



**“AND THEN YOU GO HOME HAVING ANGER ISSUES”:  
INVESTIGATING POLICE-PERPETRATED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As those entrusted with the duties of safety, security, care and protection, police officers play a significant role in responding to the crisis of domestic violence in South Africa. Paradoxically, they are capable of perpetrating the very crime they are sworn to prevent and equally capable of failing to hold those who do accountable. Police-perpetrated domestic violence (PPDV) is a globally prevalent yet largely understudied phenomenon, particularly in the South African context.

Drawing on literature, police oversight monitoring reports, quantitative data and interviews with South African Police Service (SAPS) Station Commanders and Domestic Violence coordinators, this dissertation sheds light on this largely underexplored phenomenon providing a more contextualised understanding of PPDV in South Africa with a more selective focus on the Western Cape where its rates are disproportionately high.

Research findings illustrate the complexity of PPDV, revealing an interplay of multiple influences and factors that contribute to its emergence and undermine state efforts to address it. Its findings emphasise the need for targeted reforms to take the issue of PPDV and the wellness of police officers in South Africa far more seriously than is currently the case.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Setting the Scene

On 2 January 2022, in the small dusty town of Piketberg in the Western Cape province of South Africa, Richard Smit reaches for his firearm and pulls the trigger seven times. Three of the seven shots fired strike the back of one of his fleeing targets, his girlfriend, Natasha Booise. As Natasha lies dying on the street, a heavily intoxicated Smit pursues her aunt, Roslin Kaiman, who has fled to a nearby petrol station along with Natasha's son and other children. Parked next to the cowering Roslin, Smit aims his gun at her and threatens: "*Ek gaan your vrek skiet!*" (I will shoot you dead!). Deterred by witnesses shouting at him not to shoot, Smit drives away (Booyesen, 2022b:np).

The court case<sup>1</sup> that followed Smit's arrest exposes a concerning history of violence and legal troubles (Booyesen, 2022b:np). In 2013, Smit's father sought a domestic violence protection order against him after receiving death threats that his son would shoot him. His father later withdrew the protection order. A year later, Smit was arrested for assaulting his father and shooting at him during an attempted escape from the physical altercation. However, the charges were mediated, and the matter was withdrawn. Smit was, though, declared unfit to possess a firearm. His violent behaviour persisted. In 2015, he was arrested for stabbing a man and was convicted of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm. He was sentenced to 36 months of correctional supervision, including 24-hour house arrest and 16 hours of community service. In 2017, he was back in court, this time accused of common assault for beating a man. A year later, he returned to court for traffic violations and resisting arrest, receiving a R3 000 fine. Smit's reign of terror in Piketberg eventually concluded in October 2023. He was sentenced to life in prison for the premeditated murder of his girlfriend and additional years for attempted murder, common assault, pointing of a firearm, handling of a firearm while under the influence of alcohol and driving under the influence of alcohol (Marriah-Maharaj, 2023:np).

While this story may read like yet another example of South Africa's well-documented issues with crime and violence, the reality is more disturbing. Richard Smit was an active member of the South African Police Services (SAPS) until he resigned just a day before his disciplinary hearing,

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<sup>1</sup> *The State vs Richard Smit*, 2023.

scheduled after his 2022 arrest (Booyesen, 2022a:np). More concerning, Smit used the same state-issued firearm in the shooting that had previously been confiscated from him for five years but reinstated in 2020 after he was declared fit to possess it again (Booyesen, 2022b:np).

Richard Smit's case is not unique, nor does his sentencing close the chapter on the challenges plaguing the SAPS in addressing police-perpetrated domestic violence (PPDV)<sup>2</sup>. At the time, Smit was just one of 208 officers in the Western Cape, out of 417 nationally, reported for domestic violence to the Civilian Secretariat for Police Service (CSPS) during the 2021/22 financial year<sup>3</sup>. He was also one of 26 police officers implicated in domestic violence-related deaths, as reported by the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) in the same period (IPID, 2022:43).

Domestic violence - abuse between family members or intimate partners - is a significant issue in South Africa. Intimate partner violence is especially pervasive, with one in four women experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime (NDOH et al., 2019:355). Femicide - the most extreme manifestation of this violence - accounts for more than half of all women murdered in the country (Abrahams et al., 2024:13,10).

As the primary protectors and defenders of safety and security, SAPS wields tremendous authority and responsibility in responding to domestic violence. These obligations, as outlined in the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) 116 of 1998, include arresting offenders, seizing weapons as directed by courts, ensuring the immediate safety of victims,<sup>4</sup> informing them of their right to lay charges, apply for a protection order and helping them access medical care, shelter, and other support services. SAPS commits to delivering these services to victims with empathy, care, and respect (SAPS, 2024:np).

However, SAPS officers are far from model defenders of law and order, being both capable of committing heinous acts of violence, like Richard Smit, and of failing to hold those who do so responsible. In 2008, Dideka Madyibi successfully sued the then Minister of Safety and Security

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<sup>2</sup> As no singular definition of PPDV exists in the literature, this dissertation defines PPDV as any form of domestic violence perpetrated by a police officer against an intimate partner or family member. Domestic violence includes physical, emotional, verbal, psychological or economic abuse; harassment; coercive and controlling behaviour; or any behaviour that is 'intimidating, threatening, abusive, degrading, offensive or humiliating' (DVAA, 2021:6-8).

<sup>3</sup> This total figure was extracted from the CSPS's bi-annual Domestic Violence Act monitoring reports for April to September 2020 and March to October 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Or complainants as referred to in the DVA.

for over R4.3 million after her police officer husband shot her with his state-issued firearm before killing himself. In *Madyibi v Minister of Safety and Security and Another* (2008), Ms Madyibi argued that the police had failed to protect her by not taking disciplinary action against her husband despite her seeking help from his colleagues, the Station Commander, and the Area Commissioner. The judge agreed, finding the Station Commander negligent for not confiscating his firearm, despite being aware of the officer's violent behaviour towards his wife and other police officers and that he suffered from depression, had suicidal ideations, and abused alcohol. The Station Commander was also found guilty of not ensuring that criminal charges were brought against the deceased and for neglecting to report the matter to higher authorities within the SAPS.

Police officers who perpetrate domestic violence are unlikely to prioritise care and respect for victims who seek their help. Moreover, when police officers cover up or ignore domestic violence within their ranks or actively prevent victims from getting the help they need, they become as complicit as the perpetrators of that violence. These actions violate and undermine government measures established to prevent and respond to domestic violence.

This issue is, however, far from unique to South Africa.

### **The Historical & Contemporary Response to PPDV Globally**

The earliest research into PPDV emerged in the United States (U.S.) in the mid-1980s when sociologist Leonor Johnson unintentionally uncovered a well-kept secret within police households (Roslin, 2017:59-61). While interviewing police officers' wives for a study on work-related stress, Johnson discovered recurring accounts of domestic abuse, revealing what Roslin (2017:61) describes as an 'epidemic raging in many law enforcement homes'. Of the 728 officers surveyed, approximately 40% admitted to violent behaviour towards family members.

Subsequent studies, though few and far between, have echoed similar findings. Officer-involved domestic violence (as it is known in the U.S.) is alarmingly common (Mennicke & Ropes, 2016:158). In one study, as many as 54% of officers knew of a colleague involved in domestic violence (Ryan, 2000:300), while in another, over half (51.3%) of officers interviewed reported having responded to domestic violence incidents involving law enforcement (Russell & Tannenbaum, 2016 in Russell & Pappas, 2018:135).

Johnson's pioneering research contributed to legislative and policy changes in the U.S., including the 1996 Lautenberg Amendment, which prohibited individuals, including police officers, from accessing a firearm if convicted of domestic violence, and the 1999 International Association of Police Chiefs Model Policy for handling officer-involved domestic violence (Stinson & Liederbach, 2013:602).

Despite increased efforts and attention to this issue, little has improved in the U.S. Police departments lack consistency in implementing policies, displaying a 'laissez-faire approach' towards policy and procedure (Russell & Pappas, 2018:139). Investigations are frequently flawed or lack objectivity (Cheema, 2016:489; Roslin, 2017), and officers are rarely held accountable for their actions. Sanctions are typically lenient and seldom lead to job losses (Russell & Pappas, 2018:135; Mennicke & Ropes, 2016:159; Goodmark, 2015:1193-1194; Ammons, 2005:31-32).

This issue has more recently gained prominence in other contexts.

In 2020, the United Kingdom initiated a public inquiry into PPDV following a complaint from the Centre for Women's Justice (CWJ) and the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ), which documented widespread failures in the policing of PPDV. Victims faced significant challenges in reporting cases against their abusers, with their experiences frequently dismissed or minimised. In some instances, victims were arrested (CWJ, 2020:24). The complaint further detailed systemic manipulation of police procedures, including missing or unfiled reports, flawed investigations, and irregular decisions regarding criminal charges (CWJ, 2020:3-4). A Freedom of Information request by the BIJ (CWJ, 2020:27-29) revealed that of 624 reported misconduct cases, 76.3% (518) concluded without sanctions or finding fault, while only 7.6% resulted in corrective measures. Only 3.9% of cases led to criminal convictions (CWJ, 2020:28).

In Australia, similar issues have surfaced. In 2022, Queensland's Premier launched a Commission of Inquiry into the police's handling of domestic violence. The inquiry raised numerous concerns, among them a notable increase in the number of officers implicated in domestic violence cases, with such cases having doubled over the past decade and only 8% having led to disciplinary action (CIQPS, 2022:176). The Commission recommended suspending police officers who contravened protection orders with full pay. The union disagreed, arguing that each case should be individually assessed and handled with discretion (CIQPS, 2022:178).

## **The Historical & Contemporary Response to PPDV in South Africa**

In 1994, emerging from a deeply troubled and violent political era where police relied heavily on coercive force, ‘embedding danger in the very theatre of policing’ (Perkins, 2018:47), the new democratic government sought to redefine police practice centred on protection, upholding human rights, and fostering ‘good relations between the police and the community’ (Section 206 (3) of the Constitution). Central to this goal was the need to establish mechanisms for police oversight and accountability.

In 1995, the SAPS Act granted the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD) the authority to investigate complaints of misconduct, offences, and deaths involving the police. In 2001, the ICD began reporting on police compliance with the DVA and also began paying attention to PPDV (Vetten, 2017:10). However, it was only after a noted increase in police-perpetrated femicide between 2004 and 2007 – resulting in 49 cases – and legal action against the then Minister of Safety and Security (ICD, 2009:2) that the issue of PPDV garnered greater scrutiny. Finding SAPS’ interventions inadequate, the ICD initiated the state’s first and only national study on PPDV to understand why police were killing their female partners (ICD, 2009:2).

The ICD study found two primary contributing factors: victims attempting to end long-standing abusive relationships and easy access to state-issued firearms (ICD, 2009:35-36). Of the 30 femicide cases reviewed, 80% had involved the use of these guns. Study recommendations included, among others, increasing domestic violence awareness among police, improving communication between officers and management, providing access to external counselling, and restricting off-duty access to firearms (ICD, 2009:37-39). The extent to which these recommendations were acted on is unclear. While the ICD held investigative powers, it had little enforcement authority (Vawda & Mtshali, 2013:137).

To overcome such limitations, the government restructured the ICD into the IPID, granting it expanded responsibilities and enforcement capabilities. IPID was mandated to investigate allegations of police misconduct or offences that resulted in the rape, torture, assault or death of a civilian, whether directly caused by a police officer or through their actions in an official capacity (IPID, 2015b:5).

That same year, the CSPA assumed the role of civilian oversight of SAPS. Its responsibilities included monitoring SAPS's compliance with the DVA and recommending disciplinary action for non-compliance, which constitutes misconduct (CSPA, 2023a:5). The CSPA also began reporting on PPDV.

The problem of police misconduct remains grave despite these efforts. Between April 2012 and March 2019, IPID received over 42,000 complaints of police misconduct, including rape, assault, torture, police-involved shootings and killings (Bruce, 2020a:30). Of the 2 806 deaths linked to police actions, 354 stemmed from interpersonal disputes, with the majority—222 cases— ending in domestic violence fatalities (Bruce, 2020a:8).

The CSPA has consistently expressed concern over the increasing number of PPDV offenders and SAPS's inability to manage and prevent such cases (CSPA, 2021b:13). Much like the ICD had in the past, they find SAPS to be doing 'very little' to address the issue (CSPA, 2019a:13). It has also questioned the effectiveness of SAPS's employee wellness support services, the adequacy of police protocols for disarming officers implicated in domestic violence, and the leniency shown in disciplinary measures (CSPA, 2019a:12).

PPDV has otherwise received minimal attention. Only two studies were identified. Jennifer Nix (1998), a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, examined the issue from the perspectives of victims and experts working in the field of criminal justice and victim support, while Coenraad Van den Heever's (2017) doctoral dissertation focused on homicide-suicide cases involving SAPS officers. This latter study found intimate-partner homicide to be the most common subtype of homicide-suicide by police (2017:160).

Domestic violence has profound life-altering consequences for victims, their families and, by extension, entire communities. The issue becomes more critical when perpetrated by those tasked with policing this crime – individuals who may be desensitised to violence, feel entitled to hold power and control over others, have easy access to firearms and are seldom held accountable for their actions. Failures by police to adequately address PPDV endanger not only the lives of victims but also jeopardise public trust in the police.

This issue demands more attention.

## **Research Question & Objectives**

This exploratory study aims to develop a deeper, more contextualised understanding of PPDV in South Africa, exploring its prevalence, nature and the factors that enable its persistence. It does so by consolidating data from IPID, SAPS and CSPA to provide a clearer picture of its national prevalence before narrowing the focus to the Western Cape, where PPDV rates are significantly higher than in other provinces. Interviews with SAPS personnel - specifically Station Commanders and Domestic Violence (DV) Coordinators - from five Western Cape-based stations offer deeper insights into this critical issue in answering the question: *how is police perpetration of domestic violence understood, addressed and investigated in South Africa?*

Its findings aim to support ongoing efforts by the South African government to address gender-based violence and femicide more effectively, particularly among those entrusted to uphold the law and protect and care.

## **Structure of Dissertation**

This introduction has provided some context for understanding the prevalence and landscape of policy and accountability measures to address PPDV, comparing global contexts with South Africa. Doing so has highlighted the disturbingly high incidence of such violence, as well as the limited accountability for those who perpetrate this familial and intimate partner violence.

Chapter Two builds on this foundation by drawing on scholarly research and theory to uncover the dynamics of police work, police culture and sociocultural and political influences that contribute to the risk and perpetration of domestic violence by police officers.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology used in this investigation.

Chapter Four presents the dissertation's findings. It consolidates data from IPID, CSPA, and SAPS reports on PPDV in South Africa; explores legislative, policy and other frameworks for responding to such cases; and delves into interviews with police personnel, examining their perspectives on how they understand, manage, and investigate instances of PPDV.

Chapter Five concludes the dissertation by summarising its key findings and offering recommendations based on interviews and analysis.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

In the U.S., PPDV is estimated to be two to four times more prevalent than in the general population (Russell & Pappas, 2018:135). Although no comparable estimates exist in South Africa, we know that intimate partner violence played a substantial role in the deaths of women in over 84% of homicide-suicide cases involving police (Van den Heever, 2017:160).

Researchers often turn to feminist theories to explain intimate partner violence, examining how power and control dynamics in relationships, gendered social norms, and patriarchy - defined by Walby (1989:214) as a 'system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' – influence such violence. However, these theories are limiting. For instance, they do not sufficiently explain why only some men perpetrate such violence despite being exposed to cultural norms of male superiority over women (Heise, 1998:263).

When applied to the context of PPDV, additional intricacies emerge. Johnson, Todd & Subramanian (2005:6), for example, note that feminist theories cannot fully account for the unique dynamics of police culture in which both men and women are socialised to dominate and assert their authority, power and control. These dynamics may exacerbate the potential for intimate partner violence but may operate independently of gender hierarchies. Furthermore, research finds other factors, such as financial difficulties, alcohol abuse, and even outstanding disciplinary cases, as contributors to PPDV (ICD, 2009:35; Van den Heever, 2017:122).

Thus, feminist theory alone cannot articulate the complexity of PPDV.

Following Heise's suggestion that a better approach to understanding the aetiology of such violence requires conceptualising it as a 'multifaceted phenomenon grounded in an interplay among personal, situational, and sociocultural factors' (1998:263), this chapter focuses on literature that explores possible internal and external factors and risks involved in PPDV. Specifically, this requires examining the influence of police culture, the dynamics of police work, and the potential external sociocultural and political influences that may shape the life experiences, social attitudes and perceptions of individual police officers. I will start with the latter in the context of South Africa.

## **Roots of Violence & Inequality: The Sociocultural & Political Influences**

Violence against women is frequently described as an epidemic in South Africa. Indeed, substantial evidence exists of its proliferation and significant consequences for the health and wellness of those directly affected. Interpersonal violence, inclusive of intimate partner violence, is the second leading risk factor for disease, injury, and death among females in the country (Bradshaw et al., 2022:556). While the term ‘epidemic’ emphasises the seriousness of this issue, it also implies that it is a disease with a biological determinant driven by biological traits which can be studied and treated. However, this is not the case. Violence against women is complex and context-specific.

Jewkes (2002), in her analysis of differences in intimate partner violence prevalence across countries, explores the complexity of understanding the causes of this violence. She finds that, except for poverty, few social and demographic characteristics increase the risk for intimate partner violence. Contrary to biological diseases, intimate partner violence is ‘entirely a product of social context’ (Jewkes, 2002:1423), in particular, women's ‘unequal position’ within society and relationships and the ‘normative use of violence in conflict’ (2002:1426).

These two conditions are prevalent in South African society.

Although a contested theoretical concept for explaining violence against women, patriarchy remains widely accepted as a systemic issue contributing to gender oppression and inequality (Hunnicut, 2009:555). Patriarchal social norms and unequal power relations between men and women lead as the primary drivers of gender-based violence in South Africa (Meyiwa et al., 2017: 8613). Such attitudes, practices, and beliefs legitimise men's control over women. These often regard men as being entitled to abuse women (Mshweshwe, 2020:3; Pelowich et al., 2024:9). They also perpetuate, consciously or unconsciously, the notion that women are deserving of such violence (Meyiwa et al., 2017:8613).

An additional argument proposed to explain South Africa’s high levels of violence and abuse of women is that of the country’s ‘culture of violence’. This aligns with Jewkes’s second epidemiological condition for intimate partner violence, that of the normalised use of violence in conflict.

Many attribute the emergence of South Africa's 'culture of violence' to the legacy of colonisation and the country's brutal history of Apartheid, where the use of armed, militarised forces for suppression and control created the conditions that socialised children among violence (Gqola, 2007:114), and, in particular, bred generations of violent men (Vetten, 2000:57).

Apartheid represented not only a period of great injustice and instability for the black majority of South African citizens and their families but also created widespread unrest in the country. Hamber (2010:6) describes the 1980s as one of the most violent decades in South Africa's history, characterised by the state's extensive use of force – particularly by the police – and often against young activists and those associated with them. Here, violence and struggle enmeshed and intertwined, shaping for these young men in particular, identities that required them to be 'strong, brave, tough, fearless, aggressive, and violent' (Eagle & Langa, 2008:155). The violence initially concentrated between the state and its citizens - what Hamber refers to as vertical violence - eventually spread horizontally through intra-community and organisational conflicts in townships and rural areas, 'seeping into all parts of public life, undermining the moral, interpersonal and social fabric of society' (2010:6-7).

The end of Apartheid promised a better life for all, but while much has improved, the country, for a multitude of reasons, has not been able to shed this legacy and the destruction that it left in its path. South Africa's ongoing struggles with poverty, socio-economic inequality, patriarchy, widespread drug and alcohol abuse, and other harms continue to sustain and normalise the use of violence and the general precarity of life.

South African criminologist Andrew Faull believes that this historical and sociocultural context informs both the organisational culture of SAPS and the personal identities of those who serve within it. Based on his extensive ethnographic research on South African police (2017a, 2017b, 2018b), Faull highlights how officers grew up in households and communities plagued by poverty and violence – conditions entrenched by Apartheid, which normalised violence as a tool to 'demonstrate power, resolve interpersonal conflict, and express masculinities' (Faull, 2017b:4). Many South African police officers hold on to the belief that violence 'teaches lessons and solves problems, or builds respect' (Faull, 2017a:180).

It is these narratives that officers carry with them into their roles within the communities they serve, and that, in turn, intersect with the unique culture of policing.

### **Police Culture: The Nexus of Masculinity & Violence**

For decades, researchers and policing scholars have described the dynamics and effects of police work and the policing environment as contributing to a culture of shared values, attitudes and norms (see, for example, Paoline's 2003 historical study of developments on police culture). These dynamics both inform and influence how police officers view themselves, their profession, and their interactions with others. Primarily influenced by global north perspectives, classic portrayals of 'cop culture', like Reiner's (1992), describe the police as being driven by a sense of mission, perceiving their work as more than 'just a job, but a way of life' (p. 111). They are said to be cynical, pessimistic and highly suspicious (Reiner, 1992:113-115). These attitudes, the unique features of police work and the dangers and stressors that the policing environment engenders foster a sense of isolation from the public while reinforcing solidarity among each other (Reiner, 1992:115). Machismo and sexism are also features often equated to police culture (1992:124-125).

While scholars like Paoline (2003) have questioned the general acceptance of these traditional features in contemporary policing, recent ethnographic studies, like those of Loftus (2010) in the United Kingdom and Faull (2017) in South Africa, suggest that many of these traits persist. For Loftus, policing remains dominated by 'powerful undercurrents of masculinity [that] encourage an aura of toughness and celebration of violence' (2010:7). Faull, too, finds a similar fixation with masculine bravado and violence amongst the South African police, a feature that comes into play both on and off duty (2017a:181).

Despite increasing gender diversity in policing worldwide, policing is still largely regarded as the domain of men and the terrain of masculinity. Scholars describe policing as a 'pure form of hegemonic masculinity' focused on aggression, physical action, and competitiveness, often exhibiting misogynistic and patriarchal attitudes towards women (Fielding, 1994 in Silvestri, 2017:293).

Goodmark (2015) shows how hypermasculine culture, violence and the denigration of women are endemic within policing institutions, citing research by Prokos and Padavic (2002), who found

that as early into their initiation into policing, police recruits frequently engaged in the demeaning and objectification of women, as well as minimised the gravity of violence against women (p. 1212). She argues that militarised aspects of policing - evident in narratives of 'war against crime' - further intensify such issues: '[m]en working within militarised settings may have difficulty maintaining boundaries between the expressions of masculinity expected in work settings and their behavior in their relationships' (Goodmark, 2015:1214).

This analysis is relevant to the South African context, where hegemonic masculinity and militarised policing have deep historical roots.

Jewkes et al. (2015) describe hegemonic masculinity, a term introduced by Raewyn Connell in the late 90s, as an 'analytical instrument to identify those attitudes and practices among men that perpetuate gender inequality, involving both men's domination over women and the power of some men over other (often minority groups of) men' (p. 113). The authors acknowledge that the concept itself is contested, with the debate often centred on whether violence is inherently endemic to hegemonic masculinity. The authors suggest the need to separate violence from the stereotype, proposing that 'hypermasculinity' - referring to a 'destructive and exaggerated' form of masculinity - is a more accurate descriptor for men or cultures with more violent tendencies (Jewkes et al., 2015:114). On the other hand, Morrell et al. (2013), as discussed by Jewkes et al. (2015:114-115), argue that the demonstration of toughness and the capacity for violence are integral aspects of hegemonic masculinity in South Africa.

However, not all scholars agree. Suttner (2005), for example, takes exception to the concept of hegemonic masculinity in the South African context, arguing that it overlooks the complexities of manhood. He contends that the political domination and disempowerment of African men during colonisation and Apartheid ultimately denied them their manhood; in this context, masculinity could be described as an attempt to 'reclaim manhood' (Suttner, 2005:73). While this may indeed be the case, it is this very struggle of reclaiming manhood that often plays into broader systemic issues of men's use of violence (Mshweshwe, 2020:3; Faull, 2018a:np). Suttner does well, however, in reminding us of the importance of acknowledging the past and its effects on the present.

Under Apartheid, a highly militarised police force enforced dominance over marginalised groups, inheriting its military ethos from colonial predecessors (Lamb, 2018:936-937). Efforts to demilitarise and adopt a more human rights-centred approach to policing following the end of Apartheid proved short-lived. By 2000, SAPS had revived a 'war on crime' strategy to more effectively tackle violent crime through aggressive policing (Lamb, 2018:939,940). This shift reintroduced military ranks in 2010. This was justified as a necessary alignment to deal with the demands of waging war on crime and further intended to instil discipline among police officers, boost police morale and improve public confidence in the police (Lamb, 2018:940).

Despite the reintroduction of militarisation in the SAPS, crime and violence have not abated, proving this approach to be neither effective as a crime-fighting strategy nor a tool to restore public confidence. What it has arguably done well is to reinforce the notion that violence by the police is a legitimate tool to control and dominate, potentially excusing the misuse of force by police.

Researcher Lorio Viljoen (2015) argues that the re-militarisation of the police also signalled a 'revalorisation of masculine ideals' within the institution (p. 53). Her research identifies hegemonic masculinity as a 'core feature' of police culture in South Africa. This culture, she argues, serves to 'perpetuate gender stereotypes and marginalise women within the police force' and create an environment where inappropriate sexual behaviour is sometimes tolerated (Viljoen, 2015:59).

Such problematic behaviour towards women and the propensity for violence misuse within the SAPS police culture has broader implications. For example, Bruce (2002:np) suggests a correlation between police brutality and the propensity for violence outside of the police role, including in the context of domestic violence. He explains: 'factors which contribute to one may contribute to the other, members who are prone to the one may be prone to the other' (Bruce, 2002:np).

Police training may further encourage this probability.

Police are taught how to physically and psychologically control themselves and the situations they may face (Sgambelluri, 2000:311). They are trained to remain stoic in the face of danger, unemotional and detached, commanding authority and power over those they police (Goodmark, 2015:1211; Johnson, Todd & Subramanian, 2005:6; Paoline, 2003:201). Respect and subservience

are expected in return; any challenge to their authority is perceived as a sign of disrespect and a threat to their masculinity (Goodmark, 2015:1183; Faull, 2017a:177). Officers accustomed to this interplay of control, authority, respect, and subservience, particularly those with authoritarian personalities<sup>5</sup>, may inadvertently impose similar demands in their private lives. This power dynamic may be further susceptible to abuse when ‘police officers come to see themselves not simply as enforcers of the law, but as the law itself’ (Wetendorf & Davis, 2003:np). The consequences of not complying with their authority can be severe for those on the receiving end (Johnson, Todd & Subramanian, 2005:6; Sgambelluri, 2000:313).

While the policing work environment brings with it significant dangers and stressors, it also creates an environment that creates bonds and loyalty amongst those who share this experience. While solidarity brings positive notions of camaraderie and protection, it may also be used to hide and deceive, commonly known as the ‘Code of Silence’. This unwritten rule discourages officers from reporting misconduct by their peers, thereby concealing instances of abuse and reinforcing the power dynamics contributing to such violence (Saunders, Prost & Oehme, 2016:2; Wetendorf & Davis, 2003:np).

A well-trained, dominant, authoritarian police officer with a tendency towards violence and ready access to a firearm can make for one dangerous individual and significantly more dangerous as an abuser (Goodmark, 2015:1183). Sgambelluri (2000) underscores this point, explaining:

Police officers are trained to take control, and are controlling individuals. When they arrive at a situation, they are trained to take charge and establish themselves as the regulatory element. When a situation has deteriorated beyond their verbal control, or they lose control because of some intervening element, they are trained to take physical control. The final solution to a situation that the officer cannot physically control is their weapon. The gun is control. The police officer is trained to resolve a completely deteriorated situation, one way or another, with their sidearm. Tragedy can occur when an officer resolves the problem of a deteriorating relationship in this manner. (p. 311-312)

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<sup>5</sup> The authoritarian personality, common within law enforcement, is described as characteristically narrow-minded, suspicious and prone to violence (Balch, 1972 in Anderson & Lo, 2011:1178).

This danger is heightened when the officer is already on edge. Law enforcement is widely recognised as a dangerous and stressful occupation.

### **On the Edge: Occupational Stressors & Emotional (Dis)Regulation**

Given the demands of their work, police officers need to maintain control. However, literature on policing suggests that much remains beyond their control. Policing is a pressurised, stressful and inherently dangerous occupation which routinely exposes officers to violence and its traumatic consequences (Van Den Heever, 2017:3,4). The reality of this would be particularly pronounced in South Africa, which has high, often very violent, crime rates. The dangers of police work, their consistent exposure to violence, and the daily stressors of police work hold severe implications for the wellness of police officers.

A South African study on police exposure to extreme violence revealed significant associations between witnessing such violence and stress responses associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), such as hyper-vigilance, emotional detachment, and aggression (Kopel & Friedman, 1997 in Johnson, Todd & Subramanian, 2005:5). While stress responses serve as psychological protective mechanisms, they are also traits commonly reinforced in policing. Take emotional detachment, for example. While policing is dangerous work, it is also a service-orientated profession that requires interaction with people, often during challenging times in their lives. Police work demands constant emotional regulation: officers must suppress their emotions when dealing with violence and aggression yet are expected to show compassion when helping victims of crime (Lennie, Crozier Sarah & Sutton, 2020:2). This continual need for emotional regulation can lead to adverse effects, such as depersonalisation and emotional detachment as a coping mechanism (Lennie, Crozier Sarah & Sutton, 2020:3).

The need to suppress personal emotions to fulfil professional obligations is referred to as 'emotional labour,' a term coined by sociologist Hochschild in 1983 (cited in Thwala, 2021:1). Thwala's study on SAPS examined the impact of emotional labour on police officers. While officers were generally expected to suppress emotions and maintain neutrality, certain situations, such as when dealing with violent offenders, required them to display anger and aggression to intimidate and appear threatening (Thwala, 2021:42). Some officers reported feeling the pressure to over-perform such emotions as a means to assert their masculinity (Thwala, 2021:61). The

constant need to regulate their emotions, combined with the persistent exposure to violence and trauma, led to officers feeling a loss of control over their feelings, often expressing these in problematic ways, such as through violent outbursts both in the workplace and in their personal lives (Thwala, 2021:61).

Additional occupational stressors, such as the pressure of police work (Cheema, 2016:489), shift work (Faull, 2018a:np), workplace discrimination, job dissatisfaction, and lack of cooperation among colleagues (Gershon et al., 2009:275) impact the emotional and psychological well-being of police officers. Such stressors have been linked to individual adverse outcomes for police officers, including depression (Gershon et al., 2009:275) and elevated rates of divorce, alcoholism, and suicide (Cheema, 2016:489). Gershon et al. (2009:285) have also found a strong association between the occupational stressors of police work, inclusive of PTSD and their abuse of intimate partners, a connection supported by other studies.

According to Oehme, Donnelly, and Martin's U.S.-based study, 28.6% of 853 law enforcement officers surveyed who admitted to having physically abused their spouses or family members also reported high rates of post-traumatic stress and alcohol misuse, the rates of which were statistically more prevalent than those of the general population (2012:423). Their study concluded that officers who had PTSD were four times more likely to report intimate or family violence, while alcohol abusers were eight times more likely to do so (Oehme, Donnelly & Martin, 2012:425).

PPDV was also observed in another U.S. study among officers who worked excessive hours, took minimal leave, and engaged in specific types of high-risk police work (Neidig, Russell & Seng, 1992:37). In South Africa, work stress, heavy workloads, and poor working conditions, including poor relationships with management, was found as significant occupational stressors contributing to PPDV (ICD, 2009:28).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how multiple, intersecting influences of a militarised, predominantly masculine police culture, the inherent stressors that make the work of policing challenging, and the historical and sociocultural norms of inequality and violence (particularly in the South African context), converges to not only shape police identity and practice but may also

facilitate, encourage and normalise the use of violence as a means to assert power, enforce respect and as a solution to problems in the privacy of police homes and relationships. This makes the issue of PPDV challenging to navigate.

Further, while little is known about how the police manage cases of PPDV in South Africa, evidence suggests, as briefly described in Chapter 1, that the enforcement of measures designed to respond to PPDV may be inadequate. This implies that beyond the individual actions of police officers lies an inherent problem within the South African police culture and for the institution of policing as a whole.

This dissertation aims to delve deeper into the issue of PPDV in the South African context - and more specifically in the Western Cape – to find out how and why this may be the case.

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

PPDV in South Africa is a recognised problem, having been the subject of state monitoring for more than a decade and at least one official study on femicide by police in 2009. However, no current consolidated data exists on its prevalence. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, no formal academic study in South Africa has attempted to explore this issue from the perspective of police officers themselves. This study aims to address these gaps.

### **Research Method**

In studies of crime and violence that seek to ‘better understand and explain’ social issues, Lewis et al. (2003:110) recommend using quantitative and qualitative data rather than relying on a single form of data collection. Accordingly, considering the limited contextual and situational information on PPDV in South Africa, this study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating secondary quantitative data on prevalence, predominantly from police oversight monitoring and annual reports, with qualitative data from document reviews and semi-structured interviews with a purposefully selected sample. The combination of literature, theory and multiple sources of data - known as method triangulation – proved beneficial as each type of data informed and strengthened the other (Frechette et al., 2020:6). Additionally, this study employed an interpretative phenomenological paradigm, a methodological tool rooted in the belief that people's perceptions, ideas, thoughts, and meaningful experiences can be understood by studying their cultures (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:421). As Cuthbertson and Blair (2019:97) describe, this analytical method is particularly effective in providing insights into ‘how a given person, in a given context, makes sense of a given phenomenon at a given moment in time’, focusing on ‘personal meaning and sense-making’ among those who share a common experience.

While a national investigation into this phenomenon in South Africa would be ideal and necessary, it was not feasible for this dissertation. Therefore, a more selective focus was placed on the Western Cape – for reasons described soon - drawing on the insights and experiences of police officers while exploring this issue more broadly within South Africa through the collation of quantitative data.

## **Quantitative Data: Collecting the Numbers**

Three primary sources provided the quantitative data for this study: IPID annual reports and the CSPS and SAPS bi-annual DVA monitoring reports to Parliament. IPID reports were easily accessible online through the South African Government website, but sourcing the latter proved more challenging. The first step involved searching the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (PMG) website, initially focusing on the 2018/2019 to 2021/2022 financial years. While PMG records of Parliamentary Committee meetings proved valuable, not all CSPS and SAPS presentations to committees were found. Extensive and time-consuming Google searches followed, generating additional data from various documents, including PowerPoint presentations, scanned PDF reports, and event reports—the earliest data for CSPS dated back to May 2013 and for SAPS, October 2015. Email requests to CSPS yielded additional reports, but a request for bi-annual reports to SAPS, included in the formal application to conduct research with SAPS, was unsuccessful.

All available data were captured and manually entered into a spreadsheet covering the period of April 2014 to March 2024. Some of this data is presented in Chapter 4.

## **Qualitative Data: Geographical Focus, Study Sites, Sample & Data Collection**

### ***Geographical Focus***

Besides its convenient location, the Western Cape was selected as the provincial site for this research based on data available during the research planning phase. This data revealed Western Cape as having the second highest rates of domestic violence-related crimes (CSPS, 2022a:4) and the highest proportion, at 73%, of all domestic violence compliance complaints reported against police in the country (SAPS, 2022a:14). Furthermore, the Western Cape recorded the highest number of police as domestic violence perpetrators—117 of 239—and victims—34 of 73—nationwide (CSPS, 2022a:22). The province also reported the highest number of complaints to IPID overall, with assault being the most common complaint received, and ‘deaths as a result of police action,’ – which includes domestic violence homicide-suicide cases - being the third most frequent complaint (IPID, 2021:41).

### ***Study Site Selection***

Three factors guided the selection of study sites: number of reported members as offenders, geographical diversity, and population size served by the station. Two primary data sources informed the selection order. The first, SAPS's DVA bi-annual report to Parliament from 1 April 2021 to 30 September 2021 (SAPS, 2022a:15), revealed the names of 41 police stations where domestic violence complaints were filed against 76 members. The second is a spreadsheet emailed to me by a Western Cape Provincial SAPS representative listing the number of members reported for domestic violence each month during the 2021/2022 financial year and the stations where they were employed. This revealed 168 members as offenders working at 78 Western Cape-based stations. The lists were compared and sorted to identify 10 stations with the highest number of offenders, with the top five selected as priority study sites<sup>6</sup> (see table 1).

Although these two data sources covered different periods in 2021, both identified three stations with the highest number of members working at the station and living where the incident was reported. The remaining two stations were selected based on their geographical location. Both had roughly the same number of offenders; however, one served a significantly larger population than the other (approximately 9 000 versus 61 000). It was decided that the station serving the smaller population might provide some interesting insights. This final selection presented an eclectic mix of stations diverse in geography and culture: a sizeable urban township, an urban suburb, a peri-urban farming area, and two rural towns, sharing a similar population size but differing in economic production.

<b>Station</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Nr of SAPS domestic violence offenders (Apr-Sep 2021) (Reported at station)</b>	<b>Nr of SAPS domestic violence offenders (2021/2022) (Based on station employment)</b>
Station 1	Urban township	8	3
Station 2	Urban suburb	5	5
Station 3	Rural town winelands	2	8
Station 4	Peri-urban farming	7	8
Station 5	Rural town agriculture	7	13

*Table 1: Study sites.*

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<sup>6</sup> The remaining five stations were designated as an alternative sample in case one or more interviewees from this first list declined participation.

### ***Interviewee Sample***

Purposive sampling is commonly used in phenomenological research (Frechette et al., 2020:6). The study sought to interview two key police personnel responsible for managing, monitoring and/or investigating PPDV at each of the five selected police stations. Those deemed to have ‘rich knowledge of the phenomenon’ (Frechette et al., 2020:6) were identified as Station Commanders and DV Coordinators. Station Commanders are responsible for the operational management of the station, its units and personnel, and the station’s compliance with the implementation of the DVA. DV coordinators are responsible for managing domestic violence cases reported at the station and monitoring complaints related to non-compliance with the DVA.

### ***Qualitative Data Collection***

Two semi-structured, open-ended interview guides were developed, one for the Station Commander (Appendix 1) and the other for the DV Coordinator (Appendix 2). In alignment with the approach suggested for interpretive research, questionnaires explored the ‘how and why’ (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:421). Questions were devised to elicit information on the practice and experience of responding to PPDV cases from the individuals’ respective areas of responsibility and specific social and cultural contexts. Questionnaires further sought interviewees' perspectives on the causes of PPDV, its impact in the workplace, the challenges faced in addressing such cases, their views on the effectiveness of current measures, and recommendations for policy and structural changes to better respond to these cases.

Permission to conduct research with SAPS took just over two months from application to approval. After receiving authorisation, contact was made with the Western Cape Provincial Commissioner’s office to obtain the contact details of the Station Commanders of the five identified police stations. Invitations to participate in the study were sent via email, along with the study information sheet (Appendix 3), interview consent form (Appendix 4), University of Cape Town (UCT) ethics approval (Appendix 5) and SAPS approval letter (Appendix 6). Invitations requested the participation of the Station Commander and the station’s respective DV Coordinator. Some Station Commanders were more readily responsive than others, especially once my supervisor intervened. For those still unresponsive, follow-ups were made via phone calls and

WhatsApp. This process took an inordinate amount of time in some cases. Nevertheless, several months later, all 10 interviews were completed.

Nine of the 10 interviews were conducted on-site at police stations, with one occurring virtually at the interviewee's request. The latter proved challenging: software incompatibility issues initially, and then later, poor connectivity led to occasional disruptions and delays in communication. Fortunately, these disruptions were minimal and had no impact on the quality of the data collected. Interviews were recorded and uploaded to cloud storage, and recordings were transcribed via transcription software.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Obtaining informed consent requires clear explanations of the research, including potential risks, and informing interviewees of their right to withdraw from the study (see Appendix 3 and 4). These are essential ethical standards to 'legitimately obtain consent' (Bloomberg & Wilkins, 1977 in Jones, 2012:np). In addition to these basics, research studies must also prioritise the well-being of participants, balancing potential risks against the benefits and importance of the study (Chi, Horn & Kruger, 2014:63).

During the research planning phase, I assessed the risk of psychological harm to participants as minimal, considering that the topic of domestic violence, though sensitive, is one they routinely handle, and all interviewees have access to SAPS's Employee Health and Wellness services. My primary concerns were with other aspects of the research. The first was how to guarantee anonymity to study subjects, particularly DV Coordinators, considering that access to them necessitated the approval of their superiors. A limited study sample heightened these concerns.

The second is related to the research itself. Due to the serious nature of the study and the likely critique that it may generate, I anticipated the potential for interviewees to be less than forthcoming to avoid negative criticism of themselves, their colleagues or their institution. The reality was somewhat different. I found most to be frank and easily able to share their opinions, beliefs and experiences on navigating the complexity of policing PPDV, including not shying away from critiquing some of the deficiencies within organisational policy and practice. What I had not entirely expected – perhaps naively - was the openness with which some shared their own

experiences of domestic violence. I feel honoured by their trust in sharing such intimate details with me. However, this raised ethical questions about using this information and, if so, how. After careful reflection, I decided to include these lived experiences as they provide invaluable insights pertinent to the study. The researcher identifier numbers associated with these accounts have not been disclosed to safeguard anonymity.

### **Integrating Theory, Experience & Data Analysis**

The interpretative phenomenological researcher relies on three primary sources of data: theory, the ‘lived experience’ of the phenomenon, and the researcher's own experience and expertise.

While literature and theory on this subject provided a foundational understanding of the potential factors in the South African context, my aim was not to test a hypothesis. Instead, within the paradigm framework, I utilised theory for ‘direction and interpretation’ (Miner-Romanoff, 2012:10) but relied primarily on exploring the ‘lived experience’ of this phenomenon (Frechette et al., 2020:6) through participants’ ‘experiences, notions and beliefs of their respective social and cultural context’ (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022:421).

I also relied on my own ‘horizon of significance’ (Frechette, 2020:11), drawing on my perspectives, experience and expertise. Having worked in the domestic violence sector since 2005, I have experienced first-hand the profound impact that domestic violence, particularly intimate partner violence, has on victims and those around them. I am also intimately aware of many flaws in police responses to victims of domestic violence (see, for example, Stone & Lopes, 2018). Yet, I also recognise how challenging policing in general, and policing of domestic violence especially, is. I was thus both consciously aware of potential bias and the need to ‘bracket’ any pre-judgements (Smith et al., 2009 in Miner-Romanoff, 2012:16) while being able to relate my experience with those of the participants, maintaining an open attitude and empathetic response (Miner-Romanoff, 2012:16,10). Through this interpretive process, as eloquently put by Smith et al., the ‘researcher is making sense of the participant, who is making sense of the [phenomenon]’ (2009:35 in Miner-Romanoff, 2012:16).

The interpretative phenomenological paradigm recognises the diversity and uniqueness of studies and thus does not prescribe a set analytical framework. Analysis should, therefore, be tailored to

the distinctive characteristics of the study (Miner-Romanoff, 2012:21). Nonetheless, fundamental guiding principles were adopted. Data analysis involved reflecting on the interview process, making notes during and after interviews, analysing these and deriving ‘meanings as informed by prior theory’ (Miner-Romanoff, 2012:21).

Audio recordings were listened to, and transcripts were read multiple times, identifying ‘meaningful topics’ (Frechette 2020:9), comparing this with the literature and the research question and purpose constantly in mind. Further, I adopted Gadamer’s (1981) approach, which suggests the following questions as guides in ‘dialogu[ing] with the texts’:

How is the phenomenon being expressed in this encounter? What is the meaning for the interviewee and the researcher about this element in relation to the studied phenomenon and why? “What do I now know or see that I did not expect or understand before I began . . . ?” (Benner, 1994:101 in Frechette, 2020:10).

Through this process, the researcher ‘inquires, listens, searches, compares, verifies, composites, confirms, and evaluates ‘in endless cycles to ensure fundamentals of knowledge’ (Shin, Kim & Chung, 2009:856 in Miner-Romanoff, 2012:2).

Next, interviews were manually coded and mapped out, and themes were further refined using NVivo software. This process helped to identify and cluster similar and divergent perceptions, concepts and themes (Miner-Romanoff, 2012:24; Frenchette, 2020:10).

## **Limitations**

As in any study, this one encountered several limitations. I have already discussed the challenges in accessing reports and will later describe some difficulties in analysing the data due to inconsistencies and gaps in the data (see Chapter 4). I have also noted the limitations of exploring this topic from such a narrow base. Selecting the Western Cape as a primary site for this study makes logical sense, but it does not represent the entire country. While the province does report high domestic violence rates in general, and even more so by police, Western Cape officials may be better or more serious about reporting it. The exclusion of other provinces to test this possibility is a limitation.

Another is that this study did not include views different from those of SAPS. The initial plan had intended interviews with representatives from the Civilian Secretariat and IPID. However, as I delved deeper into monitoring reports, I realised that interviews may not reveal anything new beyond what is consistently mentioned in reports. What these reports did highlight, however, was how very little is known beyond the numbers. This realisation led me to abandon the initial plan of diversifying and expanding the sample size in favour of more contextual data, seeking permission from the SAPS research unit to access 508(c) forms, i.e., reports of domestic violence incidents involving a member as the alleged perpetrator. Access to this information would provide a far better understanding of circumstances and context related to the phenomenon of PPDV. Unfortunately, SAPS did not approve this request. Nevertheless, what I present in Chapter Four provides a richer, more nuanced understanding of the issue than what is currently known.

## **CHAPTER 4: UNDERSTANDING, ADDRESSING & INVESTIGATING**

### **PPDV**

This chapter presents the results of this exploratory study on PPDV. Through policy, prevalence data analysis, and research participant perspectives, it answers the study's central question: *how is police perpetration of domestic violence understood, addressed and investigated in South Africa?*

#### **Understanding PPDV: Directives & Trends**

##### ***Policies & Procedures: The DVA, the SAPS National Instructions & the Firearms Control Act***

Three key frameworks guide the management of PPDV cases. These include the DVA (amended in 2021), their corresponding National Instructions, and the Firearms Control Act (FCA) 60 of 2000 (amended in 2006).

Section 20 of the latest version of the National Instructions<sup>7</sup> associated with the amended DVA mandates police officers dealing with domestic violence perpetrated by a fellow officer to treat the incident, the victim and the offender as they would in any other domestic violence matter. Directions are then provided, identifying steps for reporting, re-assigning members, and firearm removal.

When a police member is involved in such incidents, officers receiving the report must document the event in their pocketbooks and complete either the SAPS 508(c) form if the member is the alleged perpetrator or the SAPS 508(d) form if the member is the victim. These forms must be submitted to the member's commander within 48 hours, who then forwards them to the district commissioner and the provincial heads of Visible Policing, Discipline Management, and Health and Wellness.

If charges or a protection order are filed against a member, commanders must consider reassigning the member to a position where they will not have contact with domestic violence complainants. Additionally, commanders are required to dispossess the member of their official or privately owned firearms if they are deemed 'unfit and proper to possess a firearm' or a sworn statement to

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<sup>7</sup> Amended by Consolidation Notice 06 of 2023.

that effect is received, pending an inquiry under Section 102 of the FCA (NI, 2023:55). Members declared unfit under Section 102 (determined by the registrar) or Section 103 (as determined by a court) are prohibited from being issued with permits to carry firearms for a period of five years (Firearms Control Amendment Act, 2006:11,22–24).

The FCA’s Section 102 and the DVA’s Section 9 (2021:50) specify the conditions under which a person may be deemed unfit to possess a firearm. These include:

- a final protection order granted against them,
- if they make threats or express intentions to kill or injure themselves or others, and
- if possessing weapons poses a risk to themselves or others because of a state of mind or mental condition, inclination to violence, or use of or dependence on substances such as alcohol and drugs.

The DVA National Instruction offers no additional guidance on managing PPDV beyond referencing firearm seizures. It concludes by emphasising the importance of disciplining officers, including pursuing criminal charges, and providing support services to victims and offenders (NI, 2023:36). The SAPS’ 2016 Disciplinary Regulations and its Employee Health and Wellness (EHW) Policy Framework provide the mechanisms to implement these actions, though neither specifically addresses domestic violence. These two mechanisms will be discussed in more detail later.

### ***State Monitoring: PPDV Case Management Compliance & Prevalence***

The IPID and the CSPS also play key roles in addressing PPDV through investigation and oversight but from different angles. IPID investigates ‘deaths as a result of police action’<sup>8</sup>, which includes ‘domestic violence-related deaths’. While not defined by IPID, domestic violence-related deaths involve ‘interpersonal disputes’ where ‘police are active participants and which culminate in them killing their wives or another person’ (Bruce, 2020:9). The IPID documents such cases

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<sup>8</sup> Meaning any death, including that of a police officer, directly caused by a police member or through their actions while in an official capacity. This includes deaths occurring during an arrest, mass action, car accident, in self-defence, or any other ‘action or inaction’ by a police officer constituting misconduct or a criminal offence (IPID, 2015b:7).

through their annual reports. The CSPS monitors police's compliance with the DVA and their management of PPDV cases. The CSPS reports on this bi-annually, as does the SAPS.

The SAPS and CSPS bi-annual DVA compliance reports provide official data on the prevalence of domestic violence involving police - both as victims and offenders. These reports also document SAPS' adherence to policy regulations regarding firearm seizures, 102 hearings on fitness to possess firearms, and disciplinary actions against domestic violence offenders.

Together, the SAPS, IPID and CSPS reports provide the best sources of prevalence data on PPDV in South Africa. This data has been consolidated to present a national overview of this phenomenon, though not without some difficulty. Thus, some explanation is necessary before I present this consolidated prevalence data.

A review of CSPS reports over 11 years (from April 2013 to March 2024) revealed various data collection and reporting inconsistencies. Some reports included data from only a few police stations that CSPS monitored during their annual oversight visits, while others presented national data provided by SAPS or a combination of both. In 2018, a national census replaced the bi-annual reporting process to collect more 'accurate, reliable and comprehensive information on SAPS performance' (CSPS, 2019:vi).

The level of detail in these reports also varied. Between April 2013 and September 2017, reports contained more detailed information on PPDV cases, including the number of criminal charges filed (and those subsequently withdrawn) and protection orders granted against police officers at some of the provincial stations that CSPS had monitored. However, disciplinary case outcomes were reported inconsistently, appearing in only three of eight bi-annual reports.

From October 2019 onward, CSPS reported national domestic violence prevalence data more consistently. Yet, including key details, such as information on disciplinary outcomes and firearm seizures, remained sporadic. No reports provided national data on whether 102 hearings were conducted following firearm withdrawals. SAPS do not provide the CSPS with such information, despite CSPS routinely noting the need for this data to be supplied to them.

When comparisons between SAPS and CSPS reports were possible, at least one revealed a significant discrepancy. Between April and September 2021, the SAPS reported a national total of

147 offenders, while the CSPS reported 239 – almost double. Despite this discrepancy, both reports documented identical data on the number of firearms seized, with figures aligning with SAPS’s 147 reported offenders. Notably, although both institutions presented their data to Parliament during the same committee meeting<sup>9</sup>, neither picked up on this error nor was this inconsistency flagged by the Parliamentary committee reviewing the reports and hearing the presentations. This lack of scrutiny raises questions about the effectiveness of communication between the CSPS and the SAPS, the overall reliability of the reported data, and the adequacy of oversight and compliance mechanisms.

Despite inconsistencies and at least one noted error, the data that these reports provide remains a rare and valuable source of information on PPDV in South Africa. Below, I present the results of consolidated data on the national prevalence of domestic violence-related deaths extracted from IPID annual reports since its first report in 2012 (see Tables 2 and 3 and Figure 1). This is followed by national data on the number of offenders reported for domestic violence extracted from a combination of CSPS and SAPS bi-annual DVA monitoring reports from the financial years of 2020/2021 to 2023/2024 (Table 4).

### ***Domestic Violence-Related Deaths***

Category & Cause	IPID Annual Reports												Total
	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	
<b>Domestic Violence-Related Deaths</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>331</b>
Assault	2	1		20	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	35
Shot with service firearm	35	27	28		25	13	26	24	15	22	10	18	243
Suicide (shooting)	5	2	5	3	8	7	3	5	4	3		1	46
Suicide (accidental or other)							1						1
Suffocation							1						1
Shot with private firearm					2						1		3
Torture		1											1
Struck by police vehicle (pedestrian accident)		1											1

Table 2: Causes of domestic violence-related deaths as per IPID Annual Reports from 2012/2013 to 2023/2024.

Over the last 12 years, 331 incidences<sup>10</sup> of domestic violence-related deaths have occurred as a result of police action, with 47 of these involving suicide, presumed to refer to suicide committed

<sup>9</sup> See <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/34601/>

<sup>10</sup> IPID reports on incidents and not the number of deaths; thus, it is probable that far more people died at each incident than what first appears.

by officers themselves. Firearms present as the leading cause of all suicides and homicides (88% n=292 incidences), with the latter, about two-thirds (78%, n=243) involving state-issued firearms.<sup>11</sup> The next most common cause of death, in 35 cases, involved assaults, followed by single instances of suffocation, acts of torture, and death by being struck by a police vehicle.

Figure 1 better illustrates the yearly trends in domestic violence-related deaths, paying particular attention to the role of state-issued firearms and suicide. Shootings and suicides feature as critical areas of concern in the data and literature related to policing and domestic violence, both internationally and locally (see, for example, Faull, 2018a; Abrahams, Jewkes & Mathews, 2010). Notably, easy access to state-issued firearms was identified as one of the leading contributing factors in the ICD’s study, accounting for 80% of police-perpetrated femicides (2009:35).

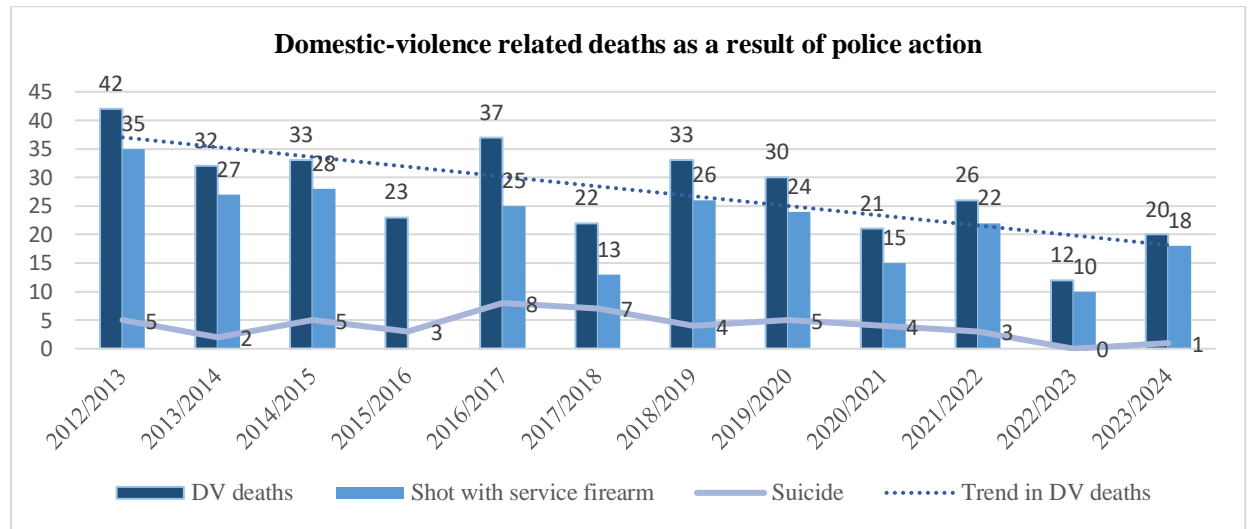


Figure 1: Domestic violence deaths as a result of police action (own compilation of data extracted from IPID annual reports from 2012/2013 to 2023/2024).

As evident in Figure 1, a gradual but significant declining trend (47%) is noted in domestic violence-related deaths. The data indicates some fluctuations in suicide, with a notable peak in 2016/2017 (seemingly corresponding with a peak in domestic violence deaths during that year) but gradually declining to only one suicide by the end of the 2023 financial year.

Trends in fatalities involving state-issued firearms appear relatively consistent for most years, accounting for 80% or more fatal incidents in seven of the 12 years, as Table 3 further illustrates.

<sup>11</sup> Although not specified in reports, it is likely that suicides also involved the use of state-issued firearms.

This correlates with ICD’s study, suggesting that not much has improved over the last 14 years. However, this data also reveals some fluctuations between 2014 and 2018, with the 2015 year in particular - with zero cases – highlighting a significant deviation from general tendencies.<sup>12</sup>

Year	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	17/18	18/19	19/20	20/21	21/22	22/23	23/24	Total
Domestic Violence-Related Deaths	42	32	33	23	37	22	33	30	21	26	12	20	331
Shot with service firearm	35	27	28		25	13	26	24	15	22	10	18	243
<b>% Contribution</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>73%</b>

Table 3: Contribution of state-issued firearms in domestic violence-related deaths (own compilation of data extracted from IPID annual reports from 2012/2013 to 2023/2024).

The ongoing occurrence of fatalities and suicides by police, including shootings, despite some noted positive declining trends, highlights persisting challenges in firearms management and with the mental wellness of police officers. Both issues are focal points of concern for research participants and will be explored in greater detail later.

### *Domestic Violence Offenders*

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Total	Percentage contribution to national figures
Eastern Cape	12	3	14	7	36	3%
Free State	38	56	40	133	267	19%
Gauteng	47	53	79	49	228	16%
KwaZulu Natal	31	14	15	27	87	6%
Limpopo	6	5	13	10	34	2%
Mpumalanga	5	5	5	6	21	1%
Northern Cape	9	8	8	6	31	2%
North West	5	14	7	9	35	2%
Western Cape	202	167	164	150	683	48%
<b>Total</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>1,422</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4: National data on SAPS members as domestic violence offenders extracted from bi-annual CSPS/SAPS DVA Monitoring Reports<sup>13</sup> consolidated to present annual figures.

<sup>12</sup> Further investigation into the causes of these deviations may be valuable but falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>13</sup> CSPS bi-annual reports provide data for the periods of April to September 2020; October 2020 to March 2021; October 2021 to March 2022; April to September 2022; October 2022 to March 2023; and April to September 2023.

Over the last four years, DVA monitoring reports have recorded an alarming 1 422 police officers as offenders of PPDV.<sup>14</sup> This data identifies the Western Cape, Free State, and Gauteng as the provinces contributing the highest number of PPDV offenders in South Africa. The Free State, however, only features among the top three contributing provinces due to a dramatic spike in reported domestic violence offenders over the last financial year – a total of 133 - more than tripling the previous year's total of 40. It is unclear whether this signifies a genuinely high increase in the number of offenders or improved reporting practices.<sup>15</sup> The Eastern Cape, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape and North West contribute between 1 to 3% to the national total. These low figures may indicate lower prevalence or systemic gaps in addressing and monitoring PPDV. Lower rates among these provinces may also generally reflect underreporting trends in some communities more accepting of domestic violence than others, as other research finds (Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002:1613).

The Western Cape accounts for the largest share, representing nearly half of all reported cases. This province's disproportionately high contribution to national rates may reflect higher actual prevalence, more effective reporting, or both. Nonetheless, a notable downward trend from 202 offenders to 150 indicates some improvement. The reasons for this decline are unclear, as DVA monitoring reports do not analyse or compare data. However, interviews with Western Cape-based Station Commanders and DV Coordinators interviewed for this dissertation suggest that improvements in policy responses may have played a role.

The remainder of this chapter presents the interview data, providing a more nuanced perspective on how police in the Western Cape understand, address and investigate PPDV.

### **Situating PPDV: The Socio-Cultural Norm of Domestic Violence**

All participants described domestic violence as a serious issue and more so when perpetrated by one of their own; as one participant stressed, "It's even in a more serious light because we are the guys who have to police this thing, and now we, ourselves, are doing this" [5-DVC]. While this

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SAPS data has been used in place of CSPA data for the period from April to September 2021 to correct the reporting error previously noted.

<sup>14</sup> Due to the noted error mentioned earlier, this figure may under- or over-represent the actual number of reported offenders.

<sup>15</sup> This is an issue that warrants further enquiry but falls outside the scope of this dissertation.

participant deemed PPDV to be “unacceptable”, he also felt that it was “unavoidable”. This is because PPDV does not exist in isolation within the boundaries of police stations and officers’ homes but is symptomatic of broader social ills within the communities that they serve.

Seventy per cent (70%, n=7) of participants believed this to be the case, as one participant reflected, “Police are *mos* (after all) a reflection of communities” [4-SC]. Participants identified some of the prevailing social ills as the normalisation of intergenerational cycles of violence, abuse, and trauma compounded by poor or absent parenting, lack of discipline amongst the youth, and high rates of substance abuse and poverty. One participant [5-DVC] elaborated:

[It’s] a whole community problem. There’s no employment, you drink your ‘*all-pay*’ (social grant), you assault your wife; that’s how the people grew up. If it did not specifically happen to you, it’s happening next door; you’re also exposed to all the circumstances in the community.

Domestic violence in communities emerged as a significant and challenging issue for 80% (n=4) of the stations studied.

At suburban Station 2, physical violence accounted for more than half of all assaults reported at the station. One interviewee described domestic violence as a “huge problem” overall, affecting not only the “poorest of the poor” but also increasingly middle-class communities who were “starting to break the silence” [2-SC].

In rural Station 5, domestic violence was described as “very, very high”, featuring in up to 90% of distress calls to the station [5-DVC]. Similarly, rural Station 3 reported experiencing “a lot” of domestic violence, and increasingly so during the festive season, with the number of protection orders rising to 100 a month from 56 during the “quieter” winter season [3-DVC]. Many of the incidences were severe: “If we look at murders, most of [the cases] either the husband killed the wife, or the wife killed the husband” [3-SC].

Station 1, located in an urban township consistently ranked as having some of the highest crime rates nationally, manages an overwhelming number of domestic violence cases. The station dedicates four to five officers to handle the over 200 protection orders received monthly. Here, an interviewee described physical violence as the “norm” for conflict resolution, explaining: “If you

can't talk, you can't communicate, then your fist is going to do the work for you, or you smack your wife" [1-SC].

In contrast to other stations, participants from Station 4 described their community as contributing relatively few and less serious crimes. This station, located in a central business district, is one of three stations serving a large peri-urban farming area. Its location and distance from community neighbourhoods and townships may contribute to its lower crime rates, including domestic violence cases, which ranged (depending on the interviewee) from 11 to 25 a month. These incidences were mostly characterised as "misunderstandings" fuelled by alcohol misuse [4-DVC]. Additionally, Station 4 reported only a few cases of PPDV - three in 2024 - none of which involved their officers.

These findings underscore the importance of understanding context when examining complex issues such as domestic violence. In communities with higher levels of crime, inequality and other forms of harm, the prevalence of domestic violence appears more significant.

Police officers are also products of context, shaped not only by the communities in which they work but also their personal experiences, which for many include 'hardship, unemployment, violence, and crime long before they join the SAPS' (Faull, 2017b:4).

### **Situating PPDV amongst the Police**

Participants shared various examples of PPDV cases, drawing from incidents reported at their current stations and throughout their careers at SAPS, collectively spanning an average of 27 years. Specific to their stations, participants from Stations 1, 2 and 3 characterised PPDV as "mostly physical", while Station 5 reported both physical and emotional abuse as typical. Station 4, on the other hand, described most cases as involving emotional abuse, noting that physical violence was not common, with only an occasional slap but no "grievous harm" [4-DVC]. This latter description, from the same participant who described domestic violence in their community as primarily based on "misunderstandings", may be illustrative of social attitudes that tolerate, justify or underplay the seriousness of domestic violence (Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002:1605).

Most reported PPDV cases involved abuse against an intimate partner perpetrated by a male offender. Female perpetrators were few, mentioned only on three occasions [3-SC, 3-DVC, 5-

DVC]. Few studies have examined gendered differences in PPDV. Those have found that while women in policing may resist adopting overt hypermasculine behaviours, their alignment with certain police cultural norms – combined with workplace pressures and adverse responses to occupational stressors in the policing environment – can contribute to their perpetration of domestic violence (Williamson, 2020:117; Mennicke & Ropes, 2016:162; Schuck, 2014:178).

Interviewees identified multiple factors contributing to PPDV. Six attributed it, in part, to officers growing up in abusive households, suggesting that these early experiences normalised cycles of violence later in life. Research indicates that officers who experienced child maltreatment are twice as likely to report abusing their intimate partners compared to those without such experiences (Zavala, Melander & Kurtz, 2015:65).

Additionally, four participants highlighted interpersonal difficulties and relationship problems as contributing factors. Affairs, jealousy, alcohol misuse, miscommunication, misunderstandings, and, at times, even financial strain served as catalysts for incidences. Financial strain was described in three ways: officers striving to uphold certain ideals, such as buying fancy cars and cell phones, only to struggle to make ends meet; financial expectations from intimate partners that, when unmet, led to aggression and conflict; and financial disputes arising in the context of divorce or retirement. Other studies corroborate the link between a loss of economic control and its influence on domestic violence within intimate relationships (Mshweshwe, 2020:3).

However, at least two participants [2-SC, 3-DVC] believed that perpetrators were not always entirely at fault, suggesting that, in some cases, victims may instigate or “provoke” domestic violence or make false allegations of domestic violence as retribution for infidelity. It is unclear whether these perceptions are factual or reflective of victim-blaming tendencies common in domestic violence cases (Taccini & Mannarini, 2023:11). However, at least one of these participants emphasised that domestic violence by police officers is never justified, stating, “We have been told how we must behave in different situations” [2-SC].

While all participants could identify varied and often concurrent interpersonal contributing factors in PPDV cases involving colleagues, not all instances were easily understood. Several participants shared examples, particularly of those involving domestic violence homicides, where the behaviour of the officer and the motive for the extreme acts of violence had caught them by

surprise. As one participant relayed, “[T]hat was one of the guys that I really didn't expect it from, he wasn't drinking, he wasn't smoking, he was very disciplined, but something like that triggered him” [3-SC].

The issue of officers grappling with personal and professional pressures – often in silence - emerges more frequently in the following discussion on the role that the perils of police work and the institutional environment may play in the phenomenon of PPDV.

### **The Perils of Policing: Violence, Stress, Hypermasculinity & Personal Vulnerabilities**

The majority of participants (80%, n=8) identified the dangers of police work, alongside work-related stress and pressure, as triggers for emotional distress, which for some may escalate to PPDV. Only two participants did not view the work environment as a contributing factor, at least not at their station (Station 4). One elaborated,

We're lucky here. Everything here is normal; you can plan your day. [This] is a nice station<sup>16</sup>; you can't ask for more. And you also see our members; they are just on a different level. [4-SC]

Station 4 reported generally low levels of crime, including fewer domestic violence cases by both the community and police officers in comparison to other stations. This suggests a correlation between lower crime rates and decreased exposure to violence and danger, with lower work-related stress levels, potentially exacting less strain on the private lives of police officers. Research finds similar associations between increased exposure to high crime rates and critical incidences with heightened stress and a greater propensity for violence in the home (Erwin et al., 2005:18).

Aside from these two participants, all others experienced policing as significantly more challenging. They described police work as unpredictable and “difficult” [5-DVC], with officers reportedly working “under extreme circumstances” [1-SC] and frequently “confronted with violence on a daily basis” [3-SC].

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<sup>16</sup> I can attest that this station had a notably “nice” feel about it, more so than other stations visited during data collection. It was quieter than most and had a more modern, less state-institutional appearance. Plants and motivational posters adorning some of the walls in its administrative wing contributed to a generally pleasant atmosphere and a sense of ease.

## *Violence*

Cumulative exposure to violence has been shown to reinforce negative emotions, such as isolation, frustration, resentment and anger (Anderson & Lo, 2011:1178-1179). One participant described how the frequent and varied exposure to violence affects officers, contributing to a sense of unease and anger:

It does play a role because you also get hurt. Let's say you come to a murder scene; let's say a husband kills a wife. After that complaint, you get another complaint that is firearm-involved. So those things are playing in your mind...Because everything that you do at work, when you're in your house, relaxing, it plays in your mind again. That's why the police always have anger. [3-DVC]

Participants emphasised that the dangerous and unpredictable nature of policing had a cumulative negative effect, exacting a psychological and emotional toll on their personal lives. One participant explains:

It has to do with the nature of your work, especially when you either become a witness to violence, or you are in the midst of violence, or you need to react as a responder towards violence; you don't know what to expect. It's like you need to be ever ready for whatever the circles will be. You don't know what you're going to face. Most of the time, the police, as the perpetrator, brings that same emotion home. There's no place where he can offload regarding the negative energy that's still within his mindset. But on the route home with expectancy of people, [what they] expect [from] you as a father or as a partner, as a husband, you need to change to adapt to that circumstance. Still, the negative energy is still hanging... Every time you have to switch off and turn on, switch off and turn on or force, and it's difficult. [2-DVC]

The need to be “ever ready” and hypervigilant is a function and a by-product of the policing environment, as described in Chapter 2. Still, while necessary under dangerous conditions, this response is not conducive in all contexts and environments. Officers on edge and under strain may struggle to regulate their emotional reactions to differing settings. This may have had a ripple

effect, with aggression and the use of violence, as cited by two participants, as a common or easy reaction to stressful situations encountered. As one of these participants put it:

[A]ggression leads to things, many times it leads to violence because of the lack of proper communication or effective communication, the shortest way out is by means of aggression...Because many times you feel so stressed in situations that you feel you could have rather used your fists. [2-DVC]

A tendency to resort to violence can spill over into the homes of officers, as one participant commented, “because we sometimes take our work home; you can't distinguish, or you can't differentiate [between] work and [home]” [1-SC]. The difficulty to “differentiate” between the stressors of work and home life can pose significant problems, particularly if anger and violence become a normalised response to stressful situations, as two participants commented:

So now you take your anger from work, let's say we are dealing with aggressive people, now you also take your anger to the house. That's where most of the time [domestic violence] happens. [3-DVC]

And then you go home having anger issues, and then maybe you don't know how to control it, and then your next person that will be your punching bag will be your partner. [2-SC]

The emotional and psychological toll in response to the stress and dangers of police work also led to high rates of absenteeism, with one participant observing that at his station, up to 75% of officers could call in sick on a given shift [5-DVC]. Another participant said officers were booking off sick because “they can't stand it anymore” [1-SC]. Absenteeism from work is a common adverse outcome of the stress-filled policing environment (Van Den Heever, 2017:3; Gershon et al., 2009:276). It is also identified as a potential warning sign triggering the need for psychosocial support interventions, particularly when combined with increased aggression, alcohol abuse and other problematic behaviour (Oehme, Donnelly & Martin, 2012:427).

### ***Alcohol***

The use of alcohol by police, described as “flowing very, very freely” [3-SC], emerged frequently among participants (90%, n=9). Alcohol is widely regarded as an ingrained aspect of police culture

(Cheema, 2016:490). Research finds a strong association between police stress and the use of excessive alcohol consumption, further contributing to problematic behaviour such as drunk driving, involvement in criminal activities, and personal disputes, both on- and off-duty (Stinson & Liederbach, 2013:604; Oehme, Donnelly & Martin, 2012:425; Gershon et al., 2009:284). These findings align with the participants' observations.

Alcohol was frequently cited as a coping technique for dealing with stress, essentially to “ease or release the things that you are facing every day” [2-DVC]. However, this was often associated with negative consequences, as one participant described: “...and you know, with liquor...if you cannot control yourself, you know what is going to happen” [3-SC]. This was echoed by another participant who described how stress, understaffing and a chaotic working environment compounded, ultimately contributing to alcohol reliance and problematic behaviour:

Or you drink to relax. You've done four shifts; it's stressful, especially on weekends and month-end [when] it's *deurmakaar* (chaotic). And so, you go through these four shifts, and your colleague dropped you, he booked off sick, there's only one man handling all this stuff on a Saturday night, month-end. Now you go on rest days, you want to relax, you don't really do other drugs, but alcohol is a legal drug...There's nothing really wrong with using one or two, but then you become another person, and you also don't care. You're the law...I'm a police officer, so no one can tell me, so I can do what I want'. That is also a misperception that members have. [5-DVC]

Alcohol was also frequently described as a contributing factor to PPDV, emphasised by one participant when reflecting on a former colleague:

He was a very quiet guy... you won't believe it is him doing these things. But I've noticed with him, it was alcohol. He will do that when he's drunk. But when you see him here, you won't say this is a perpetrator of domestic violence. [5-DVC]

As an avoidant coping technique, alcohol masks or suppresses emotions, exacerbates anxiety and emotional burnout (Gershon et al., 2009:284,285), further intensifying a negative stress response.

### *Hypermasculinity & Emotional Suppression*

Hiding emotional turmoil and suffering in silence was a recurring theme during interviews, with officers described as being reluctant to express their feelings. As one participant explained, “Some of us think we are Rambo...I'm going to be weak if I'm going to talk about my feelings” [1-SC]. Another echoed this sentiment:

Because your weaknesses surface and policemen don't want that made known; let me keep my privacy rather a secret, although I know I suffer through a lot, but let it rather be something that I suffer in silence, than making it known...Your understanding or belief will be that with time, it will go over, but many times, it does not go over... it's a battle in your mind... it's not all of us that can win that battle. [2-DVC]

Emotional suppression is the norm in policing, viewed as a necessary tool of the trade (Thwala, 2021:37,61). However, although it plays a functional role in policing, it becomes problematic when it serves as a default mechanism for masking emotional distress. Within the hypermasculine police culture, expressing emotional effect to stressors is perceived as a sign of weakness, a trait contrary to the valorisation of toughness and invulnerability (Zavala, Melander & Kurtz, 2015:65; Wetendorf, 2004:45).

One participant [2-DVC] expressed similar views on how difficult it is to be a police officer. Despite the challenges faced, the expectation to “perform at all times, being strong and tough” placed much pressure on the police. He explains: “Although there is training, you're still a human being. You become so vulnerable to certain things”. These unrealistic expectations felt, to this participant, as not only imposed by the policing institution but also by communities who similarly expected police officers to be strong and brave – or, as he described it, “a Superman”. Seeking help, or “a fix”, conflicted with this idealised image and with the officers' own internalised beliefs that doing so means that he is less capable, “half a policeman” and someone that the community could not rely on [2-SC].

## **Institutional deficiencies: the Lack of Operational Readiness, Support & Care**

The overwhelming underlying sentiment expressed by many interviewees is that, beyond the perils of police work, much of what makes policing so challenging – and officer’s lives that much more complicated – stems from institutional deficiencies rooted in culture and function.

Two participants [2-SC, 1-SC] spoke of the disjuncture between the theory of policing and its reality, noting that recruits were often not adequately prepared for the pressures and stressors of the job and were, as a result, negatively affected. One participant explains:

Now, the training will never be enough. Let me rather say that it will never be sufficient for you. Say, for instance, you are coming from a [low-stress environment]. Now they place you [in a high crime area]. Now, this environment in itself is now going to play a role here because you are not used to this, and that might also play on your mental state because you are going to be under a lot of pressure; your life is in danger every day, and that is an issue also because you were protected there but now here, this is the real life, as they will say here in the townships. So, it can also play a significant role in your mental health as a police officer. [1-SC]

Several officers spoke of their frustration at the lack of meaningful support from management and the institution, describing a culture that values output over the individual wellness of the officer. As one participant reflected:

They want you to work, work, work, work, work, work, but the other stuff, they don't worry...in the police, uh huh, nobody cares here. I would rather nail you than carry you. [3-DVC]

A Station Commander shared similar sentiments:

You can also find that we, as Station Commanders, we don't even know where these [police officers] are staying. The only thing we want is for them to come to work to do their job here. We don't really care about them. [5-SC]

The lack of debriefing after traumatic events came up frequently, emerging as a critical concern for several participants. Two examples suffice:

Yeah, we don't have any debriefing after. Now you work very hard, then you out. They only going to [ask during] the parade, how was the weekend? But let's say there was a murder. You tell them there was a murder. The superior won't ask you, as a shifter, do you need any help or something...Ah, they don't talk about this stuff. They only say, 'Okay, I'm going to see you tomorrow morning', and then dismiss [you], and that's where you go. [3-SC]

Going out to scenes, seeing that body or that crime scene, and then you just have to go home, switch off and go home. There's no debriefing, speaking about what you saw, or there's nothing like that... And I think that also plays [a role] because it stays in your mind, and it plays over and over, and now you have an argument with your spouse, and things is getting too much. [1-DVC]

The narratives presented thus far demonstrate how various occupational and personal stressors and pressures may create conditions of harm that, for some - even those who appear most resilient - may find too difficult to bear. These challenges are intensified for those who lack coping skills and support systems (Gershon et al., 2009:276).

We now shift focus to police practices and research participant perspectives on the effectiveness of managing PPDV when such factors contribute to domestic violence.

### **Addressing & Investigating PPDV: The Practice**

Responding to PPDV involves criminal proceedings, disciplinary investigations, firearm-related inquiries and referrals for psychosocial support. While implementation largely follows DVA and National Instruction legislative and policy guidelines, participant descriptions provide insights into how these steps unfold in practice, emphasising the roles, responsibilities and interactions of all involved.

When a domestic violence complaint is reported, officers attending the incident or receiving a complaint at the station complete the required 508(c) form and record the matter in the occurrence book. Relevant commanders are informed. DV Coordinators primarily handle administrative

functions<sup>17</sup>, ensuring all necessary paperwork and referrals are submitted to the required departments.

If charges are laid, a criminal process is initiated, and a detective based at the station where the matter was reported leads an investigation into the case. Arrests are made, and any firearms in the alleged offenders' possession are seized. Simultaneously, a Section 102 inquiry is initiated to assess the member's fitness to possess a firearm, managed by the provincial office. Officers arrested for domestic violence are suspended from the police service temporarily pending a bail hearing. Once bail is granted, they are reinstated until the disciplinary matter is finalised. During this disciplinary period, officers are restricted from external duties and reassigned to administrative roles by Station Commanders. Members barred from accessing guns have their names on a list stored in the firearm safe.

According to interviewees, whether or not domestic violence charges are laid, any complaint of domestic violence against an officer triggers a disciplinary process. Once a disciplinary file is opened, an investigation is conducted by the station where the member is employed, led by a fellow officer appointed by the Station Commander.

Following the investigation, the provincial office will convene a disciplinary hearing per SAPS's disciplinary regulations. In "extremely serious" [1-SC] cases, an expedited process (as will be described later) may be followed, potentially resulting in an immediate dismissal.

Offenders are also referred to SAPS's EHW programme for psychosocial support. However, participation is not mandatory unless so specified in disciplinary sanctions. Officers who decline EHW services may seek private therapeutic care through SAPS's medical aid schemes, such as Polmed.

Participants offered a range of perspectives on the effectiveness of existing legislation, policies and measures aimed at addressing PPDV. Forty per cent (n=4) believed that new legislation and more stringent measures had a deterring effect on domestic violence, particularly on PPDV cases.

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<sup>17</sup> While their role typically does not involve direct case management of PPDV cases, at least one DV coordinator reported taking on a more active role when a police officer was a victim. In such cases, the DV coordinator extended support to the victim by visiting them at home, assisting with protection order applications, and even accompanying the victim to court.

However, the majority (90%, n=9) expressed frustrations with systemic barriers that hinder effective responses to these cases. All participants cited some form of challenge that made managing PPDV cases difficult. These ranged from the reluctance of victims to lay charges to systematic flaws and shortcomings in handling cases manifesting across investigations, disciplinary processes, firearm regulations, and psychosocial support service provision.

The remainder of this chapter delves into this dual reality, beginning with the positive impacts and then addressing the gaps and obstacles that undermine these efforts in practice.

### **“Brilliant Policies”: Improved Legislation, Oversight & Consequence Management**

In 2018, a presidential commitment to prioritise gender-based violence and the subsequent adoption of South Africa’s National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide two years later initiated a series of positive changes, including legislative amendments to the DVA. These changes have been evident at a station level. Some participants observed that domestic violence is now more frequently addressed during station lectures and parades. Station 5’s commander felt that these discussions and dedicating time to engage with offenders have contributed positively to reducing PPDV at their station. Another participant reflected, “Remember in the olden days, the police could say, 'Go and sleep over it, resolve it'. But now, the act you are not allowed to do that, every incident must be recorded” [4-SC].

Amendments to the DVA<sup>18</sup> introduced stricter measures to curb high rates of domestic violence. For instance, while domestic violence case withdrawals were previously allowed at stations, this is no longer the case and is only permissible in courts. Some participants believed that these changes had a deterring effect on PPDV. One participant noted that such cases were frequently reported at their station - “every month or two” – before the amendments. However, he observed a notable decrease since the amendments were enacted, describing the prevalence of PPDV as “much more quiet now” [3-DVC]. He attributed this not only to the requirements to withdraw cases at courts but also to the increased seriousness in which domestic violence is being taken. He explains: “Now they [police officers] are [also] scared because they are arresting, it's a serious

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<sup>18</sup> Amended in 2021 and operational from 14 April 2023.

offence” [3-DVC]. This suggests that enforcement of arresting officers for PPDV was less frequent before the DVA amendments.

Participants emphasised that increased oversight and monitoring by the provincial office, which had the fortunate effect of not allowing domestic violence to be swept “under the carpet” [5-DVC], combined with stricter consequences for non-compliance, also drove change. Improved systems allowed cases to be more easily “picked up” and monitored, which, combined with increased consequence management, had the needed effect of holding police leadership accountable. One participant explains: “[There’s] no way to hide it... it is a compliance issue. If I don't, there's consequence management” [4-SC].

Another elaborated on the potential repercussions for non-compliance:

They will charge me at the end of the day. That’s now in my job description that [I] comply to the National Instruction and Domestic Violence Act...And our Provincial Commissioner will dismiss you. Even the [former] minister Bheki Cele was saying the same thing: You will be dismissed. If you go to your friend's house or your colleague's house, there's a domestic violence incident, and you decide to hide it, you will be dismissed if you hide the crimes. And to hide the crime is also a crime. We cannot hide the crime. [5-SC]

The combination of legislative changes, increased oversight and tangible job-related consequences has led to some noticeable improvements at the station level. However, challenges remain. Despite established procedures, participants identified several flaws and challenges that undermined the effectiveness of implementation as one participant reflected,

We've got brilliant policies that guide you on what to do, and you can't go wrong when you comply... But now, the implementation of it is a problem. And the interpretation of it is also problematic. [1-SC]

### **“It’s not working”: Systemic Barriers & Challenges to Policing PPDV**

#### ***Victim Reluctance & Repeat Offenders***

While not all participants agreed on the significant prevalence of PPDV, a few highlighted the persistence of repeat offenders, and at least 40% (n=4) believed that the actual number of cases

could far exceed those reported. One participant suggested that underreporting could be due to first responders failing to report cases [5-DVC]. Others felt that cases were underreported because victims feared their partners losing their jobs or were scared, threatened or manipulated into silence, especially if they were financially dependent on them. As one participant explained,

What the wives usually don't do is they don't report it to us, and if they report it to us, they don't want to open criminal cases, or they don't want the process to go further, because they are dependent...the husband is the main contributor when it comes to earnings, so that security part, the 'what if he's losing his job?' [leads to underreporting]. [3-SC]

Victims' reluctance to lay charges was a recurring theme.<sup>19</sup> Some may report an incident in the hope that it will prompt some form of action or provide a reprieve from abuse, even if only temporarily. A participant from Station 1 explained:

In most instances, they don't open up cases. They just do the report. They think, okay, it's going to be on a record, it's fine...she will phone the police, or he will phone the police, making the report he smacked me, or she smacked me, and then I just want him or she to be removed from the house and then tomorrow, they're back together again. But then, two months along the road, the same people are coming back here...it's hard for us. [1-DVC]

Repeat offenders at Station 1 were common, with one or two members being reported for domestic violence on a nearly monthly basis [1-DVC]. Similarly, at Station 5, 2023 data on PPDV shared by the DV Coordinator during the interview revealed 10 officers with 18 cases reported against them, with four of these officers alone accounting for 12 reported cases<sup>20, 21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Participants also often spoke of victims withdrawing cases for reasons similar to those who did not want to open cases [1-DVC, 4-DVC, 5-DVC].

<sup>20</sup> This rate had substantially reduced by the time the interview was conducted in October 2024. Potential reasons for this will be explored later.

<sup>21</sup> The pattern of repeat offenders was not consistent across all stations. Stations 2 and 3 reported cases of domestic violence against officers with no prior cases. The reason for this is not entirely apparent. For example, it could point to cultural differences or indicate more effective initial interventions at some stations than others. Whatever the case, participants from all these stations highlighted challenges in managing cases.

Part of the problem may stem from victims withdrawing cases or perpetrators filing counter charges, another recurring theme. The DV Coordinator of Station 5 shared one such case:

She opens cases only to withdraw the cases later on. They don't apply for the protection order stuff like that. So, he keeps getting away. They know him. The perpetrator also knows it. As soon as the victim opens a case against him, and the judge sentences him, then they [the perpetrator] also make a report [against the victim]...you get frustrated because now there's no outcome at the end of the day.<sup>22</sup>

Domestic violence is widely recognised for being underreported. Common reasons for victims' reluctance to report include shame, loyalty to the abuser, financial dependence, fear of the abuser, fear of recrimination, and mistrust of the police (Mshweshwe, 2020:1; Sibanda-Moyo, Khonje & Brobbey, 2017:57; Jewkes, Levin & Penn-Kekana, 2002:1604). For many, laying criminal charges may present far too many negative repercussions to their safety and livelihood. Reporting PPDV may present significantly more risks (Cheema, 2016:488; Nix, 1998:np). When victims do report, they may seek only to interrupt or find ways to manage the violence (Stewart, 2001:456). It is also not uncommon for victims to lay charges only to withdraw these later (Govender, 2015:39), an issue which often frustrates police officers (PARENZEE, ARTZ & MOULT, 2001:83-84). Officers also report feeling frustrated by the limited role they play in domestic violence matters, perceiving their interventions as temporary and largely ineffective in the long term (Retief, 2013:280).

Moving beyond these dynamics, participants now turned to systemic barriers, of which many hinged on inadequate and inconsistent policy adherence. As one participant explained, “[T]here are gaps because sometimes in this organisation, there will be a guideline or there will be a policy, but it depends on who is following the policy” [5-SC].

### ***Investigations: Flaws, ‘Cover-Ups’ & Undue Delays***

The effectiveness of disciplinary hearings often depended on the quality of investigations. Investigators were described as “too lenient” [1-SC], while another felt that they over-relied on interviews with offenders to reach conclusions instead of conducting thorough inquiries to verify

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<sup>22</sup> This example also highlights some systemic flaws in managing PPDV cases, as will be explored later.

offenders' accounts [5-DVC]. Limited time to conduct investigations<sup>23</sup> was one reason cited by this latter participant, as well as a lack of training and experience with conducting investigations of this nature. He explains,

We're not trained to do the investigations. We just get the order from the Station Commander to go investigate these things. Most of us don't even have a clue of how to do a disciplinary investigation... There's no real investigation. I sit with you as a perpetrator, I listen to your story, and [if] it sounds okay, 'My wife had an affair with someone, now I'm angry, I gave her a hiding'. 'Oh, I mean, that's now no problem; your wife had an affair, so why can't you...'. It's all these problems. [5-DVC]

This statement, however, alludes to more than just a lack of training. It highlights deeper systemic problems long observed in the policing of domestic violence in South Africa. These include inadequacies in conducting thorough investigations, failures to maintain accurate records of domestic violence complaints (often to reduce administrative burdens), discriminatory attitudes towards victims, and perhaps most troubling, entrenched patriarchal beliefs among police officers that, under certain circumstances, intimate partner violence is justifiable (Spies, 2019:59; Govender, 2015:38; O'Regan & Pikoli, 2014:141-145; Abrahams & Levandale, 2009:3-4; Parenzee, Artz & Moul, 2001:83).

The persistence of such issues is deeply concerning.

Another concern lies in potential "cover-ups", as two participants suggested. One of these described how some victims could be pressured into not laying charges or withdrawing cases to protect officers but added that there were other means to ensure that cases do not proceed efficiently:

It also depends on who you know. Where there's cover-ups, you might have a big influence, and to protect the person [and] the person's reputation, there will be a cover-up... But there are ways that the process can be delayed... [2-DVC]

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<sup>23</sup> The 2016 SAPS disciplinary regulations framework mandates such investigations to be completed within or as close as possible to 30 calendar days (p. 10).

Deliberate delays by investigators were also noted by another participant who shared two such examples, allowing offenders to evade accountability. According to the participant, such delays were reportedly common, especially when officers were awaiting promotions. Citing one example, the participant explained:

[T]hey will drag it so that it doesn't show that this guy is charged or has a criminal case...They will drag [it] until the process is finished. And this is the one thing I would say falls through the cracks, where the officer was eventually promoted to a higher rank because of the undue delay. Eventually, he was not charged because the wife and the husband [withdrew their cases against each other], and [the disciplinary case] was [also] eventually withdrawn. But if it was dealt with within a reasonable time after the cases were reported, yeah, then maybe we'll see another result. [3-SC]

### ***Discipline: Weak, Inconsistent & Vulnerable to Exploitation***

Participants also raised concerns about the disciplinary process, describing its implementation as inconsistent and vulnerable to exploitation, leading to variability in sanctions. One participant commented, “The one guy you dismiss, the other guy, you don't dismiss. How? Are you serious?...Everybody deals with it in their own way” [3-SC].

Participants attributed the inconsistency to decision-makers who lacked the capacity or the resolve to impose serious sanctions:

[They] are not trained, or they are not experienced, or they don't have the willpower. Some of them are still trying to be popular...they don't want to be seen as the bad [ones]. That's why they make popular decisions. They will, for instance, find a person guilty, but they will give him corrective counselling...they will go for the least or the less serious sanction instead of giving a dismissal. [3-SC]

Favouritism was also cited as a concern: “Some guys, when they do the disciplinary, they will just look who you are...instead of the seriousness of the case against you... It's like the Animal Farm... Some animals are more equal than others” [3-SC].

Unions were frequently criticised for exploiting procedural loopholes to delay cases or have these withdrawn.<sup>24</sup> One participant felt strongly that while unions are meant to protect officers against “unfair labour practices”, they were frequently more focused on “protecting people guilty of offences” and should not play a role in domestic violence matters. He explains:

If I'm not promoted, then they must take my case, not [take my case] because I have beaten my wife; now, there's a disciplinary investigation that's nothing to do with employment. It's not their job... unfortunately, they are more trained in what they are doing than police officers who are supposed to investigate the disciplinary stuff. [5-DVC]

Another participant [1-SC] provided two illustrative examples of the challenges of dismissing officers with offenders' actions, particularly that of their legal representatives, often leveraging gaps in disciplinary regulations to undermine disciplinary sanctions. These had financial repercussions for SAPS. In one case, an officer arrested for corruption successfully appealed her dismissal, resulting in her reinstatement and an order for SAPS to pay her three months' salary. In another example, this time related to domestic violence, the accused officer filed a lawsuit against SAPS, demanding R1.5 million for unlawful arrest and detention. This matter was pending at the time of the interview.

These narratives, including shared case examples during interviews and CSPS DVA monitoring reports, suggest that not all may treat PPDV cases with the seriousness they warrant.

The CSPS has frequently criticised SAPS for failing to discipline officers adequately. While DVA monitoring reports seldom provide specific details, when they do, they highlight complexity and weaknesses in managing PPDV cases. For example, between October 2019 and March 2020, 178 officers were reported for PPDV nationally (CSPS, 2020:18). Half of these cases remained under investigation at the time of reporting. Of the 78 ‘resolved’ cases, 44 saw no disciplinary action, seven cases were withdrawn, two officers resigned, two had died (one by suicide), and two were listed as unknown. Of the 27 offenders who had faced disciplinary hearings, six were found not guilty or had no steps taken against them, while another six were awaiting sanctions pending

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<sup>24</sup> SAPS disciplinary regulations dictate that hearings must be concluded within, or as close as possible to, 60 calendar days from their commencement (p. 15).

criminal case outcomes. Only 19 had faced sanctions ranging from corrective counselling to suspension in only one case.

Part of the problem with disciplining police officers may stem from ambiguity and leniency in disciplinary regulations. Notably, SAPS' 2016 Disciplinary Regulations do not specifically reference domestic violence. However, they list various examples of misconduct, categorised as either 'less serious' or 'serious', each with distinct processes and sanctions. Less serious cases may result in sanctions such as corrective counselling and warnings, with disciplinary hearings only initiated in cases requiring verbal or written warnings if the employee denies wrongdoing (p. 8-10). Serious misconduct, such as theft, damage to property, assault with the intent to commit grievous bodily harm, rape, murder and actions that bring SAPS into disrepute, are subject to disciplinary hearings. However, some 'serious cases' *may* (own emphasis) warrant an 'expeditious process' (p. 11) which foregoes a formal disciplinary hearing and is only presided over by a SAPS representative of Brigadier rank or higher, with no involvement of a labour representative<sup>25</sup>. However, the regulations lack clarity on when a serious case warrants a disciplinary hearing versus the expeditious process. These gaps and ambiguities in policy demand serious attention.

### **Firearms Management: A Focal Point of Concern**

All participants articulated the importance of seizing firearms as a precaution, even in less serious cases like economic abuse, where such cases may not require such action [3-SC]. This participant elaborates:

[I]f there's any threat, even if it's a verbal threat, or if we see this guy's behaviour is not acceptable, there must just be a possibility or an inclination to violence, not only related to domestic violence, we withdraw that firearm...Because there were too many cases where people were killed...history taught me to be preventative... I don't take chances. [3-SC]

Another felt just as strongly, stating, "The minute that there is a case that is opened against you, and it's DV-related, the firearm is withdrawn immediately. That one, it's not even open for discussion" [2-SC].

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<sup>25</sup> The latter point is not immediately evident when reading SAPS disciplinary regulations but is emphasised in a presentation to parliament (see SAPS, 2017:40).

### ***Impact of Firearm Removal & Job Consequences***

Two participants from Station 4 regarded the removal of firearms following domestic violence incidents as an effective deterrent to PPDV. The DV Coordinator emphasised its significance, noting that the potential loss of a gun was a strong disincentive for police officers who “don’t want to lose their firearm at the end of the day” [4-DVC].

The firearm plays a significant role in the policing profession, tied not only to professional functionality but also to identity and status, as will be described later. Being denied access to firearms had significant repercussions for officers, impacting not only their ability to perform key functions but also their remuneration, as one participant explains:

If I am operational, I get an allowance to work outside. A danger allowance. Now, if I am moved because of an incident, there's an obligation on me to make sure I am cleared so that I can go back to my original position... If a member is working on the shifts, he gets a night shift allowance and salary allowance. So, in other words, once you alternatively place a member, he is running at a loss. [4-SC]

The process of seizing and returning firearms nonetheless emerges as a significant concern for participants, with challenges arising in multiple ways.

### ***Delegated Authority & Systemic Vulnerabilities***

While one Station Commander [1-SC] expressed relief at not bearing sole responsibility for firearm competency decisions, another [5-SC] raised concerns about the process’s overall efficacy. As previously mentioned, firearm competency decisions are managed by the firearms registrar at the provincial office as regulated under Section 102 of the FCA. The registrar determines whether sufficient cause exists for temporary or permanent firearm seizures and directs Station Commanders on whether to return firearms. Firearms are not seized if the domestic violence instance or situation is deemed not to be “life-threatening” [1-SC]. For Station 1’s commander, this delegation of authority provided a sense of reassurance and protection from possible personal repercussions.

In contrast, Station 5's commander raised concerns about the system's effectiveness, highlighting its vulnerability to manipulation. He recounted a grievous domestic violence case where an offender's lawyer successfully challenged a 102 hearing, overturning an earlier decision which had found the offender unfit to possess a firearm. Fortunately, in this instance, another officer had taken the initiative to file charges against the accused officer after the victim refused to do so despite multiple incidences of abuse. The court's subsequent Section 103 hearing confirmed the offender as unfit to possess a firearm. Reflecting on the case, the commander remarked,

So, you can see that the one of the police was challenged by the private lawyer, and that guy [the registrar] changed his mind... [if it wasn't for that court order] he was going to get his gun back. So that is what is happening. [5-SC]

### ***Impact on Service Delivery & Adherence to Firearm Restrictions***

Several Station Commanders highlighted the challenges of seizing firearms from alleged offenders. Doing so placed them in a predicament. Denying such officers access to weapons, particularly those working shifts, necessitated their reassignment to administrative duties. Officers without firearms access are temporarily assigned to non-operational roles while disciplinary investigations are underway or may face permanent reassignment should they be found unfit, barring them from accessing firearms for five years. SAPS's DVA National Instruction requires Station Commanders to 'take steps to consider the placement of the member where he or she will not be dealing with complainants of domestic violence' (NI, 2023:55). This meant, depending on the severity of the case not placing accused officers at the Command Service Centre (CSC) where they were very likely to interface with complainants. One participant [3-SC] highlighted an additional risk, noting that the CSC at their station housed the firearms' safe, potentially enabling domestic violence offenders with access to weapons. To mitigate this risk, he preferred assigning officers accused of domestic violence to manage police detention cells<sup>26</sup>, a placement he considered a safer option.

Beyond the logistical challenges of finding alternative placements for officers, such reassignments often affected other colleagues, disrupting personnel dynamics within shifts [5-DVC]. They also

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<sup>26</sup> Police officers managing detention cells typically do not carry firearms as a security measure.

had an impact on service delivery, particularly in terms of resource allocation and response capacity, as one participant commented,

[I]t's denting the service delivery for our community because you can't utilise that member outside. If [for instance] those three members [officers accused of domestic violence] are working on the same shift, you must know that you are having one vehicle less in terms of deployment. [2-SC]

In some cases, the pressure faced with resource constraints led to station management bypassing firearm regulations. This issue was particularly distressing for one participant<sup>27</sup> who shared their personal experience of domestic violence with an intimate partner who was also a police officer. Despite having laid charges against their partner, their partner continued to be granted access to firearms. Reflecting on this and other cases, this participant observed,

If a firearm was removed and a Section 102 was opened, you're not supposed to work with firearms, and you're not supposed to work outside, which means you need to work by the front desk helping clients. But now some Commanders will allow it if there is a shortage of staff, and then obviously, you'll need to book out the firearm. Now, the [accused officer] is going outside, and the victim will see that the officer has a firearm again, and she or he will be scared, and then they'll withdraw the case. It makes it really very hard. That's why I'm saying the process isn't working.

Police failures to remove firearms from PPDV offenders is a historical issue, raised as far back as Nix's 1998 PPDV victims' study and the ICD's 2009 femicide study. The CSPA has also repeatedly raised concerns about SAPS' non-compliance with firearm regulations in its DVA monitoring reports. For example, in their 2017 census, the CSPA reports SAPS as having seized firearms from 65 of 132 officers reported for domestic violence who had firearms listed in their personal inventories<sup>28</sup> (CSPA, 2019b:25). Section 102 hearings followed in only 38 cases, even though some officers had protection orders against them. In one instance, an officer with a protection order was still allowed to book out firearms. The report did not specify whether 102

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<sup>27</sup> The participant's research identifier number is not disclosed to safeguard their anonymity.

<sup>28</sup> Refers to a firearm dedicated explicitly to that officer.

hearings were held for offenders without firearms in their personal inventories. Recent reports continue to highlight similar issues, including cases where offenders continue to access firearms or where firearms were not seized because SAPS deemed that no physical violence or threats<sup>29</sup> to victims or others had occurred (CSPS, 2022c:14-15,21). While the CSPS emphasises that any form of domestic violence, irrespective of the level of harm, requires the seizing of firearms (CSPS, 2022c:15), the FCA legislation itself is not as stringent as this stance implies, which may explain some of the variability in determining fitness. This is an area of policy and practice that requires further consideration.

### *Psychological Repercussions*

Removing firearms from accused officers posed challenges beyond logistical and service delivery concerns for Station Commanders. While this measure was necessary to prevent harm, it could also cause other harm. As one Station Commander noted, removing firearms had a “demoralising” effect on accused officers [2-SC].

Several participants highlighted the importance of these weapons within the policing profession. Firearms are essential tools of the profession (Perkins, 2018:151), asserted by one participant who described the firearm in policing as akin to “chalk to a teacher” [2-SC]. Beyond functionality, they are intertwined with an officer’s sense of purpose, particularly within the masculine culture of policing. One participant explained, “You know, for men, it is like that...if you take away my firearm, what is my purpose at the end of the day?” [4-DVC].

Another officer<sup>30</sup> reflected on how the loss of a firearm affected one’s identity and status. Recounting their own experience of having their firearm confiscated following a complaint of domestic violence, the officer described its profound impact: “You feel like half a police officer because your firearm is part of your uniform. That's how you are. You are stripped of your identity...it's almost like you come in socks without shoes”.

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<sup>29</sup> These cases involved forms of domestic violence categorised as emotional, verbal, or psychological abuse and trespassing incidents.

<sup>30</sup> The participant's research identifier number is not disclosed to safeguard their anonymity.

This experience, combined with the marital crisis that had been unfolding for some time, had a debilitating effect on this officer:

So, I can put myself in the shoes of what other police are going through—the immediate effect it has on the family and what it can cause after that. Because you come from home, you're not feeling to go to work, you feel sort of depressed, and there are lots of other things going through your emotions, you're unstable, you can't think properly, you can't concentrate at work, you're not the same anymore. You become very isolated, and I think that is where the danger comes in with things going on in your mind.

While necessary, removing firearms from accused officers has far-reaching implications beyond the practicalities of policing. Both research participants and the literature highlight the strong association between firearms removal and its impact on policing careers, officer identities, and even its role as a potential precursor to suicide (Wetendorf, 2004:49). These measures, though imperative for deterring violence, must be balanced with the need to support accused officers in navigating the psychological repercussions.

### **Employee Health & Wellness: Existing Barriers to Psychosocial Support**

Like firearms, employee wellness emerges as a focal point of concern. Participant interviews highlight problematic police cultural attitudes and institutional shortcomings that undermine efforts to address domestic violence effectively.

#### ***Police Culture***

Cultural attitudes, particularly among male officers, often trivialise the seriousness of domestic violence [5-DVC] or stigmatise officers involved in such cases [3-DVC, 3-SC]. Maintaining confidentiality – an essential aspect of effective support systems - is not possible when officers are arrested and when procedural regulations require the names of offenders and details of domestic violence incidences to be logged in registers freely accessible to all on a shift [2-DVC, 2-SC, 3-DVC]. While some of this practice is necessary and largely unquestioned, it gives rise to gossip. Several participants spoke of the prevalence of this at their stations, as one stated, “Usually nothing is a secret...By the time I arrive at the police station...it's all over. Everybody knows about it” [3-

SC]. Another participant shared how this environment can prove toxic, preventing officers from seeking help:

I know some police officers they'll say, 'I won't come here and come speak to you about my problems. I'm going to sit, I'm going to smile'. There are a lot of people walking around smiling and greeting, and you don't know what's happening at home...they don't speak about it because they don't want to tell you. Tomorrow, you tell that one, and now my whole story is laying out. [1-DVC]

The fear of stigma and judgment is intensified by the hypermasculine nature of police culture, where seeking help is often perceived as a weakness, as one participant reflected:

It's almost like when these people [representatives from SAPS EHW services] get involved, it feels like you are labelled. Because it's either the assumption or the perception, he's a woman beater or a softy, he's a mama's boy, or he's not up to it, he's not man enough. [2-DVC]

Another hindrance mentioned by the participant was the fear that seeking help meant exposing their private lives, placing them in a vulnerable position to information being “held against them”, and limiting their chances for professional advancement.

However, cultural stigma was not the only factor. One participant noted that certain offenders, particularly repeat ones, displayed indifference rather than reluctance to seek help: “You get the impression that they're so far down the line that they don't really care” [5-DVC].

Another issue often raised relates to the voluntary nature of psychosocial support provision. Station Commanders expressed frustration that they could recommend support but not mandate participation. One participant emphasised, “You must refer, and you must give guidance, but you can't force the member to go” [2-SC].

A further two commanders expressed similar experiences. One described how his attempts to help were sometimes perceived as “interfering” - a commonly held belief within society and even among police that domestic violence is a private family affair best resolved by not interfering (Spies, 2019:59; Retief, 2013:252). This participant felt that ‘intervening’ in domestic violence

matters required caution as actions could also be seen as “border[ing] on defeating the ends of justice”. Yet, he held fast to the idea that “sometimes...you have to involve yourself” [3-SC]. When his direct interventions proved unsuccessful, he enlisted the support of the Human Resources department and, at times, even investigators to encourage officers to seek help.

Another echoed similar effort, “[I]t's not that we are folding our arms waiting for something to happen” [5-SC]. His proactive measures included booking officers into psychiatric/rehabilitative clinics, conducting home visits, requesting personnel transfers for members who needed to be closer to familial sources of support, and organising educational workshops. Yet, success was inconsistent; for example, a request to the provincial office/EHW for an anger management workshop for three officers remained unanswered 10 months later.

### *Institutional Offerings & Deficiencies*

The SAPS DVA National Instruction (2023) emphasises the need to ensure that officers implicated in domestic violence receive support services. SAPS offers such services through its EHW programme, guided by the Department of Public Service and Administration’s (DPSA) EHW strategic framework. Employee wellness management services (one of four EHW programmatic areas) focus on promoting individual physical, social, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and financial wellness, as well as fostering organisational wellness and work-life balance (DPSA, 2023:48). Psychologists, social workers, occupational health practitioners and chaplains render these services, available 24/7 to both police personnel and their families and accessible via referrals and mandatory debriefings (SAPS, 2022b:25-26).

The EHW programme reads impressively on paper. However, the extent to which such services are readily promoted or made available is questionable. Several participants spoke of the lack of psychological debriefing following traumatic events. For one participant, this included an incident of domestic violence involving one of his colleagues. This participant had the harrowing ordeal of having to break into a colleague's home after hearing a gunshot being fired. It later emerged that his colleague, who lived next door to him at the police barracks, had earlier in the day killed his girlfriend before driving home and shooting himself. This event had a profound effect on him, yet there was little consideration for the impact this experience had on him and his colleagues, he says:

After that, no one took us to the counselling. Nothing. That's why I think the police fail us on that; rather than assisting us or finding out all about you or what you think, call us like interviewers to ask how I feel. Maybe once a year, but nah, they don't do nothing. [3-DVC]

This participant linked the lack of debriefing with an organisational cultural attitude, particularly among leadership, that appears indifferent to employee well-being. Several participants echoed similar sentiments.

These issues are not new. The ICD (2009:35-36) found that strained relationships with management and an ineffective employee assistance programme that officers generally distrusted were some of the causal factors contributing to PPDV.

Participants further questioned not only the accessibility of psychosocial support services but also their relevance, adequacy and effectiveness. One participant, for example, felt that while the inclusion of chaplains in EHW services was helpful for spiritual guidance, their involvement in other aspects, such as domestic violence-related matters, may not be suitable or effective. He explains:

[I]f you're not a religious person, you won't go to the pastor. I mean, what can he do? If you really don't believe in God, or whatever, then you won't go to him. Of course, you don't believe. What can he say now from a religious perspective to convince you not to assault your wife? [5-DVC]

This participant concluded that a social worker trained in understanding the complex nature and dynamics of domestic violence would be more suitable.<sup>31</sup>

Two other participants were more critical of EHW services, basing their critique on negative feedback from colleagues who had made use of such services, their efforts to access support for

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<sup>31</sup> Literature on PPDV, such as that by Saunders, Prost and Oehme (2016:13), highlights potential problems with police clergy providing psychosocial support services in domestic violence matters, citing research which found clergy susceptible to misconceptions about domestic violence. While this may not be the case for all clergy, it is worth emphasising the importance of ensuring that underlying biases do not influence those tasked with providing counselling on domestic violence matters.

domestic violence cases they managed, and their personal experiences with the services in the context of abuse within their intimate relationships.

One participant described their experience of receiving counselling from a chaplain as a victim of domestic violence as “unhelpful”. The lack of follow-up support from either EHW or their direct superiors left the participant feeling abandoned, demoralised and cynical about the institution as a whole, ultimately concluding, “It's like they don't care”.

A similar experience was shared by the second participant, who described the lack of adequate, sustained support following an initial intervention by an EHW representative (also a chaplain) as leaving a lasting and disappointing impression, even several years after the incident. In this case, martial conflict led the couple - both police officers - to lay charges against each other. When these charges were withdrawn as part of their effort towards reconciliation, their disciplinary processes were halted, and no further psychosocial support was offered. Reflecting on this, the participant stated,

So easily after that, anything could have happened. There could have been a new thing or conflict, but [no support was given after that]. So, we had to come back to the office and work like nothing had happened. [It was] disappointing. They left you in the cold.

## **Conclusion**

Although not as seemingly frequent as PPDV in the U.S.-based studies discussed in this dissertation, this research finds that PPDV in South Africa – based on police oversight reports – is significantly prevalent and warrants far more academic attention and institutional scrutiny than it currently receives. When combined and consolidated, these reports paint a stark picture of the serious consequences of domestic violence perpetrated by South African police officers, particularly for victims who may find themselves staring down the barrel of a gun in the hands of an enraged officer.

The Western Cape reports the highest number of offenders nationally. While the reasons for this remain unclear, interviews with participants from the police stations indicated that most find the issue a pressing concern. Participant narratives highlight the multifaceted nature of domestic violence by police officers in an environment where domestic violence is already characterised as

frequent and normalised and, under particular circumstances, justifiable or excused. Participants attribute PPDV to difficult upbringings and various conflicts and stressors within intimate and familial relationships, often exacerbated by the pressures exacted by the unpredictable yet frequently very violent and traumatic nature of policing.

For the majority of interview participants, PPDV presents a significant challenge to manage. Various institutional shortcomings marked by inconsistent adherence to policy, flawed investigations, logistical and other challenges presented by firearms removal, and ineffectual disciplining of accused officers add to the complexity of managing such cases and providing support to such offenders.

The final chapter of this dissertation further summarises key research findings and offers various solutions to address some of the identified shortcomings in the policing of PPDV in South Africa.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS & FINAL REFLECTIONS**

This dissertation has sought a deeper, more contextualised understanding of PPDV in South Africa, exploring its nature, prevalence and the factors enabling its persistence. It has done so.

PPDV in South Africa is both widespread and relentless, with far-reaching consequences. Over the last 12 years, 331 such incidents have tragically claimed lives, forever devastated families, and presented significant challenges for SAPS. Understanding its aetiology and persistence has conceptualised it as a multifaceted issue, influenced by both personal and professional factors, the latter including the dynamics of police work and police culture.

Much like Faull (2017b:1) perceives SAPS and its organisational culture as the ‘products of overlap and entanglement’ of three narratives – the South African context, the organisation and the individual officer – similarly, PPDV in South Africa emerges as an ‘overlap and entanglement’ of social context, institutional deficiencies and the personal vulnerabilities of the individual officer.

Police officers are products of their environment. Many are raised and work in communities afflicted by generations of trauma, hardship, and abuse, where violence, including domestic violence, is the norm for resolving conflict. Police are trained and expected to always remain in control. However, policing in a volatile, pressured and stressful environment exacts its psychological and emotional toll, one that officers grapple with, often in silence, hidden behind the guise of hypermasculinity and emotional stoicism expected within police culture. Anger, frustration, and negative coping strategies are the results creating conditions for further harm that seep into personal lives, where for some, domestic violence may serve as the easiest, perhaps most natural, solution to problems within homes and relationships. This may have been the case for the 1 440 SAPS officers reported for domestic violence in South Africa over the last four years.

SAPS has taken great strides in creating policies and frameworks to address this complex, multifaceted issue. Amendments to the DVA and stricter safeguards have allegedly had a deterring effect on PPDV. The 10 Station Commanders and DV Coordinators interviewed from the five Western Cape-based stations are commended for complying with policy and procedure and

supporting affected members. However, this work remains arduous. This study, informed by interviews and data analysis, finds various systemic flaws and shortcomings besetting the policing of PPDV. Poor, potentially biased investigations, weak disciplinary structures, problems underlying firearms management, weak oversight and limited accountability are among the barriers undermining measures introduced to address PPDV. Further shortcomings in addressing employee wellness are also noted.

The following unpacks some of these issues and presents solutions as both recommended by research participants and analysis.

### **Oversight**

Flaws in monitoring, accountability, and interagency collaboration raise questions about the purpose and effectiveness of oversight. While it is commendable and essential that SAPS, CSPS, and IPID report on the prevalence and practice of responding to PPDV, such efforts seem superficial and of little use if concerns are repeatedly raised but not addressed. This is particularly perplexing, especially when mechanisms like the CSPS's Compliance Forum, designed to enhance monitoring and reporting between SAPS and the secretariat, already exist (CSPS, 2015:26).

Participants also questioned the utility of repeatedly providing statistics on PPDV when no meaningful action followed, suggesting that some of this monitoring may reflect more of a bureaucratic tick-boxing exercise than much else: "If there were someone really, really watching all this" [5-SC], things would change.

The CSPS and IPID are expected to hold police accountable but are not immune to weaknesses and dysfunction. Established primarily as a supervisory body with advisory capacity, the CSPS lacks the power to enforce compliance with recommendations (Vetten, 2017:10). IPID has been criticised for weak investigations and prematurely closing off files to 'inflate' performance indicators (Bruce, 2020a:1-2; Knoetze, 2019:np<sup>32</sup>). However, even when investigations result in recommendations for disciplining police officers accused of misconduct, SAPS often fail to institute measures against its members (Bruce, 2021:np). Thus, the CSPS and IPID cannot take

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<sup>32</sup> See Knoetze's Viewfinders extensive expose on IPID: <https://viewfinder.org.za/kill-the-files/>

sole responsibility for shortcomings. Like Vetten (2014:2) argues, ‘accountability... resides not in the work of any one mechanism but in the integrity of the structure as a whole’.

Indeed, more effort is required by all oversight bodies, including Parliament, to take the issue of PPDV more seriously and hold SAPS more strictly accountable.

### **Accountability within SAPS**

Problems affecting police accountability may stem from inefficiencies in SAPS policies for managing police misconduct (Bruce, 2020b:2). Disciplinary regulations appear weak, ineffectual, and insufficiently stringent to deter misconduct, often allowing officers to remain employed irrespective of the severity of the allegations against them. For instance, of the 5 489 police officers arrested for serious crimes since 2019, 3 981 were still actively employed by SAPS four years later (Charles, 2023:np). Leniency in disciplining suggests a broader tolerance for bad behaviour within the policing institution. Moreover, regulations framing discipline for misconduct as ‘corrective’ rather than ‘punitive’ (Section 4 of SAPS Disciplinary Regulations) and which mandate disregarding historical records of misconduct if no similar infractions follow within six months (p. 22) may inadvertently foster a culture of impunity within the police.

Participants questioned whether SAPS was genuinely committed to accountability, expressing frustration over the perceived difficulty of enforcing discipline of those accused of domestic violence. Key concerns raised included inconsistencies in applying sanctions and reluctance to take decisive action against perpetrators.

This dissertation identifies gaps in policy, as well as investigations and hearings that are prone to subjectivity, manipulation and misinterpretation.

Disciplinary investigations are conducted by police officers based at the same station as the accused, making them potentially susceptible to bias. Participants expressed concerns that investigators lacked training and thoroughness in conducting investigations, with some accusing them of delaying or even “covering up” cases.

Participants also criticised the practice of police officials as presiders over disciplinary hearings. One participant remarked, “You cannot just put anybody there as a Magistrate and expect results” [3-SC].

Union involvement in domestic violence-related matters emerged as a contentious issue. Participants allege these representatives may delay and exploit regulatory processes, protecting offenders and undermining accountability measures. The same was said of Section 102 hearings involving firearm seizures, where the influence of legal representatives may sway decisions in favour of offenders, irrespective of the potential dangers imposed.

Some of the problems here, again, may lie with policy. Disciplinary regulations state that ‘serious cases’ of misconduct may be subject to expeditious processes. Such processes forego disciplinary hearings and exclude union and legal representatives - an issue that unions have taken exception to (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2023:np). Participants shared several case examples where union and legal representatives were involved, even though the specific cases sounded, at least to me, severe enough to warrant an expeditious process. While I lack sufficient details to draw definite conclusions, the regulation seems vague, leaving room for varying interpretations, especially because SAPS discipline regulations do not refer to domestic violence. Amendments to the DVA and its National Instruction should have prompted updates to SAPS discipline regulations to ensure better alignment and minimise the potential for misinterpretation. This may resolve some of the ambiguity currently present.

Regarding further recommendations, participants suggested changes to disciplinary practice to address identified problems. They recommended assigning a dedicated team [3-SC] to investigate and oversee disciplinary processes related to all reported PPDV cases, ensuring greater consistency across the board. One participant suggested that teams include trained human resource management specialists [5-DVC]. It would also be necessary for those involved in managing (investigating and disciplining) PPDV to receive specialised, in-depth training on domestic violence.

### ***Firearms Management***

Participants highlighted several difficulties associated with the seizing of firearms from those accused of domestic violence. While recognised as necessary and reportedly carried out with precision according to most participants, at least one participant and several CSPS oversight reports suggest that protocols to seize firearms may not always be strictly adhered to. Firearm seizures presented logistical challenges for commanders, especially when faced with understaffing. Allowing officers continued access to firearms despite domestic violence complaints poses a significant danger to victims. However, restricting firearm access for only five years may also not necessarily address the issue of PPDV, as illustrated in Chapter 1 by the case of Richard Smit. The 2021 attempt to amend the FCA aimed to introduce permanent disqualification from firearm possession for individuals found unfit (Firearms Control Amendment Bill, 2021:104) as a measure to reduce violent crime. The amendment bill has since been paused for further consideration; however, this issue remains critical and needs to be reconsidered in future revisions of the legislation.

### ***Psychosocial support***

The impact of work and life pressures on police officers is well recognised. Mental health challenges, suicides, homicides and femicides rank amongst the most significant health and wellness risk factors affecting police officers (SAPS, 2016:11).

Employee wellness emerged as a focal point of concern for participants. Interviews highlighted complex dynamics and obvious tensions between the critical need for psychosocial support, the tendency to avoid seeking help - underpinned by a hypermasculine socio-cultural mindset that simultaneously trivialises and fears seeking help - and the evident gaps in the availability and effectiveness of these services.

Many participants expressed frustration at a general lack of support and care, describing a culture that values output over wellness. The scarcity of debriefing after traumatic events came up frequently, emerging as a critical concern for several participants. Station Commanders, however, voiced their frustrations, noting that while they can refer their members for psychosocial support, they cannot mandate their participation. This needs to change. The literature also emphasises the

importance of providing emotional support to offenders whose firearms have been removed, as this process can be psychologically detrimental to officers, impacting both their careers and personal identities (Wetendorf, 2004:49).

Although SAPS' EHW services, programmes and interventions appear comprehensive on paper (SAPS, 2016:22-37), their accessibility and effectiveness remain questionable, as the CSPPS and interviewees highlighted. A possible problem may stem from under-resourcing, with only 621 personnel employed to serve 187 278 SAPS members (SAPS, 2022:25). This under-resourcing may perhaps reinforce the perception shared by some participants that SAPS does more for "protecting their image" than caring for its members; here, they are "failing dismally" [2-SC]. Recently, police unions and parliament's Portfolio Committee on Police have called for an 'overhaul of SAPS's approach to mental health', including proposals for a larger budget to employ more personnel and increased awareness to encourage officers to seek psychosocial support for problems they may be facing (Mashinini, 2024:np).

Participants advocated for regular, compulsory debriefing sessions for all personnel. Such initiatives would destigmatise help-seeking (Zavala, Melander & Kurtz, 2015:67). Related to PPDV, they further recommended mandatory, professional psychosocial support services, ideally outside the framework of EHW [3-DVC]. These services should be complemented by compulsory participation in anger management, substance misuse, domestic violence, and other related programmes and workshops.

While some progress has been made in normalising discussions on domestic violence at a station level, more is required. Cultural attitudes that trivialise domestic violence and stigmatise both victims and offenders require urgent attention. Reducing PPDV is unlikely without addressing this aspect of the police organisational culture (Goodmark, 2015:1207).

Participants recommended gender sensitivity training to help shift entrenched attitudes and foster a more supportive, caring environment. Additionally, PPDV-relevant literature recommends training for all police personnel on the dynamics and consequences of this issue. This includes highlighting the links between PTSD, alcohol misuse and domestic violence, as well as identifying other less obvious warning signs, such as increased aggression and absenteeism (Oehme, Donnelly & Martin, 2012:427).

Finally, it is critical that police leadership not underestimate the need for debriefing following particularly traumatic events, including those involving PPDV. Implementing regular debriefing may normalise help-seeking and mitigate long-term effects on mental health.

### **Final Reflections**

The existence of PPDV is unacceptable but not entirely perplexing; police are, after all, a product of their environment. This, though, does not excuse such behaviour. SAPS must take more proactive steps to root out problematic patriarchal attitudes and beliefs that may indicate the acceptance of domestic violence or any other form of gender-based violence by its members during recruitment or by other means once already employed.

Aside from some identified policy gaps, SAPS has the necessary processes to respond to PPDV when cases are reported. Yet, what happens after a case is made known largely depends on the individual interests and commitments of those involved - to report, thoroughly investigate, disarm, and take seriously the disciplining of such cases. As Parenzee et al. note, 'Even the most far-reaching legislation will be rendered toothless if it is enforced by those who themselves do not believe in its necessity' (2001:83). Relying solely on the police to police PPDV may not be the most effective solution. Any form of gender-based violence perpetrated by police officers demands specialised knowledge, focused attention, thorough investigation and targeted interventions.

Above all, there remains an urgent need, like others have expressed, to pay serious attention to the psychological wellness of police officers and a police culture that seems to be in crisis. From the interviews - which at times felt like counselling sessions - I was left with the overwhelming impression that SAPS, as the institution, regards police officers as little more than numbers to fill positions, moulded into a uniform, one-size-fits-all entity but fails to adequately prepare or support them in dealing with the realities of policing. Their personal characteristics, needs, and well-being appear to be overlooked.

This neglect carries serious consequences for the institution and the integrity of its work in communities, and the individual officers and those closest to them. Pressures that become too difficult to bear may well spill over into homes and relationships, with potentially new numbers added to the tally of bi-annual PPDV cases.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Interview Guide - Station Commander

Participant Identifier Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of service: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of service in current position: \_\_\_\_\_

#### *General Perception of Domestic Violence*

- In your opinion, is police perpetration of DV (PPDV) a problem in South Africa/Western Cape? If yes why? If not, why not?

#### *Policy responses to addressing PPDV at a Station Level:*

- What guides how you respond to PPDV cases? (Besides the amended National Instructions 7/1999, are there other policies applicable?)
- Can you talk me through what happens from the moment a case of DV involving a police member is brought to your stations' attention when the perpetrator is (a) member of your community; (b) member of your station?
- If the member is not stationed at your station, what role do you play, if any, in that matter?
- What interventions are offered to (a) perpetrator; (b) victim, (c) others affected (if any) and to what extent are these mandatory/compulsory?
- How is the alleged perpetrator's position at work and/or job affected?
- What factors determine whether an officer is (a) disciplined; and/or (b) criminally charged?
- What does 'disciplining' a member entail?
- To what extent is a history of DV considered when implementing disciplinary measures?
- What remedial measures are applicable to disciplining a member as a result of DV perpetration?
- What leads to a dismissal?

#### *Station-relevant cases of PPDV*

- Over the last year, how many cases has your station had to deal with as (a) members who live in your community but do not work in your station; (b) members who work in your station?

- What are the most common types of DV reported?
- Who are the most likely victims?
- Of these cases, how many complainants are also police officers?
- Why do you think PPDV occurs? What factors do you think play a role (*prompts: individually, socially, police culture*)?
- What impact does it have in the workplace (*prompts: to self as management, with colleagues, institutionally*)?
- What perception do you think the community has when police officers are perpetrators of DV?
- What makes addressing PPDV challenging?
- Can you share an example with me of a case that stands out for you where you were not content with the outcome of the matter?
- Can you share an example with me of a case that stands out for you when you felt a positive outcome was had?

### ***Addressing PPDV overall***

- In your opinion, how well do all current measures address PPDV respond to the problem? What works? What doesn't? (*prompt: CSPA and IPID cooperation*)
- Are there specific gaps (policy, structurally)? If yes, what are these and how do you think these gaps could be addressed?
- Any further recommendations?

## Appendix 2: Interview Guide - DV Coordinator

Participant Identifier Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank: \_\_\_\_\_

Job Type: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of service: \_\_\_\_\_

Length of service in current position: \_\_\_\_\_

### *General Perception of Domestic Violence*

- In your opinion, is police perpetration of DV (PPDV) a problem in South Africa/Western Cape? If yes why, if not, why not?

### **Addressing PPDV at a station level**

- What role do you play when cases against SAPS members are brought to your attention?
- Over the last year, how many cases where SAPS members are perpetrators have you personally had to address?
- What are the most common types of DV reported in these types of cases?
- Who are most often the victims?
- Of these cases, were any complainants also police officers?
- Why do you think PPDV occurs? What factors do you think play a role?
- What impact does it have in the workplace? (*prompts: to self in job role, to self as a colleague/friend, with colleagues, institutionally*)?
- What makes addressing PPDV challenging?
- Can you share an example with me of a case that stands out for you where you were not content with the outcome of the matter?
- Can you share an example with me of a case that stands out for you when you felt a positive outcome was had?
- In your opinion, how well do all current measures to address PPDV respond to the problem? What works? What doesn't?
- Are there gaps? If yes, what are these and how do you think this gap could be addressed?
- Any further recommendations?

## **Appendix 3: Study Information Sheet for Interview Participant**

### **Introduction**

My name is Claudia Lopes, and I am conducting research toward a master's degree in Criminology through the University of Cape Town (UCT). As the *[designation]* of the *[institution/police station]*, you are being invited to participate in an interview as I believe you hold key insights that will contribute greatly to this research.

### **About the Research**

My research is focused on Police-Perpetrated Domestic Violence (PPDV) - a largely under-researched yet notable problem in South Africa. I am interested in understanding how pervasive PPDV is and how it is understood, dealt with and investigated by the South African Police Services (SAPS), the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) and the Civilian Secretariat of Police Services (CSPS). This study has received Ethics Clearance by UCT and authority via the *[institution]*.

The study will explore the issue in South Africa overall but place a more selective focus on the Western Cape (WC). The research will entail the following: collating information on prevalence rates of PPDV nationally as reported by the state institutions listed above; a review of police-perpetrated domestic violence docket files specific to WC only; and interviews with selected WC SAPS officials and with both WC and National IPID and CSPS investigators or other relevant personnel.

It is envisioned that the research findings will contribute to a more contextualised understanding of PPDV in South Africa and helpful to current measures being taken by the South African state to better address incidences and consequences of gender-based violence and femicide and overall strengthen police accountability to responding to domestic violence in South Africa. The research may also serve as the foundation for a future PhD study by me related to this topic.

### **Voluntary Participation**

The expected duration of this interview is 1 to 1.5 hours. Participation is free and entirely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time either during the interview or at its conclusion with no consequence to you in doing so. I would, however, be very grateful for your assistance in participating in the research.

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The interview will be conducted *[face-to-face/virtually]* and be audio recorded for accuracy and transcribed. *[Virtual interviews will not be video recorded only audio recorded although cameras may be*

*used briefly for introduction purposes only. Cameras will be turned off before audio recording of the interview commences].* Should you not consent to be audio-recorded, I will only take written notes of our conversation. All information recorded is confidential and no one but me will have access to the recording. The recording will be deleted once it is transcribed. The transcribed interview record will be allocated an identifier number thus no personal information identifying you or any other third party mentioned in the interview will be captured in the transcription, in written notes or research findings.

### **Risks**

As you ordinarily deal with domestic violence through your work, and as I will not be disclosing any of your personal information [*nor the name of your station or its location*], **I do not anticipate any personal or work-related risks to you in participating in this research. However, should any questions in the interview create any level of emotional and/or psychological discomfort or unease of any kind please let me know and we will stop the interview. Should any discomfort or unease arise after the interview, I encourage you to make use of your institution's Employee Wellness Service.**

**Should you have any questions related to this research, you are free to ask me at any time either in person, via email at [lpscla001@myuct.ac.za](mailto:lpscla001@myuct.ac.za) or on 0827808682. You may also contact my Supervisor, Professor Kelley Moulton via [kelley.moulton@uct.ac.za](mailto:kelley.moulton@uct.ac.za) or 0216501285.**

## Appendix 4: Interview Consent Form

Please read the following information and tick the appropriate box relevant to your response.	Yes	No
<p><i>1. Voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity</i></p> <p>Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your identity will be kept confidential and any other identifying information that you may reference, such as names of third parties or locations, will not be revealed in any written records, research findings or any publications that may arise from the research. You may withdraw at any time either during the interview or at its conclusion with no consequence to you doing so. No financial or other material benefits will be received for participating in this study.</p> <p>Do you agree to participate in this study?</p>		
<p><i>2. Recording of interview</i></p> <p>I would like to audio record our interview for accuracy purposes. The audio recording will be saved to cloud storage and deleted once it is transcribed. The transcribed record will be allocated an identifier number thus no personal information about you will be captured in any written notes, data storage records or research findings.</p> <p>Do you consent to the interview being audio recorded?</p>		
<p><i>3. Future research</i></p> <p>The information you provide may be useful to a future PhD study on police perpetrated domestic violence by me.</p> <p>Do you consent to me keeping the transcription of our interview on file in safe storage (password-protected cloud storage) for use after the conclusion of this study?</p>		

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix 5: UCT Ethics Clearance



### Faculty of Law: **Research Ethics Committee**

Private Bag X3 • Rondebosch • 7701 • South Africa  
 Room 6.29 • Kramer Building • Middle Campus  
 Tel: +27 021 650 3080 Fax: +27 021 650 5660  
 E-mail: [lamize.viljoen@uct.ac.za](mailto:lamize.viljoen@uct.ac.za) Internet: [www.law.uct.ac.za](http://www.law.uct.ac.za)

### **Certificate of RENEWAL: Approval for Ethical Clearance**

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/SUPERVISOR: KELLEY MOULT	<b>ETHICS REFERENCE NUMBER: L0006NS-2022</b>
STUDENT: CLAUDIA LOPES – [LPSCLA001]	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE: 29-NOVEMBER-2022
FACULTY: LAW	RENEWAL: 11-OCTOBER-2023 (1 <sup>st</sup> )
DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC LAW	APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE: 10-OCTOBER-2024
PROJECT TITLE: To Uphold, Protect & Care? Investigating Police Perpetration of Domestic Violence	
PURPOSE OF RESEARCH: Masters degree. The study proposed aims to provide greater contextual understanding of the phenomenon of police-perpetrated domestic violence in South Africa (SA).	
<b>CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL</b>	
<p>This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.</p> <p><b>Modifications</b>                  To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a formal "Request for a Modification" to the REC Administrative Office. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.</p> <p><b>Renewals</b>                  Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You are responsible for submitting this by at least 2 months prior to the expiry date of clearance date issued.</p> <p><b>Project Closures</b>                  When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please formally notify the REC: Law as well as your supervisor where applicable.</p>	
<b>Certification</b>	
<p>This certifies that the University of Cape Town Law Faculty's Research Ethics Committee has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Cape Town Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.</p>	
<p>_____  <b>Ms Monique Carels</b>                  LAW REC: LEAD REVIEWER</p>	

Certificate Issued On: 19/10/2023

**Appendix 6: SAPS Research Approval**



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Privaatsak Private Bag X94	Pretoria 0001	Faks No. Fax No.	(012) 232 7866
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Your reference/U verwysing:

My reference/My verwysing: **3/34/2**

THE HEAD: RESEARCH  
SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE  
PRETORIA  
0001

Enquiries/Navrae: **Col (Dr) Smit**  
**W/O Thenga**  
Tel: **(012) 432 7866**  
Email: **ThengaS@saps.gov.za**



**C Lopes**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE:  
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN: MASTERS DEGREE: TO UPHOLD, PROTECT AND CARE?  
INVESTIGATING POLICE PERPETRATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: RESEARCHER: C  
LOPES**

The above subject matter refers.

1. You are hereby granted approval for your research study on the above-mentioned topic in terms of National Instruction 4 of 2022.
2. Further arrangements regarding the research study may be made with the following office:

The Provincial Commissioner: Western Cape:

- **Contact Person:** AC L Gomo-Bentsile
- **Contact Details:** (021) 417 7520
- **Email Address:** GomoL2@saps.gov.za

3. Kindly adhere to paragraph 8 of our attached letter signed on **2024-02-19** with the same abovementioned reference number.

**MAJOR GENERAL**  
**THE HEAD: RESEARCH**  
**DR PR VUMA**

Date: **2024/04/09**