenomenological Attitude and Reflexivity

According to Giorgi (2009), bracketing is a core concept of phenomenology, which involves adopting a phenomenological attitude of bracketing one's thoughts, emotions and biases during data collection and data analysis. This involves bracketing cultural, experiential, and theoretical predispositions during data analysis. The researcher practised the act of bracketing during both the data collection and data analysis, which allowed her to separate herself from the individual being researched and from their lived experiences. The researcher conceptualized and noted all her pre-understanding and acted non-judgmentally prior to the analysis phase, this ensured that the researcher steered away from these concepts. The researcher was able to suspend all her attitudes, beliefs, and suppositions to focus on the

experience of police officers of the phenomenon and to identify the essence thereof. This involved eliminating all of her opinions and knowledge about the nature of police work and its impact on police mental health to avoid the influence of preconceived ideas or prejudice. The researcher accomplished this by seeing things as they are and not as she hoped they would be. The researcher set aside all her knowledge and experience with depression and understood that depression is subjective thus allowing every participant to have a varying experience thereof. This included paying close attention to the possible impact of her values (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, as the researcher's goal in transcendental phenomenology is to achieve transcendental subjectivity, the researcher did not allow her subjectivity to inform the descriptions provided by the police officers. In this study, the researcher did not let her preconceived beliefs or opinions about depression influence the analysis of the transcripts. The researcher separated her own experiences from what was being studied and entered the analysis process with a neutral attitude. By implementing the principle of bracketing throughout the research process, the researcher was able to document the phenomenon in its form based on the police officers' descriptions. Additionally, the researcher ensured not to take away or add to the words of the participants, but only to describe their experiences precisely as they were expressed.

Researching a mental illness such as depression, was extremely challenging especially with a sample where mental illness is stigmatized and shunned upon. The researcher expected data collection to be complex as police officers' have an image to maintain, and therefore will be hesitant to share their personal experiences with depression. However, to combat this, the researcher attempted to build rapport with participants' and share her personal experiences with depression. Furthermore, the researcher explained to participants the importance of mental health and how this can assist other members in the organization. A notable point that the researcher observed was that the male participants were reluctant to expand on certain

concepts, especially relating to their coping strategies. Being a female, the participants constantly reiterated their “macho” demeanour and being a man would entail being able to control your emotions. During these instances, the researcher reassured the participants that the interview is strictly confidential and encouraged participants to be transparent.

After the interviews the researcher was taken aback by the police officers experiences. The researcher did not realize the magnitude of obstacles that the SAPS members are faced with. Furthermore, the participants also encouraged the researcher to share her study with management in hopes that changes will be implemented within the organization. From this, the researcher realized and found value in her research, and was motivated to deliver a study that is authentic and shows the true reflection of depression within the police fraternity.

### **5.3 Participants**

The participants of this study were all police officers who served at police stations in the Gauteng province. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the researcher administered twenty-two pre-screener scripts to obtain the relevant participants for the study. From this, four participants met the minimum requirements to proceed with interviews. According to the inclusion-exclusion criteria used in this study, the participants were selected based on the number of years they served in the SAPS and whether they had scored 20 or more on Beck’s Depression Inventory-II. All participants were able to communicate in conversational English despite struggling at times to put their thoughts into words since English was not their first or home language. The participants were four Black African males; therefore, they were not representative of every race group in SAPS. Attempts at securing interviews with females or other races were unsuccessful as potential police officers declined participation. All participants in the study have not sought professional help for their depressive symptoms, but instead have utilized alternate coping mechanisms which are discussed later in this chapter.

Following is a brief introduction to each participant, who was assigned a pseudonym as noted previously.

### **Sizwe**

Sizwe, a 36-year-old married African male, had been serving SAPS for 12 years. Sizwe is a constable. He initially served in Limpopo but then received a transfer to Gauteng province.

### **Thabo**

Thabo is a 38-year-old married African male, who had been serving SAPS for 11 years. He is a sergeant.

### **Kabelo**

Kabelo is a 59-year-old divorced African male station commander, who had been serving SAPS for 39 years.

### **Themba**

Themba, a 62-year-old married African male, is a captain in the SAPS holding the position of senior forensic analyst for 12 years.

## **5.4 Themes**

As discussed in Chapter four, the researcher employed inductive thematic analysis in conjunction with Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method to analyse and interpret the data accumulated for the research study. This method involved encoding descriptive qualitative data often in the form of themes that are based on the data collected and research questions. The themes presented reflect patterns that have identified in the data. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and sub-themes from the interviews

Theme	Sub-theme
Theme 1: A culture of silence about mental health	Mental and emotional toughness Stigmatisation
Theme 2: External interference	Political interference Community interference Media interference
Theme 3: Organisational challenges	Lack of resources and equipment Lack of support and aloof management
Theme 4: Depressive ‘symptoms’ in the workplace	Truancy and absenteeism Pessimistic behaviour Irregular sleeping patterns Displaced anger

#### 5.4 Theme 1: A Culture of Silence About Mental Health Issues

The nature of police work is stressful and demanding, which can have an impact on police officers’ mental well-being (Demou et al., 2020). A recurrent theme across all the interviews was a sense that participants feel that the police culture inhibits discussions about mental health with both senior management and colleagues. There are organisational, occupational, and socioeconomic stressors within the police culture that contribute to officers’ mental health morbidities, such as depression.

This idea of police officers having to display a heroic image consists of emotional suppression and detaching themselves from their emotions. How police officers spoke about their experiences of depression and its impact on their lives was revealed through subordinate

themes. Besides being perpetually at risk, additional challenges such as the idea of having mental and emotional toughness, political influence, the role of the media, lack of resources, and a lack of respect are ever present within the police culture, consequently making policing even more challenging and thereby threatening their health and mental well-being.

#### ***5.4.1 Mental and Emotional Toughness***

When relating their experiences with depression in SAPS, the police officers reported organisational and operational stressors in the police culture that have and still continue to affect them. The participants spoke of having a tough mental and emotional character, which means that police officers do not feel comfortable openly discussing mental illness and that they are reluctant to seek support.

Police officers frequently encounter situations that elicit intense negative emotions; therefore, they have a specific need to regulate their emotions, which need to be hidden or pushed down:

*They must be strong; you must control your emotions ... members of the politicians they can come with an aggressive manner and then sometimes the person can be negative under the influence of liquor, you must control yourself, you must know that you are there for the community. Kabelo*

*We must be strong ... we just need to be, we just need to be equipped in a way that we must be able to deal with the community, not in a physical way because in a physical way this thing of fighting it is against the law. Thabo*

Additionally, when it comes to seeking help for mental health issues, Themba shared that he does not need to consult a psychologist as he perceives himself as having mental toughness:

*I don't want to consult, no I don't know why I think somewhere I am strong. Themba*



### 5.4.2 Stigmatisation

A sub-culture of silence and stigma about emotions dominates in the broader police culture. Emotional suppression is the rule in the police culture, and Sizwe reiterated this by indicating that police officers who display an emotional response to work stressors will risk being stigmatised and labelled by their colleagues. Due to the negative attitudes of their co-workers, many police officers are hesitant to divulge any psychological distress for fear of being stigmatized, which causes them to continue to suffer in silence.

*The people that are surrounding you, once they hear that ah you went to a social worker, aaah, which means this one he has a serious problem, and when they see you, they start acting differently. That is the thing that makes them not to go there. Sizwe*

Themba highlights how this culture of silence and emotional suppression exerts a pronounced influence on officers, preventing police officers from admitting that they are struggling mentally and receiving mental health assistance. He explained that the fear of stigma and breach in confidentiality impacts police officers' decision to seek help:

*They don't want to accept they have depression when you have a social worker and... er, the thing is this thing of, er, thinking that for them to accept to see the social worker the story will be known by everyone at the station. They don't go to that. And also going to private social workers because if private says no, you must be on rest days because of this and that, he thinks that sick note will also leak. Themba*

## 5.5 Theme 2: External Interference

In the police system, internal and external factors influence police officers' mental health and well-being. Internal factors of the police system include the distinct organisational and functional structure of the police culture. External factors include political influences, media influences and sociodemographic variables. All participants related how the external

interference from politics, media and citizens interplay and create difficulties for police officers to do their duty and maintain the morale in their organisation.

### ***5.5.1 Political Interference***

Sizwe, a constable, believed that because of political interference being a police officer is hard and challenging:

*You know South Africa, everything is run by politics, so politicians they have got influence, they tell you what to do, because everything you do is wrong. I can arrest you now, but because you know someone that knows someone, they can say ai, it was wrongful arrest... Sizwe*

Another participant, Kabelo, expressed how political interference causes many problems in the SAPS, particularly in the ability of police officers to carry out investigative duties or to work on a case. He expressed his view as follows:

*Take members of EFF, they want to control how to do the service, must treat the community. It's not nice like that. It pressurises the police; at the end of the day, the police can lose control on how to investigate a case because they are working under pressure. Kabelo*

### ***5.5.2 Community Interference***

During the apartheid era, SAPS was viewed as the enforcers of the law; however, during post-apartheid, the officers' authority as law enforcement has been undermined owing to the amplification of democracy, and the relationship between policing and human rights has proved to be fraught and tenuous. Sizwe expressed how everything they do as police officers is perceived as wrong and how the community dictates how they should carry out their duties. He explained his views as follows:

*The community they have got too much of rights; they can tell you what to do... actually now whatever you doing as a police officer even though its right, it's wrong. Sizwe*

Similarly, Thabo shared his point of view, indicating that his depression is worsened when he is faced with members of the community who attempt to instruct and challenge the competency and legal expertise of police officers.

*Maybe I am helping the client and you are trying to help her, then they start to tell you how to do things and how they know the laws ... Thabo*

The consensus is the desirability of human rights-compliant policing; however, since public concern about policing has heightened, the police officers are placed in a compromising position and they are unsure of how to react for fear of being criticised, reprimanded, or even dismissed. The participants shared that there is a constant difficulty in concluding decisions because a battle exists between the state versus the people; between protecting human rights and upholding the law, and between exercising authority and serving the community. Sizwe expressed this as follows:

*At all times you want be safe, you don't[want] to make a mistake by fearing to lose your job. Actually, we are in a situation where when I act, I am wrong, and when I don't act, I am wrong. We're trapped ... even if we do the right thing, someone can say, someone from outside can question you, why this thing is done like that? Isn't supposed to be done like that? Sizwe*

The notion of policing and how to behave on duty is subjected to extreme external interference with the police being told what to do and what not to do by citizens. The following quote exemplifies this:

*In most cases we are afraid to act because they will say you act unlawfully and then they will take out a claim against the state... most of the time we are afraid to act because they tell you that you didn't act well. Thabo*

### **5.5.3 Media Interference**

An additional contributor to the challenges that police officers face is the mainstream media, which continues to be flooded with reports of police misconduct and police brutality. This results in the public having a negative, violent image associated with police officers, which further challenges their line of work and contributes to mental health morbidities.

Sizwe explained it as follows:

*The media also wants to be involved in every situation, and then when they report, they report it wrongly, that is why you will find that the police are painted black. Sizwe*

This sentiment was also echoed by Kabelo, who expressed that the media reports on false and inaccurate narratives, which threatens their job security.

*The media takes a lot of sides. Take for instance, a suspect can hit me but if me I beat him, tomorrow I will be on front page and I will be dismissed from SAPS immediately.*

*The media has a lot of things. Kabelo*

A similar observation was made by Thabo when he pointed out that their organisation is afraid of the media, and this places additional pressure on police officers. He explained his view as follows:

*The problem is the issue of the media. Our organisation, according to me, my understanding they are afraid of the media because now somebody committed a crime but once we are trying [to]hold him to put him inside the van, we are being taken the pictures and then tomorrow they said no it was unlawful arrest. Thabo*

Amidst these challenges is a widespread feeling among officers that people share sneering remarks about the police on social media. Themba expressed this as follows:

*The media sometimes, especially this social media, ja, is the one that is causing problems to the SAPS members. Erm, some people will write lot of stories... this man in blue, some of them are not even educated that's why their salaries are not increased ... so such things they become really affected.* Themba

### **5.6 Theme 3: Organisational Challenges**

Webster (2013) explained that chronic exposure to complex occupational stress and routine work stressors, coupled with additional organisational challenges, is ubiquitous in the police environment and may be associated with depressive symptoms. This theme is discussed through two subordinate themes: Lack of resources and equipment, and lack of support from management.

#### **5.6.1 Lack of Resources and Equipment**

The capacity of police officers to deal with crime is limited by the resources available to them. Participants mentioned how the lack of working equipment, resources and lack of accountability from management places additional emotional stress on them. One participant explained how the lack of resources prevented him from carrying out his duty effectively, which ultimately led to a disciplinary hearing and a suspect escaping from his custody. He explained his experience as follows:

*The reason why the suspect escaped from the lawful custody because the safe with the leg irons and handcuffs was locked, and it took almost three months, the key was broken, the management was aware of that, they never done anything. We don't have handcuffs, we don't have leg irons, but the suspect escaped in my custody, they charge me. I did not have the resource.* Thabo

Police officers are grappling with vehicle shortages, resulting in low morale and police officers changing their duties. Themba perceived the lack of resources, specifically vehicles, as causing conflict with management, eventually producing emotional distress:

*Me, because I am not responsible for the shifts. Shifts A B C and D, that is why I decided to leave the shifts because it would affect me. The thing is, I will become emotional in the management meeting when you tell me that no, this people complain that you respond after 45 minutes. Then I said, but you know we are only having two vehicles. The other one, the lights are not working, so no, they cannot use that vehicle in the evening. And when you booking at the garage, we have 14 cars that are still at the garage in Silverton. He said, no captain, no, you don't have to ... I said you know what you are pushing me to the state of emotional turmoil and I warn you and I am doing this in front of the station commander, I am warning you, you have the tendency of attacking me ... Themba*

This lack of resources expands to the infrastructure at police stations. Another participant, Kabelo, who has been serving the SAPS for 39 years, made a comparison between police stations in townships areas and urban areas, indicating that the facilities in each should be the same and 'equal'.

*Some police they do not have facilities, the resources are not there. Like safety, I can explain to my station, there is no electric fence, there is no cameras. I used to work at Brooklyn, there is a lot of difference. The rural and township police station they are not the same. They should be the same because they are under one umbrella, they must get other facilities. Kabelo*

### 5.6.2 Lack of Support and Aloof Management

A key problem identified by all participants is the perception of the absence of support and concern from management. All the participants spoke about how the lack of managerial support affected and continues to affect their mental health, leading to depression. The participants perceived the SAPS senior management to be unable to support and protect its members. The following participants expressed their views:

*This organisation we have a problem, our seniors they do not care for us, that is what I have realised myself; they don't care about us. Sizwe*

*Management is not taking care of the police that are on the ground. Themba*

In addition, Sizwe raised the issue of unfairness within SAPS. He elaborated that the disadvantage of being a police officer is the favouritism that is present within the station. He explained this as follows:

*The work environment, there is favouritism and all those kinds of things, people are treated differently. You can see that there is some group of people that is treated special ... it is not equal. That is a disadvantage. Sizwe*

The lack of support and lack of interest from managers impact the morale and attitude of police officers. A participant mentioned that, owing to this lack of support and care from management, the station will not be perceived as a 'unit'. This is confirmed in the excerpt below:

*If the management is not supportive, I don't think there will be a unit. So, if the management, let's say now I have a problem and I run to the management, I got 1, 2, 3, and they are not attending to my issue, it demoralises me because it means I am nothing here. It doesn't motivate me and tomorrow when I come to work, I will come*

*being negative – I am not being taken seriously. How can I do the work when I am not happy? Sizwe*

Depressive symptoms are worsened, as participants shared that they feel underappreciated by management, which causes police officers to feel demotivated. Adding to this finding, Maslach et al. (1997) noted that feelings of being unappreciated or unrecognised lessen employee morale because employees do not see the need to work hard.

This was confirmed by the following relevant excerpts.

*That thing affect maybe you have done something, and they don't appreciate whatever you have done, it piss me off; tomorrow I might not think of coming, if I come, I will be negative. Sizwe*

*Like you going there being on duty in the evening waking up leaving my family to go and attend but you will never get an appreciation from the seniors. Thabo*

When it comes to mental health, some participants mentioned that they would not disclose their depression or any other issue to management because management is seen as being indifferent to their needs. Participants felt that management shows no interest or does not care about their members and therefore divulging this information will not make a difference. Sizwe explained:

*I don't think they care. According to me, they don't care. I won't tell them. It is easy you can go and tell them, but they will do nothing. We don't feel supported. Sizwe*

In contrast, one participant mentioned that a police officer should disclose their illness or problems to their station commander; however, management remains indifferent and pays no attention to their needs:



*Sometimes you can tell the station commander, but they don't care, as long as you are at work. Sometimes they can say, you used to be sick all the time... you must tell them even if they don't care. Kabelo*

When police officers struggle with ongoing frustration and are faced with management that does not care about the members, at times this resulted in police officers protesting for station commanders to be dismissed. Kabelo explained this situation:

*That is why sometimes you see at some of the police stations they are toyi-toying, they are looking for the station commanders, they must be removed, they don't care, they don't respect; lack of support. Kabelo*

Another participant asserted that management does not want to take accountability when situations go wrong at the station, which fuels their frustrations and anger:

*It is frustrating because they are charging you, they don't want to blame themselves. The reason why the suspect ran away was because we did not have the handcuffs and leg irons, they are not going that side; they are saying no, I was negligent. Thabo*

#### **5.7 Theme 4: Symptoms of Depression in the Workplace**

Symptoms of depression are related to work absences and impaired work performance, and cause disruptions to family life. The impact of depression may differ across police officers; however, some similarities exist between the participants. Accordingly, the participants spoke about how their experiences with depression impacted both their work performance and family relations. From the participants' experiences it is evident that depression goes beyond the moods and emotions of police officers. Depression also affects the cognitive functioning of individuals. This was confirmed by Kabelo, who explained how driving can become dangerous when his train of thought strays owing to depression:

*Even now, if I am getting depressed, I can't drive, even if the robot is closed, I can go through [pumps hand]. Kabelo*

### **5.7.1 Truancy and Absenteeism**

Depression within the police is also linked to absence from work. According to Johnston et al. (2019), depression is debilitating and is associated with absenteeism and presenteeism in the workplace. The following excerpts gathered from the interviews are consistent with this:

*Sometimes you feel like not coming to work ... sometimes I come, sometimes I take a sick day. Thabo*

*Ja, there is that time you think like, ah [clicks tongue] me I am tired, when you think, thinking of going to Olifants, thinking even those people, aah [swears] I am not going today. Sizwe*

*We have the problem with absenteeism, ja, so sometimes because they know that so and so is not on duty this week, so that means responsibilities will be shifted to me and the other thing is the problem of latecoming. Themba*

*And also, early they discharge themselves early before the knock-off time, they will say they are mothers, they say we are fathers, 6 o' clock I must already be at home so driving from here to my residential place might take 40 to 45minutes, stuff like that. Themba*

*Sometimes I take day off or ask for a leave to relax. Thabo*

### **5.7.2 Pessimistic Attitude and Behaviour**

Participants shared how their work environment being the primary source of their depression results in employees harbouring negative attitudes towards their career. One

participant expressed how being depressed affects his attitude and mood, which ultimately affected how he carried himself in front of clients:

*Ja, because now which means I will start to be negative to the clients, which is not good.* Thabo

To add to the above findings, Themba shared an example of how he experienced other police officers having difficulty interacting and engaging with victims owing to depression.

*When they arrived at the crime scenes, they will be so violent or not cooperative working hand in hand with the complaint. You go to a crime scene where somebody has been raped by four unknown African males. Then instead of saying, mam, no next time when you are alone, please make sure that everything is locked, then you will say but you are also useless, listen at 9 o' clock watching TV, the dining room door is not locked. So, they have this bad habits and attitude when attending to the complaints.*

Themba

### **5.7.3 Irregular Sleeping Patterns**

The participants shared their experiences of depression owing to the nature of their careers interfering with their personal and family life. Thabo shared his experience of how emotional stress played a role in causing depression and the symptoms thereof. He further stated that police officers routinely experience depression, and those depressive symptoms are prevalent among police officers. He explained his situation:

*When the suspect escaped in my custody, it gives me stress because now, I will tell you I didn't even eat that day I was so stressed, I didn't sleep, you know I am having the short sleep, sleepless nights, so you don't know what will happen after, you see, It's normally what is happening to us.* Thabo

Depression can trigger irregular sleeping patterns and behaviour (Nutt et al., 2008). Accordingly, Themba pointed out that depression caused him to sleep at work:

*It affects me at work, whereby I will end up sleeping at work. Themba*

#### **5.7.4 Displaced Anger**

The continuous suppression of emotions can sometimes cause police officers to displace their feelings. Some participants explained their experiences and noted instances when they would displace their anger, stress, and frustration onto their spouse or children. Two participants shared their views:

*Take for instance if I am getting depression at work ... and I don't consult psychologists, when I arrive at home, I will be harsh to my wife, harsh to my children. Thabo*

*I am working here at the station during the day and then I come across something that is, [clicks tongue] is not good and then I feel, I feel somehow you understand, and then when I arrive home, when I find my wife and the kids then I started to shout, you understand that shows that I have a problem. Kabelo*

Police officers experience incidents that are anger-provoking and may lead to maladaptive reactions by them. A participant explained how police officers experienced and perpetrated violence outside of work which resulted in officers opening fire on their spouses or on themselves. This was confirmed in the excerpts below:

*We have anger, I don't know what caused this, but I think it's the, it's the, you know sometimes small things happen to you, ne, and then you take aah, no this thing lightly but now you hold it as a grudge, you understand. So tomorrow another small thing can happen, they are bank, bank, bank, they are a lot of them, and then tomorrow they end up shooting people, innocent people. You heard that the policeman shot the girlfriend at Tembisa hospital. That is what happening, some of things we are not taught about them...*

*most of the things we can't control ourselves when we are angry, I don't know what's caused that ... it's a build-up stress ... yes, they kill themselves, it's because of depression*

Thabo

*Police officers that kill themselves because of depression. Kabelo*

*Marital problems and relationship problems where they end up taking the lives of their loved ones. Themba*

The excerpts above display how policing creates unique marital and relationship problems, which sometimes lead to police officers displacing their anger and frustration owing to work-related issues.

## **5.8 Methods Police Officers Use to Cope with Depression**

The way police officers experience and perceive depression and develop skills to manage depression can be complicated. Police officers exhibit control-seeking behaviours and adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms, as well as failing to seek the appropriate psychological assistance. (Kaur et al., 2013). Accordingly, the participants expressed and shared their various coping strategies, which are discussed below.

### **5.8.1 Excessive Use of Alcohol and Drugs**

Participants shared examples of other police officers who have depression and use alcohol and drugs as a way to cope and self-medicate their mental pain.

*A lot of police they have got too much stress, but you won't see them going to those people to seek help. That's why you can see, I don't know if you have seen it, that is why a lot of police, they have got stress, they are drinking too much... it is because of the things they are exposed to daily and some of them they don't believe in those kinds of things of going to social workers and all of this kind of things. Thabo*

*Some are having this depression they go on drugs or using alcohol, ja, so they must be encouraged to go for rehabilitation. Themba*

### **5.8.2 Hardy Personality or Getting Used to the Situation**

The excerpts below explain how the hardy personality of police officers causes them to adopt a get-on-with-it attitude. Sizwe pointed out that he has never been to a psychologist in all his years of serving in the SAPS. He feels that he is accustomed and immune to all the trauma that he has been exposed to:

*I have never went to a psychologist to say yesterday I have seen 1, 2, 3. I have never for all the 12 years that I have been in SAPS, I have never. And I have seen horrible things, I would say I am used to it now. Sizwe*

He goes on to explain that the everyday occurrences and exposure to these traumatic incidents causes police officers to become immune to the traumatic nature of their work, which results in police officers suppressing these emotions and adopting a get-on-with-it attitude.

*I think we get used to it and then we no longer care anymore, it is happening too often.*

Sizwe

*I can control it. I am not that kind of person who, let's say for example I am stress for something, I can feel something, I can't talk to anybody, no, I can come to work having a serious issue and I can become a normal person. Sizwe*

### **5.8.3 Non-Traditional Coping Strategies**

This study revealed how some police officers use and perceive non-traditional mental healthcare coping strategies in comparison to Western traditional coping strategies. Kabelo shared that the traumatic incidents he is exposed to trigger his depression and he explained that he had a recent altercation while on duty where he was shot, which caused him to feel mixed emotions of 'angry and depressed'. This was an extremely traumatic incident for him; however,

he did not consult with social services as he felt that time is the only aspect that can help him recover:

*I was not okay since then, but I recover as time goes on. It was only time that healed me because now, er I didn't consult but, er they came here those people, government social workers. They came and they just come and assess me if I am fine, but I was fine, yes, but I was trying to recover but I realise it is only time that will yield me, you understand. Thabo*

Unique cultural coping methods were also found in this study. One participant expressed how he did not make use of traditional Western coping mechanisms but instead used traditional African values, attitudes, and practices such as communicating with his ancestors. He explained his experience:

*I am also having this thing of ancestral attachment. I don't take a cigarette, so if I feel that I am stressed, I will go in a quiet room and take out the snuff and put it in my holes so that I can communicate with those people and then I think after 15 minutes I will be fine. Themba*

Adding to the above, an article by Robb-Dover (2021) shares that music has a powerful impact on emotions. For some, the sound of music provides a temporary escape from stress, depression and sadness. This was reiterated by another participant who expressed how he used music as his escape:

*Normally, when I am depressed, if I can play music, listen to music maybe when if I am alone in my house, play music and then I will be fine. Thabo*

## 5.9 Recommendations on How to Address Mental Health in SAPS

From the abovementioned results, it is evident that police officers are at significant risk of developing mental health issues. In the light of addressing mental health in the police force and creating a supportive environment, participants have shared several recommendations and suggestions on what the SAPS can implement to address mental health in the force. Key focus areas have been identified, which are discussed below.

### 5.9.1 Increasing Education and Awareness About Mental Health

Given the nature of police culture concerning mental health, raising mental health awareness can help to shape a better and healthier work environment. All participants mentioned that it would be beneficial for SAPS to implement education and awareness about mental health well-being through hosting workshops and roadshows.

*I think they need to do a sort of a roadshow or something about that, going to the police station to educate police about this kind of things, I have never seen such things. Sizwe  
They must have a workshop. Thabo*

Increasing and encouraging mental health literacy within the police environment will equip police officers with the necessary skills needed to identify signs and symptoms of mental illnesses.

*It will help a lot a lot. Yoh, you know we police officers, eish, we see, we are seeing a lot of things, actually dealing with people is draining, dealing with people on daily basis yoh, actually you need to deliver, and when you need to deliver there is pressure, because everyone is looking at you. People will come here and then they will find there will be a long queue and then they start talking, ja, they not doing anything, mara why the queue is like that? And then it's not like I'm sitting and not doing anything but I'm pushing. Today they don't appreciate what I am doing, that's how people are. Themba*



*It must be introduced and the workshops too it will help. Err, if we make the workshops ne, some of us, some of the things we are not aware of them, but once, eh, the social workers, they are here and you realise okay, no, I had a problem, but I wasn't aware.*

Thabo

### **5.9.2 Increasing the Availability of Psychologists/Social Workers**

Police officers play an essential role in society as they provide the first line of the criminal justice system. Thus, they must have access to psychological treatment through counsellors, psychologists, and social workers to maintain their well-being (Boshoff, 2015).

The lack of and insufficient access to psychologists, social workers and/or counsellors was considered a primary demand by all participants. To address the psychological distress experienced by police officers, all participants expressed the urgent need for more psychologists to be available at all police stations. The following participants provided an example of this:

*They don't have enough members; they don't have enough social workers. Remember we have nine police stations, I am talking about almost 900 members, but we have only two people, at least, ja, they must make them enough at least if we have five or six it's enough because now, we know that okay we have err we have members who can help us ... they must employ enough so we will not struggle when we need them. Thabo*

*I think the relevant people must be hired, so certain units they hire relevant people for the members who are working with taking photographs of the dead people. They also go to the mortuary to see when the bodies are been dissected and the social workers are having a picture and then from there during counselling, she or he know what to tell the members. Themba*

*They must employ enough so we will not struggle when we need them. Thabo*

*By getting more psychologists firstly. Kabelo*

This lack of or not having access to psychologists discourages police officers from consulting regularly and consistently, and results in officers procrastinating in terms of their visits or ultimately not visiting at all:

*You know government people you call someone that, now can I see you and then they say no when I am free, I will call you and then they don't call you back and then you just leave because you are fine now. Thabo*

Therefore, this notion and idea of having psychologists daily at police stations will encourage police officers to make use of the services. The following quote exemplifies this:

*They supposed to be here on a daily basis ... even they will help us we know that they are here, is not like they are there in the offices somewhere. I have to drive, hai, uh. uh they are here, I just go and knock there. Sizwe*

If psychologists are frequently at the stations, they will also be able to identify police officers who need assistance:

*If they were here, eh frequently, they will be able to assess, okay, no this guy today he is not right, let's talk, let's discuss. It is what is needed now. Thabo*

According to Stoltz (2022), SAPS members are 11 times more likely to die from suicide than the average citizens of South Africa. Themba expressed his concern about the alarming rates of police suicide in the SAPS, therefore indicating the urgent need for social services. He explained his view:

*My worry again, it's the level of suicide in the SAPS, our members they need to be, er, have social services. Themba*

### 5.9.3 Increase Support from Management

Creating an open and supportive working environment in SAPS will have a significantly positive benefit for the mental health of police officers (Heffren & Hausdorf, 2016). In this study, it was discovered that the lack of support from management is strongly related to police officers' depression and their lack of confidence in management. All participants expressed the need for management to play a more active role in the organisation and to engage with their members so that they will be able to identify signs of mental distress and issues that police officers experience.

This was confirmed by the following participants:

*If you a right manager, I think you need to, you need to give your time, some time and say, eish, let me sit down with my staff and then we talk, get to know them. While you talking to us if you, you, you good here, you will be able to see this guy, he might be suffering. But if you never engage, you never sit with us, how will you going to know? You don't even know us. Sizwe*

When SAPS managers are indifferent and disengaged from their members this reduces police officers' morale and motivation to work. Sizwe explained this:

*If they can be hands-on with employees or workers ... if you not hands-on with them you don't talk to them, how can you know this guy got a problem, this one ah, I can tell you here, the management, I will talk about this station, I don't think he knows us...that's why sometimes when I come here at work and I see him I just, eish, ey... I think he doesn't care, and it's someone that doesn't willing, he is not willing like to do something, he never talks to us. You can go there and ask, I haven't seen him in, I don't know how many months, but he is working here, he never came to address us or came here or say I want*

*to talk to us never. Obviously, the negativity will be there because he is also not supporting you, that's the most problem happening at the station. Sizwe*

Furthermore, participants related how management is perceived as their 'parents', and police officers expect managers to take care of the team and to provide support. Thus, the participants have made the following recommendations in this regard:

*They have to support us, they are the management because of us, they have to help us.*

*They must be supportive. Thabo*

*Management, they are more like our parents, so that they must make sure we are happy in all ways, they must protect us in all ways. Sizwe*

This support from management also extends to management taking the initiative for sending members for counselling. The excerpt below explains this:

*If a member attended a serious crime, ne, the commander must immediately take those arranged for those members who attending the scene immediate effect to attend a psychologist. Kabelo*

## **5.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the results of the semi-structured interviews were discussed to contribute to the existing knowledge on how police officers experience depression. A description of the findings was presented based on the themes and sub-themes which emerged from the participants' experiences and views of depression. The findings provided insight into understanding the contributing factors, which impact police officers' mental well-being, and the detrimental impact thereof. Furthermore, the chapter discussed coping strategies employed by police officers and recommendations from the police officers. In the next chapter, the findings are discussed concerning the literature review. Moreover, recommendations are made

for what needs to be implemented within the SAPS. In addition, recommendations are provided for future research.

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter explores the themes that were identified in the prior chapters. The findings are discussed in association with the literature on the experiences of police officers diagnosed with depression. An analysis is also provided of the limitations of the current study. This chapter also reveals unique findings that surfaced during data collection. Recommendations are established regarding future research about police officers' experiences with depression. Finally, conclusions are drawn.

The exposure of police officers to catastrophic incidents and routine work stress predisposes them to experiencing symptoms of depression. As such, four police officers were interviewed to elicit their experiences. The four participants revealed that the SAPS department presents a number of difficulties for police officers. Among the challenges of a lack of resources and unsupportive management, the participants revealed that the police culture which they experience plays a pivotal role in developing negative attitudes towards mental health problems such as depression. The police officers in this study displayed a strong passion for their career and for protecting the communities they serve. This was revealed by the various recommendations they shared on how the SAPS can make the organisation a better place.

### **6.2 Discussion**

The objectives of this study may be restated as follows:

- To gain insight into SAPS officers' subjective experience of depression in the Gauteng province
- To understand how day-to-day occupational stressors contribute to the depression experienced by SAPS officers in Gauteng.

- To explore the coping strategies that SAPS police officers in Gauteng adopted to cope with their depression in the work environment.
- To make recommendations for the management of depression among SAPS officers in Gauteng.

In fulfilling the above objectives, the purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of police officers experiencing symptoms of depression in the Gauteng province SAPS. Accordingly, audio-taped semi-structured interviews were conducted with police officers who met the inclusion criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. A thematic analysis was employed incorporating Giorgi's (2009) method of analysis to analyse the material from the interviews. The researcher immersed herself in the interview material by studying the transcripts and creating notes, after which themes were established. Relationships were identified between the various themes and the process of consolidation and writing commenced. The analysis revealed the following themes, as noted in the previous chapter:

- A culture of silence about mental health
- External interference
- Organisational challenges
- Symptoms of depression in the workplace

### ***6.2.1 A Culture of Silence About Mental Health***

As echoed by the participants, the police culture was experienced by police officers in a multitude of ways. Owing to the very nature of the police culture placing value on emotional suppression, police officers struggle to disclose mental illness, which consequently results in many officers suffering in silence (Edwards & Kotera, 2020). Following previous studies (Burns & Buchanan, 2020; Lennie, 2019; Papazaglou & Andersen; 2014), this study also found

that the culture of mental toughness and emotional self-control as well as stigmatisation prevented officers from seeking professional help and divulging details about their depression.

Participants in the study provided several examples of how aspects of the police culture exacerbated their depressive symptoms. When police officers displayed signs of emotional responses owing to occupational stressors, these were often experienced as a sign of weakness, which did not align with the ‘tough’ perception of policing. Therefore, according to Anthony (2018), the police culture promotes specific mannerisms that are designed to emulate the idealistic persona of control, courage, and strength, which are desired in the policing environment.

Emotional responses caused by occupational stressors are discouraged in policing and the opinions of the participants expressed the feelings of guilt and shame experienced by many officers. According to Tuckey et al. (2012), a lack of critical support mechanisms and the high probability of police officers developing mental disorders can result from the unfavourable nature of police culture. Considering the traits of an ideal police officer including toughness and mental fortitude, it is likely that police officers are reluctant to discuss mental illness and are most likely to avoid seeking help because they believe their masculinity will be questioned, leading to a perception of weakness. The participants’ responses were consistent with prior research conducted by Edwards and Kotera (2020), indicating that policing encourages behaviours of emotional control which consequently have a negative impact on their help-seeking behaviour.

Participants detailed negative outcomes of developing depression while working within the SAPS. Discrimination and stigmatising behaviours were among these responses. When participants reflected on how mental health is experienced within the SAPS, many shared the fear of being stigmatised and ostracised by their line managers or colleagues. This mental



stigma surrounding mental illness is embedded both personally and institutionally within the police force (Bullock & Garland, 2018). Participants mentioned the fear and frustration of being ‘labelled’ or ‘stigmatised’ amongst their colleagues should they disclose or discuss mental health issues, which discourages officers from seeking help for fear of being ridiculed, labelled as weak and stigmatised for their action-seeking behaviour (Karaffa & Koch, 2016). Furthermore, Bell and Eski (2016) maintained that police officers suffering from mental illness are stigmatised and marginalised within the police profession.

It emerges from the above discussion that police officers' mental health support and treatment are influenced by the police culture. Thus, it can be inferred that if the police culture is unsupportive, filled with negative interactions and cultural ideologies about mental health, police officers are less likely to seek support for depression.

### ***6.2.2 External Interference***

A notably unique finding of this study was how participants demonstrated the way in which political interference has a compounding influence on police officers' mental health and how they conduct their duties. The current political climate in South Africa is characterised by vulnerability and unpredictability. The South African political system comprises various opposing political parties, which creates a volatile atmosphere, testing South Africa's ‘turbulent and fragile democracy’ (Newham, 2021). When working under conditions filled with police murders or police brutality, participants have experienced that police officers are conflicted on how to act and carry out their duties effectively. The participants relayed their experiences on how political influence makes policing even more challenging, subsequently worsening their symptoms of depression and increasing job stress.

Additionally, this study revealed an interesting new finding: how political influence goes so far as politicians appointing new members into the organisation who do not have any

experience in policing. In a hierarchical organisation like the SAPS, when dysfunction occurs at the top it filters through to the base of the hierarchy impacting police officers who experience an ineffective management structure. A study by Hoggett et al. (2018) argued that it is imperative for police officers to be led by someone who has experience and a shared identity of being a police officer. The job description of being a police officer is exclusive and can therefore only be understood if one has done the job; thus, officers who have jumped the promotion ladder are regarded with suspicion and a lack of credibility (Hoggett et al., 2018). Having experience in the police fraternity is crucial for operational competence, decision making, and implementing effective employee wellness programmes that are tailored to the needs of the employees (Hoggett et al., 2018).

In South Africa, invasive political interference has created problematic employment regulations within the SAPS, where police loyalty is valued over competence resulting in inadequate and inexperienced individuals being appointed to the top positions (Newham, 2021). Yesufu (2014) expressed that, in South Africa, politicians have taken advantage of our police service solely because they recommend and appoint police commissioners to the top positions within the police organisation. Subsequently, and as mentioned by participants in this study, this places police officers in a compromising position after being rewarded by politicians. Moreover, according to Desai (2016), political interference is one of the leading issues plaguing the police fraternity, which was shown conclusively in this current study.

The findings of this study illustrated how politics and politicians also influence the behaviour of citizens, which results in South African citizens dictating how police officers should conduct their duties. In addition, participants also expressed how the media plays a role in falsely portraying police officers, which distorts the perceptions of citizens about police officers in the community. According to Schultz (2019), false media narratives instigate increased levels of distrust amongst citizens towards law enforcement officials. False reporting

by social and news media outlets places undue stress on police officers through which law enforcement officials encounter an escalation in the prominence of lawbreakers who resist arrest. Furthermore, physical assault attempts and murders by individuals targeting the police are catalysed by these false media narratives (Morrow, 2019). Dowler and Zawilski (2007) assert that the media function as primary mechanisms for shaping attitudes and perceptions towards police officers. Intravia et al. (2017) speculated that respondents who read news online are likely to have negative attitudes towards the legitimacy of police officers. As experienced and narrated by participants in this study, these negative attitudes held towards police officers result in citizens not respecting police officers and citizens losing their trust and confidence in police officials.

A growing body of literature suggests that police officers have been portrayed poorly in media and social media accounts (Graziano & Gauthier, 2018; Schneider, 2018). A study by Regehr et al. (2003) assessed the impact of media on first responders and found that media coverage of a traumatic event was significantly associated with symptoms of depression among first responders. Additionally, Regehr et al. (2003) discovered that those police officers who experienced public enquiry after a critical incident suffer chronic stressors. The participants in this current study corroborated those previous findings (Graziano & Gauthier; Regehr et al., 2003; Schneider, 2018), expressing that the media portray skewed representations of police officers, which weakened their mental health.

### ***6.2.3 Organisational Challenges***

The findings of the study revealed that there are several organisational stressors affecting police officers. Since many police officers view organizational pressures as uncontrollable, unavoidable, and oppressive, they are a greater source of stress for police officers. (Tekeste & Nekzada, 2014). These organisational stressors refer to the management, structure, administration, and processes within the police work environments (Kop et al., 1999).

Organisational stressors suggested in the present study, which contribute to the manifestation of depression, included the lack of support and inadequate access to resources.

The participants in this study expressed how organisational stressors are a greater source and predictor of depression owing to various structural arrangements, policies, and practices which are experienced within the SAPS. Furthermore, the shortage of resources is considered a mammoth challenge (Nkosi, 2019). The findings in this study validate a study by Nkosi (2019), since the participants highlighted how the lack of basic resources, such as vehicles or handcuffs, was problematic. According to an article by Engelbrecht (2008), the South African Police Services lack the equipment and resources needed to fight crime in South Africa, consequently resulting in the SAPS members not being able to perform their duties optimally and effectively. This causes emotional distress as participants have mentioned that they endure disciplinary hearings when they are unable to deliver on time, with management disregarding the idea that it is not their fault but instead that of the lack of resources. Furthermore, this affects the ability of police officers to serve community members effectively which, in turn, impacts the morale of the SAPS employees negatively.

An additional key issue identified by participants in this study is the lack of managerial accountability which often results in feelings of frustration and increased symptoms of depression. This lack of managerial accountability inevitably begets police officers who deliver substandard service to the community, leading to police incompetence in the long term (Masiloane, 2008). Moreover, management is unable to build effective control and monitoring systems that might raise the calibre of the services provided since they lack the ability to analyse complaints and use them as a source of intelligence.

The participants related and reflected on how they experience senior management to be indifferent and nonchalant toward their needs, which further hinders police officers from disclosing their mental health issues. In a cross-sectional study by Baek et al. (2015), it was

found that the lack of organisational social support has an impact on the increase of depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the results of Baka's (2020) study revealed that depressive symptoms increased among police officers who perceived and experienced low social support. Participants also noted feelings of being underappreciated and undervalued within the organisation, which caused low morale and motivation. According to Roy (2021), organisations that foster an active culture of recognition enable members of the organisation to create a healthy work environment and to influence employee mental health positively. Participants' own experiences, personal qualities and backgrounds impacted their reactions to and experiences of organisational stressors. Aligned with present-day literature, organisational stressors are seen as significant determinants of mental health problems such as depression. In cross-cultural comparisons with the USA (Alexander et al., 1993) and the UK (Kirkcaldy et al., 1995), this present study supports the findings.

#### ***6.2.4 Police Copying Strategies***

The responses and actions police officers take in the face of pressures could have long-term consequences. Recent studies (Mushwana et al., 2019; Purba & Demou, 2019; Violanti et al., 2017) have concluded that the chronic job stressors endured by police officers affect both the organisation and the individual. The participants noted that depression has a profound impact on their work performance and their ability to carry out their duties effectively. The participants mentioned the lack of concentration, absenteeism, irregular sleeping patterns and disruptive interpersonal skills as outcomes of their depression. This finding is in agreement with previous observations by Ménard and Arter (2013), which showed that police officers' responses comprised aggressive and impulsive behaviour on and off duty, excessive use of force, absenteeism, workplace violence, and family breakdown. Furthermore, depression affects police officers' performance (Shane, 2010), contributes to counterproductive behaviours (Talavera-Velasco et al., 2018) and to inappropriate interactions with citizens

(Neely & Cleveland, 2012), which had been observed amongst participants in this study when examples were shared of police officers using violence or speaking harshly to citizens. This finding suggests that police officers find themselves in an inescapably vicious cycle where they continuously experience strenuous incidents coupled with unsupportive management and the public losing trust and confidence in them, resulting in tragic incidents of police officers behaving maladaptively towards citizens.

Participants were trained to use brute force and violence when faced with potentially life-threatening incidents. The findings of the present study corroborate the ideas of Ferraro (2016), who suggested that this violent behaviour is likely to transfer into the police officers' family life and that their spouses could suffer the consequences. The participants shared how depression leads to family and marital conflict and, at times, even to suicide. Faull (2019) asserts that in 2017/2018, 11 SAPS officers lost their lives as a result of domestic violence. Furthermore, the SAPS members are more likely to kill themselves than be killed on duty (Faull, 2019). This finding reiterates participants' concern about the alarming increasing rates of police suicide within the SAPS owing to depression. These incidents experienced by SAPS are the outcome of societal and organisational cultures, shaped by inequality, violence, poor mental health, and impulse control (Faull, 2019). The results imply that the SAPS require management to look proactively into the rising cases of depression within the organisation, and to drive a culture that supports members and offers psychological help.

### ***6.2.5 Methods Police Officers Use to Cope with Depression***

According to Lazarus (1993), an individual uses coping as a cognitive and behavioural strategy in response to stress management. The findings of the study revealed that the way police officers experience and cope with depression varies. Police officers make use of both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Adaptive, positive coping strategies include acceptance, seeking support, and planning; however, the participants in this study were less

likely to engage in positive coping behaviours. In contrast, participants were more likely to engage in negative, maladaptive coping behaviours such as avoidance, disengagement, substance abuse and self-blame. This finding is in agreement with those of Gershon et al. (2009), which showed that higher levels of perceived work stress and despair were correlated with negative or avoidant coping methods.

From the findings, much of what is understood and practised when it comes to coping stems from the inherent police culture. As argued by Paoline (2004), the police culture results in officers developing suspicious personas, social secrecy, and adopting aggressive policing behaviours and techniques. Almost all of the participants spoke about relying on their masculine techniques to handle depression and work stress. Owing to the commitment of police officers to the culture, this has limited how police officers cope with depression. The results of the present study do not concur with those of the earlier studies by Mushwana et al. (2019) and by Wasserman et al. (2019). Under this police culture, the common methods of coping such as emotion-focused or problem-focused coping are not found to exist in this study since it is expected of officers to suppress their emotions and to avoid sources of strain such as management scrutiny. Instead, participants mentioned that officers typically rely on maladaptive coping like excessive alcohol intake and emotional suppression as a means of coping. Some police officers self-medicate with alcohol as a coping mechanism when dealing with increased and complex levels of stress (Edwards & Kotera, 2020). Furthermore, studies by Karaffa and Koch (2016), and by Shane and Andreychak (2008), ascertained that alcohol consumption is consistent with the necessity for police officers to uphold a specific character and has historically been recognized to numb depressive emotions. This finding in the present study of participants experiencing excessive use of alcohol supports a previous study by Karaffa and Koch (2015), which identified a relationship between police officers' high level of depression and problematic alcohol intake.

Adding to the literature on coping mechanisms within the SAPS, this study revealed a distinct finding that police officers have and make use of other methods for coping and support that are rarely discussed. This was evident in the current study, where a particular participant referred to using African traditional medicine to help him cope with his symptoms of depression. According to Natrass (2005) and Mbangwa et al. (2002), alternative practitioners have a crucial role to play in the provision of culturally appropriate mental health care in South Africa. Within the African traditional belief systems, mental health problems are often experienced as being due to ancestors; therefore, traditional healers or religious advisors are regarded as experts in this field as opposed to psychologists or counsellors. Moreover, these traditional sources of healthcare are often more accessible than Western forms of mental healthcare (Mahomoodally, 2013). The participant in the current study who experienced depression consulted with a traditional African healer instead of a psychologist or counsellor because of an ancestral calling that he experienced. Ndeti (2007) explained that some of the reasons that individuals consult with traditional African healers are due to shared beliefs, respect, and an understanding of cultural views and beliefs (Pinkoane et al., 2012).

#### ***6.2.6 Recommendations Addressing Mental Health in the South African Police Services (SAPS)***

To address depression and overall mental health within the police environment, participants of this study identified three areas that require consideration. First, the findings of this study showed that police officers need education and awareness about mental health. Edwards and Kotera (2020) expressed that the awareness that individuals have about mental health is shaped by how society views mental illness and that it is impacted by numerous social and cultural factors that affect self-identity and self-confidence, which was also evident in the current study. The participants of this study asserted that the implementation of workshops or roadshows is required within the SAPS so that members are provided with knowledge and



awareness about the importance of mental health, which they currently lack. This lack of knowledge and awareness causes police officers to be oblivious of their struggles resulting in their adoption of non-adaptive coping behaviours. Thus, when police officers have the knowledge and increased awareness of mental health, they will be able to identify the signs that they were previously unaware of (Edwards & Kotera, 2020). This knowledge will equip police officers with the necessary skills to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental health issues.

Second, the participants in this study emphasised the need for the SAPS to employ more members of the psychology/counselling fraternity. According to Curran (2001), one of the barriers to obtaining mental health assistance for police officers is the absence of an agency-supported confidential counselling programme and inadequate access to effective mental healthcare services. These sentiments were echoed by participants in the present study. Participants further indicated that if psychologists and counselling services were available daily at police stations, this would increase the likelihood of police officers making use of the services and addressing any mental issues. According to a WHO (2022) article on mental health in the workplace, it was highlighted that work environments that promote mental health and support individuals with mental health disorders are more likely to reduce absenteeism and to increase productivity. While mental health services are available at other police stations, the participants mentioned that the long waiting times, and the inflexibility of appointments and locations make in-house counselling services a more attractive option for many police officers.

Third, participants noted the need for increased support from line managers. Participants explained that if line managers were more engaged and played an active role in the organisation, they would be able to recognise police officers who are struggling. Bell and Eski (2016) demonstrated that managers must receive training on how to recognize signs of mental health issues and aid in easing the psychological suffering that police officers experience.

Participants shared that when police officers feel supported by managers, and there is a culture that promotes mental health, they will be more likely to disclose their mental health issues. Heffren and Hausdorf (2016) assert that help-seeking behaviour is strongly influenced by individuals' readiness and willingness to speak with others in a supportive environment. Training and development across all organisational structures will play a role in ameliorating the mental health status of police officers (Edwards & Kotera, 2020). Furthermore, participants expressed the view that disengaged management causes police officers to have low morale and feelings of negativity toward the organisation. Heathfield (2019) argued that when employees have confidence in the capabilities of their management, and communicate and interact with their managers, this bolsters employee morale, contributing to a positive work environment.

### **6.3 Study Contributions**

The results of this study provide both theoretical and empirical contributions, thus increasing the knowledge in this discipline. From a theoretical perspective, this study reveals tenets of the phenomenological theory depicting the lived experiences of police officers that inadvertently result in them presenting profound symptoms of depression because of their harsh daily encounters of crime. This theoretical underpinning is further depicted in the causes and risk factors, the police officers experience. However, the empirical contribution in this study is displayed explicitly from the participants reactions defining the dysfunctional organisational structure that is so invasive that it threatens mental health instead of promoting it within the police organisation. This evidence can play a vital role in influencing SAPS management structures to explore the necessary steps required and the procedures to be implemented to ensure the effectiveness of mental health policies and programs. Both the theoretical and empirical findings from this study will enable the design of effective interventions that are easily accessible and readily addresses the mental health needs of these officers of the law.

## **6.4 Limitations**

This current study presented some limitations. All participants were Black African males; therefore, other demographics associated with mental health were not represented, such as gender, race, cultural background, and position, which might have yielded different findings. Additionally, this study only took place in the Gauteng province, which further limited the findings. During the interviews there also existed an element of bias from the participants. Participants deferred from answering honestly to some questions but instead discussed their experiences with other colleagues. Obtaining participants for this study was a challenging and a tedious process. With the stigma surrounding mental health within the police work environment, several officers were reluctant to participate. Additionally, the researcher also observed that many police officers did not know or understand the language used in the Beck's Depression Inventory, which posed as an added limitation to the study. This was due to the way the instrument is designed and formulated. There was also a language barrier which hindered police officers' participation in the research study. These challenges resulted in the study only consisting of four participants, which for the purpose of this study, was deemed sufficient.

## **6.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

This study explored the experiences of depression by police officers in the Gauteng province SAPS. Recommendations for future research include accessing a larger sample and including more police stations in other provinces and districts. Biographical and demographic variables (age, gender, race) play a crucial role in the experiences of depression; therefore, it would be advisable that future research considers these aspects to yield a holistic understanding of the experiences of police officers with depression and mental health issues. Furthermore, the researcher suggests that future research should adopt a mixed-methods research design in order to extract rich narrative data on the lived experiences of members of the SAPS because

the existing body of information on police officers and depression has concentrated more on quantitative research design.

Additionally, limited research exists on police officers using traditional African medicine and/or methods as a coping mechanism to deal with occupational stress and mental health issues related to policing. Thus, it is recommended that future research evaluates the use of traditional African medicine on the mental health attitudes of police officers and their mental health status. Finally, comprehensive studies, such as cross-sectional comparisons, can provide useful and beneficial insights into this worldwide epidemic because poor mental health is a problem in many international nations.

## **6.6 Personal Reflections**

This study was inspired by my key interest in mental illness and my personal experience with depression. To narrow my research topic, I selected a profession whereby I knew depression had a high prevalence rate. With my father being an undertaker, I have been in contact with all his associates in the profession, which include police officers or retired police officers that are now pathologists. I was exposed to the effects of depression and the detrimental impact that depression has on an individual's work life, personal life, and family dynamics. I have learned that the experience of depression is subjective. The key obstacle that prevents individuals suffering with depression to seek help is the societal stigma associated with psychological help seeking behaviour. From these experiences and being an advocate for mental health and mental health awareness, I believed that this study was crucial to aid in the understanding of the experiences of depression from police officers' perspective.

This study was extremely challenging and strenuous from the inception of obtaining permission from the SAPS head office and the recruitment phase. There were many times throughout the research process where I wanted to change my topic or just give up, however

as I spoke about my research topic to individuals' who are doctors, social workers, and police officers'- they had reminded me of the vital importance of my study. Furthermore, the SAPS head office had a key interest in my findings and urged me to share the results so that the organization can learn and understand mental illness from the perspective of its members. This convinced me to keep going, as I wanted to further the understanding of depression, break the stigma against mental health and assist in implementing efficient mental health care within the police fraternity that is tailored according to police officers' needs.

During the time I embarked on this research study, there has been many incidents of police suicides and domestic violence that validated the need for need this study and mental health awareness within the police organization. Throughout the years, there has been a plethora of mass media reports concerning the rise of police suicides, domestic violence, police brutality and murders. These incidents invoked in me the quest to explore and try understanding what police officers might be experiencing. It was my belief that understanding the experiences of depression within the police work environment may enhance police experiences of depression from the members perspectives.

Being an Indian female interviewing Black male officers, I had no frame of reference as them. There were incidents during the interviews where I could not relate to their discussion especially pertaining to African cultural references. Even though these could have been a barrier, to foster a deeper understanding, after the interviews I would do research on these cultural aspects to educate myself and to understand these police officers' perspective as much as I could. It is my wish that further exploration be done in understanding the cultural issues that police officer diagnosed with depression battle with. Preferably by interviewers well versed in the participants culture for more deeper insights.

I did not expect the interviews to go as well as it had. I had a presumption that due to the stigma and the salient police "macho" culture; these police officers would not open up to

me. However, as each interview progressed, the police officers felt comfortable to share with me their experiences, although at times they were hesitant to do so. During the interviews, I could see how passionate the police officers were to be heard and for their story to be told. After the interviews I did not expect to be affected the way I was. I was sad because of what these police officers experience daily as I could not offer any tangible thing to assist them. I felt disappointed in the police system for not providing the sufficient support for these police officers who protect our communities and societies. This motivated me to try and write a dissertation that could have an impact and fully present the stories of the participants. I was inspired to try and present an accurate authentic piece of research that enhance understanding, on how individuals experience mental health within the police force. I hoped that this study would be contribute meaningfully to the topic of depression within the police and will pave a way for other research to follow. This has been an extremely challenging task, especially in recruitment phase, but I am truly grateful to the participants for sharing their experiences with me and trusting me. I trust that my presentation of the findings accurately encompasses what was conveyed to me and will further the understanding of the experiences of depression within the police fraternity.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the first-hand experiences of police officers suffering from depression. A qualitative research approach was employed because it enables a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon rather than merely a description of it. A core strength of this research is that the researcher was able to understand and delve into the lived experiences of police officers presenting symptoms of depression and could follow up on answers they had provided. The researcher was able to understand subjective experience and gain insight around police officers' behaviours and motivations, thereby cutting through long-held assumptions around the nature of policing and police culture. The present study proved

to be an extremely rewarding process for the researcher due to the researcher's personal interest in the phenomenon, depression. The researcher allowed participants to express themselves as they wish about their experiences. The researcher did not interfere with their responses but ensured that responses and questions asked remained within the framework of the study. Therefore, the researcher concludes that reflexivity was considered in this study.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with four police officers who scored more than 20 on Beck's Depression Inventory-II. Thematic analysis, in conjunction with Giorgi's (2009) phenomenological method of analysis, was the method utilised to analyse the interview material. The findings revealed that many factors prevalent within policing play a role in the manner in which police officers experience, understand and cope with depression. The lesson learned from this study was that police officers experience a multitude of stressors that results in police officers experiencing symptoms of depression. Stigma is one of the key deterrent in seeking mental health assistance. Furthermore, the police culture of inherent cynicism, self-reliance, suppressing emotions and valuing toughness associated with the distrust in management impedes the discussion and enforces negative beliefs around psychological injury and mental health seeking behaviour.

The results highlighted the way that the police culture, organisational stressors, and the interplay between politics, citizens and media contribute to the symptoms of depression experienced by police officers. They showed further that police officers suffer from a lack of concentration, absenteeism, irregular sleeping patterns, disruptive interpersonal skills, and displaced anger as outcomes of depression. The study supports the view that depression is detrimental both to police officers' personal and professional life. Given the findings and limitations of this study, it is recommended that the focus in future be on increased educational awareness regarding mental health, more access to professional psychological help, and a more supportive managerial structure within the SAPS in the Gauteng province.

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## 8. APPENDICES

### Appendix A: SAPS Permission Letter

SUID-AFRIKAANSE POLISIEDIENS  SOUTH AFRICAN  
POLICE SERVICE

Privaatsak/Private Bag X 94

Verwysing/Reference: 3/34/2

Navrae/Enquiries: .....Lt Col Joubert AC  
Thenga

Telefoonf/Telephone: (012) 393 3118

Email Address: Joubert G saps.gov.za

THE HEAD: RESEARCH  
SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE  
SERVICE PRETORIA  
0001

The Provincial Commissioner  
GAUTENG

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SAPS: THE  
EXPERIENCE OF POLICE OFFICERS WITH DEPRESSION  
WITHIN THE GAUTENG SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE  
(SAPS): UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA: MASTERS DEGREE:  
RESEARCHER: M MOOLOO**

1. The above subject matter refers.
2. The researcher, Ms M Mooloo, is conducting a study titled: The experience of police officers with depression within the Gauteng South African Police Service (SAPS), with the aim to understand the experiences of depressed police officials within the SAPS Gauteng.
3. The researcher is requesting permission to interview eight (8) police officers at Atteridgeville Police Station Gauteng Province.
4. The proposal was perused according to National Instruction 1 of 2006. This office recommends that permission be granted for the research study, subject to the final approval and further arrangements by the office of the Provincial Commissioner: Gauteng.

5 We hereby request the final approval by your office if you concur with our recommendation. Your office is also at liberty to set terms and conditions to the researcher to ensure that compliance standards are adhered to during the research process and that research has impact to the organisation.

6. If approval is granted by your office, this office will obtain a signed undertaking from researcher prior to the commencement of the research which will include your terms and conditions if there are any and the following:

6.1 The research will be conducted at his/her exclusive cost.

**PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SAPS: THE EXPERIENCE OF POLICE OFFICERS WITH DEPRESSION WITHIN THE GAUTENG SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE (SAPS): UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA: MASTERS DEGREE: RESEARCHER: M MOOLOO**

6.2 The researcher will conduct the research without the disruption of the duties of members of the Service and where it is necessary for the research goals, research procedures or research instruments to disrupt the duties of a member, prior arrangements must be made with the commander of such member.

6.3 The researcher should bear in mind that participation in the interviews must be on a voluntary basis.

6.4 The information will at all times be treated as strictly confidential.

6.5 The researcher will provide an annotated copy of the research work to the Service.

6.6 The researcher will ensure that research report / publication complies with all conditions for the approval of research.

7. If approval is granted by your office, for smooth coordination of research process between your office and the researcher, the following information is kindly requested to be forwarded to our office:

- Contact person: Rank, Initials and Surname.
- Contact details: Office telephone number and email address.

8. A copy of the approval (if granted) and signed undertaking as per paragraph 6 supra to be provided to this office within 21 days after receipt of this letter.

9. Your cooperation will be highly appreciated.



MAJOR GENERAL  
THE HEAD: RESEARCH  
DR PR VUMA

DATE: 2020-11-16



## Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Dear Prospective Participant

You are hereby invited to participate in a study that forms part of my master's studies at the University of Pretoria. This study aims to explore and describe the workplace experiences of depression as a police officer. Information shared by you will be used for academic and research purposes only.

### Please note that:

- 1) Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You will not be compensated for participation in this study. It will involve a semi-structured interview of approximately 30-45 minutes in length.
- 2) Your name and identity will be kept confidential. Research findings will be reported in a way that protects your dignity and right to privacy, for example using pseudonyms.
- 3) You may decide to withdraw from this study at any point within the interview by informing the interviewer that you wish to withdraw. You shall not be penalised in any way if such a decision is made.
- 4) The information shared will be stored for 15 years for archiving and future research.
- 5) You may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview after four to five months. This is to enable the researcher to compare information gathered during the research process.
- 6) The interview will be recorded and transcribed to ensure that the shared information is correctly captured and understood.
- 7) Results of this study will be disseminated in the form of a dissertation, conference paper or article in an academic journal.





- 8) It is not anticipated that participation will lead to the re-traumatisation of previous suicidal ideation. Should this happen during or after the interview process, you will be encouraged to contact SADAG on 011 234 4837 for a free counselling session by a trained counsellor.

If you are interest in participating in this study, please contact me on 076 059 7842 or alternatively send me an email: [micaelamooloo@gmail.com](mailto:micaelamooloo@gmail.com)

Thank you for your anticipated participation.

Yours Sincerely

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**Micaela Mooloo Barnard Buti Motileng**

**Student/Researcher Supervisor**

Work: 076 059 7842 Work: 012 420 2907

Email: [micaelamooloo@gmail.com](mailto:micaelamooloo@gmail.com)

Email: [benny.motileng@up.ac.za](mailto:benny.motileng@up.ac.za)



## Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

I have read the contents of the information sheet and understand that I have been invited to participate and that my agreement is fully voluntary.

I am also aware that I may be requested to participate in a follow-up interview within a four to five-month period and the information shared can be used for further studies on similar topics. I understand that I am under no obligation to participate and am fully aware that I can withdraw at any time during the course of the interview.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree to participate in this study on this \_\_\_\_\_ (day) of this \_\_\_\_\_ (month) and this \_\_\_\_\_ (year).

### Participant Details:

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Researcher and Supervisor

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Participant Informed Consent Form for Recording Interview

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby agree to participate in a semi-structured interview for Micaela Mooloo's research entitled *Exploring the experiences of police officers diagnosed with depression within the South African Police Services*, which will be voice recorded. I understand that:

- The tapes and transcriptions will not be seen or heard by another person other than the researcher and her supervisor.
- No information that may identify me will be included in the research report, subsequent presentations and/or publications.
- My responses will remain confidential.
- The study may be written up for publication in a journal or presented at a conference; therefore, all voice recordings will be stored safely in a locked cupboard on campus for a period of up to three years and then destroyed.
- Direct quotes from you may be used in the research report, presentations and/or publications, but these will be referred to using pseudonyms, e.g. X, Y, etc.

### Participant Details:

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Contact Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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**Researcher and Supervisor**

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Hello, my name is Micaela [shake hands]. I am currently completing my Masters in Research Psychology and this research forms parts of my thesis. Firstly, I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. This research is based on your experiences with depression. This study will aim to understand your everyday experiences and provide you with a platform to be heard.

Before commencing with the interview, I would like to assure you that everything you say during this interview will be kept confidential, and only my supervisor and I will have access to the voice recordings. I want to remind you that you have the right to withdraw from this study at any time during the interview. You also have the right to refrain from answering any question you are uncomfortable with. Should you wish to view the results of this test, please email me and I will forward these to you upon completion of this study. You can find my contact details on the information sheet provided to you before this interview.

**(Transition A:** Let me begin by asking you some questions about your position at work and the environment that you work in)

1. What is your position in the firm?
2. How long have you been working at SAPS?

**(Transition B:** Let me begin with the questions about your experiences with depression)

1. Did you know that you might be suffering from depression? Yes or No  
If No, close the interview.



If yes, ask:

Have you ever sought help from a Dr or psychologist regarding your depression?

Probe: If Yes, are you on medication?

Probe: If No, why not, will you consider seeking help?

2. According to you what is depression?

Probe: how does it manifest itself?

3. What factors contribute to your depression?

Probe: Are there any work stressors?

4. Does your management know that you suffer from depression?

Probe: If yes, how did they come to know?

Probe: Did you tell them?

Probe: If No, why not?

5. How does depression affect your daily life?

6. Would you say that depression affects your work?

Probe: In what way, can you provide me with examples?

7. What is your work environment like?

Probe: Do you feel “good or bad” at work?

Probe: Why? Please explain.

8. Does your company have a wellness program to support people like you? Yes/No.

Probe: If yes, Do you find the wellness programs at work helpful?

Probe: In what way has it helped you?

Probe: How can it be improved?

If No, what will you suggest? Explain why?

9. How do you manage your depression (at work)?



Probe: What is your coping mechanism at work?

10. Have you told any of your colleagues that you suffer from depression?

If participant No asks: Why not?

If Yes ask: What was their reaction like?

Probe: How did this make you feel?

11. What would you recommend your company should do to address depression?

**(Transition C:** It has been a pleasure finding out more about you, thank you. Let me briefly summarise the information that I have recorded during our interview)

1. Summarise to ensure correct understanding.

**(Transition D:** I would like to capture some demographic information for analyses purposes)

1. How old are you?

2. How many years have you been working?

3. What is your marital status?

4. **Record:** Gender \_\_\_\_\_ (Male or Female)

5. **Record:** Race \_\_\_\_\_ (African, White, Coloured or Asian) (Ask if not sure)

**(Transition E:** In closing for the interview, I would like to ensure that you have not experienced any psychological harm and to ensure you receive the necessary help if needed)

1. I understand that sharing your experience today may cause some psychological stress. If you are feeling depressed or uncomfortable, I will arrange a counselling session with a recommended counselling psychologist. If you start to experience discomfort or depression later in the day or week, I suggest that you make an appointment with a counselling psychologist to receive counselling services.



2. You are also free to contact me or my supervisor should you have further questions about the study or the results.

I want to thank you for your help and for taking the time to help me with my research.