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## **So Close Yet So Far: Perspectives on the South African Police Service's Response to Murder Cases in the Wallacedene Policing Area**

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**Abstract.** The aim of this study was to determine views of the South African Police Service's (SAPS) response to murder cases in the Wallacedene policing area; the contributing factors that lead to the failure of the police to prosecute offenders; the effectiveness of strategies to reduce murder-related incidents in the study area; the contributing factors to murder in the Wallacedene policing area; and to make recommendations to improve the conviction rate. Twenty-five participants were selected for this study. A qualitative approach was used, with semi-structured interviews as the data-collection tool. The findings highlighted that there is a lack of partnership between SAPS detectives and the community. The contributing factors for the police to fail prosecuting offenders. Reasons for the current problem include inexperienced detectives and lack of resources. In order to increase the performance of the detectives and the first responders to the scene, the research explored the challenges encountered by the SAPS detectives and makes suggestions and recommendations to increase their efficiency.

**Keywords.** Community, Murder, Prosecute, Police, Strategy, Clearance Rate

### **Introduction**

In this paper, the term "murder" is used interchangeably with "homicide". Murder is a rare, but serious, form of interpersonal violence. "It continues to matter in society. Criminology supplies theories and explanations of why one person kills another. Criminal justice works to create strategies both to prevent violent acts and to hold those accountable who have committed such acts" (Hough 2019: 88). In part, the absence of systematic research has been, as Haradhan (2018) observed, due to problems in national data on homicides. There has also been little empirical research on the clearance process by general detectives in South Africa and elsewhere.

The absence of research on the homicide investigation process is not surprising when one considers the general absence of attention paid by researchers to police investigations other than those conducted by patrol officers (Mofokeng 2018). The purpose of this study was to investigate how effectively the police solve crime, murder in particular. This is the first study of its kind in South Africa, and provides a national review of police effectiveness in terms of

murder cases in the Western Cape, as well as factors that might be associated with police effectiveness, or lack thereof, in responding to murder cases.

### **Research Problem**

Police in the Western Cape, as well as in the greater South Africa, face serious challenges in responding to contact crime, especially murder, with little assistance from police leadership. Plato (2014) (cited in Tsoho 2028) found that South African Police Service (SAPS) officials in the Western Cape are seriously under-resourced. Provincially, the SAPS has a shortage of 1 012 members, and the lack of visible policing in communities does not make matters easier. Without sufficient resources, training, and manpower, the police are unable to reach their goals and perform their duties effectively.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objectives of this research were to:

- determine how the SAPS responds to murder-related cases in the Wallacedene policing area;
- determine the contributing factors that lead to the failure of the police to prosecute offenders;
- determine the effectiveness of current strategies to reduce murder-related incidents in the study area;
- determine the contributing factors to murder in the study area; and
- make recommendations to improve the conviction rate.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Clearance Rates**

The societal impact of murder is exacerbated when cases take a particularly long time to be solved or remain unsolved, which are usually referred to as uncleared cases (Quinet and Nunn 2014). Braga, Turchan and Barao (2019) stated that criminal investigators play an important role in getting justice for crime victims. However, the effectiveness of criminal investigators in solving crimes through arrest has been vigorously debated in the existing crime and justice literature. An uncleared homicide typically means the police have not identified a suspect or do not have enough evidence for arrest. The clearance rate is the percentage of all reported criminal homicides within a jurisdiction that have been cleared by arrest and exception combined (Carter and Carter 2016).

More generally, the police are simply missing essential information about the suspect(s), including the victim-offender relationship, particularly when the identity of the victim is unknown for a period of time (Quinet and Nunn 2014). Police department performance in holding offenders accountable for their crimes is typically measured through clearance rates (Braga et al. 2019). Violent crime in South Africa is a constant occurrence and research shows that it is also a global phenomenon (Granath 2012; Leovy 2015; Mahony, Nakazawa, Funk, James and Gladden 2002; Maguire et al. 2010). Police detectives traditionally define a successful homicide investigation as involving a suspect being identified, charged, and ultimately convicted, preferably for murder (Brookman and Innes 2013). Convictions, often referred to as clearance rates, are one way of indicating how well the criminal justice system is performing (Mofokeng 2018, 2020; South African Law Commission [SALC] 2000).

Beauregard (2019) conducted a study to identify the factors associated with the duration of criminal investigations and to determine whether these factors influence the seriality of sexual murderers. They found that information from 100 unsolved homicides allowed

identification of two classes of sexual homicides: *forensically aware* and *not forensically aware* (*lucky*). The main distinction between the two is the degree of organisation of the murderer. While forensically aware murderers generally exhibit excellent skill at avoiding detection by the police, not forensically aware (*lucky*) murderers appear to pay little attention to protecting their identity (e.g., leaving forensic evidence at the crime scene). While the inability to solve forensically aware homicides is understandable, the inability to solve not forensically aware (*lucky*) ones is not.

### **Selection of Murder Investigators**

One of the main problems with investigative units is their relatively limited resources compared to other areas of police activity. The need to argue for further development of investigative capabilities reflects a level of underdevelopment that is a direct result of past failures to prioritise criminal investigations. It is essential to evaluate how police investigative structures have been designed to respond to concrete problems (Mofokeng 2018). The detectives are the least equipped unit in terms of resources and office accommodation, and the standards have thus been lowered. In some places, detectives are still used to supplement the visible policing members in crime prevention.

Police deployment should be designed to promote smooth cooperation between investigative and patrol police, given that this is essential to resolve many crimes (Mofokeng 2012a, 2012b; Mofokeng and De Vries 2016). Most inquiries involving criminal activities reported to the Community Service Centre stop at the first levels as it is difficult for the detectives to perform their duties. The reason for this is lack of experienced detectives, insufficient numbers of detectives, insufficient logistical resources, and insufficient financial means to fund the Detective Service to retain experienced detectives (Mofokeng and De Vries 2016).

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Qualitative semi-structured interviews are based on a set of predetermined questions, which are the foundation for dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom 2004). Purposive sampling was used, and 25 participants comprised general detective and crime prevention officers performing patrol duties. All participants indicated that they knew both proactive as well as reactive policing, which indicated that all participants were able to share their views and previous experiences.

The Provincial Commissioner granted the first author permission to conduct the research. The participants signed informed consent forms to participate in this study, in which they were notified of the responsible persons (contact details), the purpose of the research, a description of their duties and the requirements, the duration of their participation, any compensation, dangers and benefits, the voluntary nature of participation, and the protection of their privacy. The interviews were conducted by the first author, who guaranteed the anonymity of the participants and ensured that confidentiality was maintained during data collection. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim to ease data analysis. Note-taking was utilised to complement the audio recordings, and provided the first author and the participants an opportunity to clarify any uncertainty during the interviews (Tracy 2013).

Transcription was performed because the first author wanted to retain the participants' original formulations in order to limit premature or subconscious interpretation of the participants' responses. The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes each, and were held with one interviewee at a time. Analysis of the interviews was performed by reading and

rereading the transcripts and looking for common denominators and patterns. The analysis of the interviews was conducted after the literature review had been completed, which means that the first author had prior knowledge of issues related to murder and processes that need to be in place before embarking on the analysis.

Selected passages of the transcribed empirical material were then structured thematically and investigated by looking for similarities and differences between the participants' responses. Furthermore, the empirical material was compared to and analysed with the literature. The empirical material was then adapted to text for the major part of the chosen passages, but the authors retained the verbatim quotation form for passages that were especially interesting to reflect the participants' thoughts and ideas as objectively as possible.

## **Results**

The data analysis produced 12 themes, which are discussed as follows.

### **Theme 1: The Police's Response to Murder-Related Cases**

The majority of the participants pointed out that the response to murder cases is not very effective. Their concern was that less-experienced detectives are tasked to investigate murder cases. This includes the first responder to the murder scene, who may have less experience and who has a responsibility to ensure that the scene is not contaminated. A participant stated that not getting positive results on murder cases demotivates the detectives. According to another participant, the unreliability of witnesses to attend court proceedings strains investigations.

Participant responses that support the above statement are as follows:

*"Murder dockets are given to inexperienced detectives that cause a lot of bad luck in cases that are taken to court, and cases are being withdrawn due to the insufficient evidence, and the insufficient evidence lead[s] to low conviction rate. The inexperienced members who arrive first at the crime scene do not know how to deal with the scene itself and that also leads to the evidence left behind and the scene is destroyed by curious bystander[s] due to the fact that the scene was not properly cordoned off"* (P8).

*"The response is inadequate due to the fact that the community does not want to cooperate with the police. The inadequate resources allocated to the members to do their work properly is also a concern. The inexperienced members, especially first responders, do not know what to do and how to handle a crime scene and not all the information are included in the docket"* (P7).

*"Most of these cases received low conviction rates in court due to lack of evidence. Witnesses are not comfortable to provide the information to the police, hence their safety is not considered a priority"* (P11).

*"The detectives do so many murder cases that they are so bombed and they are so used to not getting positive results due to the public not assisting them with the information"* (P2).

The above quotations indicate that murder cases are investigated by inexperienced detectives and first responders. High levels of inexperienced police officials impact on solving murder cases. An absence of a partnership between the police, the Department of Justice, and the community was also indicated. Since the police are not getting positive results, the SAPS management should create capacity for a partnership between the police, the Department of Justice, and the community. The public's failure to cooperate with detectives has a negative impact and needs to be measured against the poor performance of the criminal justice system, especially when witnesses have provided evidence and information about suspected perpetrators. Melwich and Mofokeng (2020) suggested that discipline, skills, and motivation

among the police are low and that the capacity to investigate cases has been reduced; the police must therefore be well equipped to avoid disorganised investigations that weaken prosecution.

### **Theme 2: The SAPS's Ability to Prevent and Combat Violent Crime**

The majority of the participants highlighted that it is impossible for the police to prevent violent crimes because there is a shortage of resources and the community that they are policing is growing. The participants further raised concerns about murders that are committed at home, and due to socio-economic problems. Lack of trust between the police and the community is a risk factor for the SAPS to prevent and combat violent crime.

The SAPS's inability to prevent and combat violent crime was reported as follows by the participants:

*"The police had enough plans and focus areas to prevent and combat violent crimes. However, there is a lack of experience on grassroot level to see these plans through and to effectively implement those plans. Police ability is affected by manpower. The community involvement is also a big factor in prevention and there should be a trust relationship between the SAPS and the community members"* (P4).

*"The prevention of violent crime goes hand in hand with the community; therefore the absence of communication between the community and police makes it difficult for the police to prevent and combat violent crime. The help of the community, as well as the CPF [Community Police Forum], usually gives the police a better inside information, hence they know their area very well and they know the criminals"* (P10).

*"The prevention of violent crimes is difficult ... due to the fact that such incidents normally happen in-house. Proactive policing therefore is not so effective to prevent such incident[s]"* (P6).

*"Some of the murders took place inside houses that makes it impossible to the police to combat efficiently. Members are tasked to do other operations in the area and therefore police visibility and presence in the area are neglected"* (P9).

*"The resources of the SAPS are poor and the area the police covered has grown largely where the ratio [of] one police officer per 100 people does not justify for any effective policing. With the resources the police are having, it is difficult to prevent crime"* (P11).

*"Manpower is a serious problem in the SAPS with regard to visible policing. Many murders occur in the house environment that is difficult to police. Murders are difficult to police due to the fact that many are a crime that happen at the spur of the moment"* (P5).

The above quotations clearly indicate that lack of communication between the police and the community has a significant effect on preventing violent crime. It appeared to the participants that murders in the home and socio-economic problems make it difficult to police this crime. The findings indicate that the shortage of manpower and resources that the SAPS experiences affects effective prevention and combatting of violent crime. Plato (2014) pointed out that without sufficient resources, training, and manpower, the police are unable to reach their goals and perform their duties effectively. The lack of visible policing that the community is facing exacerbates the situation. Myburgh (2015) highlighted that it was clear that the most vulnerable communities do not have enough police officers to serve them, and that officers are facing increasing workloads.

### **Theme 3: Contributing Factors That Lead to the Failure of the Police to Prosecute Offenders**

The participants indicated a broken relationship between the police, the Department of Justice, and the community. Another concern raised by the participants was improper crime

scene management by first responders to the scene.. Poor investigation and workload have a large impact on failing to prosecute offenders. Some participants said:

*“Lack of witnesses from the communities failed to provide with the information of such crimes. Not proper crime scene management by first responders on the scene of crime. Light sentences in many cases are given by courts due to overpopulation in prison [and] creates the impression that [the] court do[es] not take murder serious[ly]. Nobody holds [the] Department of Justice accountable and that all [is] just thrown back to [the] SAPS. There is no working relationship between the SAPS, Department of Justice, and the Correctional Services” (P5).*

*“The lack of evidence, witnesses who do not go to court when they are warned, and the pressures from the perpetrator’s family members who tend to threaten the potential witness, all those factors hinder the detectives to fail [to] prosecute offenders. The amount of dockets, which range[s] from 150 to 200 per detectives, it makes it impossible to give attention to murder cases” (P8).*

*“An issue of mistrust between the police and the community makes the detectives fail to get full cooperation from the community. Lack of witness protection offered to witnesses willing to testify against the perpetrators. It is difficult to get witness protection and the process is long, what is offered in a day, the people decided not to testify. About 80% of murder[s] took place in Wallacedene area and there is no trust between the police and the community. The police are focusing on closing shebeens and not on building trust and without trust, the detectives will always fail [in] prosecuting offenders” (P4).*

*“Poor investigation by the detectives, lack of evidence to prove murder cases against suspects and poor sentences given, and easy bail [given] by [the] Department of Justice are all contributing factors for the police to fail [to] prosecute offenders” (P6).*

*“The problem that the police have with the justice system is that the courts are too lenient when sentencing the murder offenders. When these offenders see that they can get away with a lesser sentence after murdering a person, they will always continue committing the same crime over and over and this lend[s] to the increase of murder” (P10).*

The above quotations that indicate poor investigation by detectives are confirmed by Madisha, Marks and Machaka’s (2017) study. Madisha et al. (2017) highlighted that the shortage of detectives in the SAPS has been blamed for the unsolved crimes in the country. The shortage of detectives and lack of experienced detectives affect investigations. However, Plato (2014) contended that withdrawal of cases is due to improper investigation by detectives, which is caused by lack of training. Not properly following up on cases or witnesses and missing dockets have a negative impact on solving cases. The findings also indicated that the detectives are insufficiently trained, which impacts negatively on the performance of the justice system. It also appears that light sentences given to murder offenders affect investigations. Mavhivha (2013) posited that murder conviction rates are low, and because murders are often committed by people known to the victim, such crimes are supposed to be the easiest to solve.

#### **Theme 4: Contributing Factors to Murder**

The majority of the participants indicated that the misuse of alcohol has a large impact on murders. Socio-economic factors, youngsters dropping out of school, and unemployment also concerned the participants, and perpetuate murders being committed. Violence and domestic violence could be risk factors that contribute to murder. To support the above statements, some participants said:

*“Socio-economic circumstances, people are poor and alcohol is a major contributor in many cases. Poor conviction rates in courts and light sentences being handed down to the perpetrators due to work overload and prisons [being] overpopulated, that is why we have*

*bundu courts [mob justice], where people take [the] law into their own hands. Lack of education is also one of the contributing factors” (P5).*

*“Uneducated drop-out youngsters from school, socio-economic [factors], use of alcohol, use of drugs, and unemployment also play a big role in this regard” (P11).*

*“People are not willing to dialogue with each other on solving differences in a good manner but instead use violence to solve the problem. Alcohol misuse is also a realistic problem in our community and causes people not to make sober radical decision[s]” (P9).*

*“In many cases, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, domestic issues between partners, [and] lack of morals from the community contribute to murder” (P8).*

*“Nowadays, family violence and domestic-related issues do not get resolved because no one is willing to get to the bottom of the problem. Misuse of alcohol and people cannot limit themselves anymore. Jealousy between people, and people always prefer to use violence to solve the situation” (P6).*

The above quotations demonstrate that misuse of alcohol, drug abuse, use of violence, youngsters who drop out of school, domestic violence, and unemployment are prevalent in the community. It is possible that the community is at risk of becoming victims of murder, especially those who misuse alcohol. These findings should help to focus on future interventions. Zinn (2011) confirmed that crime is motivated by a combination of factors, such as economic factors such as unemployment and poverty, and socio-economic factors such as dysfunctional families, lack of education, substance abuse, availability of dangerous weapons, and people not fearing harsh punishment. It appears that people learned to solve problems with violence during the liberation struggle, which left a scar on the nation. Stevens and Cloete (2004) posited that violence in some cultural groups and certain communities is used as a way of solving problems or meeting their needs.

### **Theme 5: The Effectiveness of Current Strategies to Reduce Murder-Related Incidents**

The majority of the participants were concerned about the approach where crime prevention focuses on stop and searches, arresting people for being in possession of dangerous weapons, and closing of illegal shebeens. A participant commented that it was difficult to reduce murder due to the shortage of manpower. The strategies work but are not very effective because murder continues to be committed. Highlighting the approach to crime prevention using patrols in hotspot areas to reduce murder incidents in the community, some participants said:

*“The strategies are helping but it is not 100%. There is crime prevention that patrols on hotspot areas and they are doing stop and searches. Fifty percent of those murders police can prevent and [the] other 50 percent depend[s] to the community because it is social and some of them took place in the houses where the police cannot prevent [them]” (P1).*

*“Crimes are uncivilised and are prioritised according to the areas and a focused approach. Focus is given to the crime generators like liquor, drugs outlets, and known suspects. Due to the fact that murder is in many areas and it happen[s] at a spur of the moment, it is difficult to police” (P5).*

*“Due to a lack of manpower, we cannot really attend to all our goals and daily task[s] in the community to reduce serious crimes like murder” (P9).*

*“Currently there is no working strategy that can prevent or reduce murder because the relevant stakeholders are talking past one another. The SAPS, Department of Justice, and the community, they need to realise that they need one another for a workable plan to stop or curb the murder rate numbers. All those stakeholders need to seriously talk to one another and not*

*each one has their own plans and from their plans, they are giving the messages. They need to bring all those plans together and be able to reduce these murder incidents” (P11).*

The findings indicate that the current strategies are not very effective as some murders are linked to social factors and domestic violence, which the police are not able to address. Lopez (2016) suggested that the police can play an important role in reducing crime by focusing on hotspot areas.

### **Theme 6: Proper Partnership Between the Police and the Community to Reduce Continuous Killings**

The majority of the participants viewed a partnership between the police and the community as highly lacking. The participants also raised the concern that they believed some police officials are corrupt. There is no trust due to the fact that the community does not feel safe in providing information to the police. Some participants said:

*“There is no partnership because if there was, we would not have so much killings still happening. Although some of the police are really trying ... clearly, it is ... not enough” (P1).*

*“No, the community is hesitant to supply information to the police due to the fear of revenge attacks. The community also has no trust in the police and believes that members of the police are corrupt” (P5).*

*“There is still a lack of trust between the police and the community, especially in underdeveloped areas where murder cases are the highest, like Wallacedene. Once we do not have trust, these people will not trust the police. The police, government, and other stakeholders must interact to get the people to trust the police. Once people start trusting the police and you solve one murder, it [will] hopefully prevent the second murder but if you do not solve six, it leads to ten more. If there is no trust and community relationship, we will never solve or prevent any murder” (P4).*

*“The community does not trust the police at all. The police must hold ongoing meetings with the community to recover the trust. And there is also a feeling of corrupt police officials, then the community feel[s] that they cannot trust the system when it comes to the fact that the offenders get so easily free” (P7).*

*“We [are] sitting within the organisation where there are corrupt police official[s] whereby they supply the criminals with information and even firearms and then the community is now losing faith in the police and they cannot trust them. There are members who are misusing their position and power to gain money from the criminals, which is one of the biggest problems. That is why we cannot have [a] good conviction rate because evidence get[s] lost [and] has been tampered with and that is why the convictions on these offenders are low” (P10).*

The above quotations indicate that the community does not come forward with information because they believe that police officials are corrupt, which is why offenders go free easily. This indicates that giving information to the police could put the community members' lives in danger and that the police are not able to protect them. Lopez (2016) suggested that partnerships with other stakeholders can help and the more those interventions involve partnerships, the more effective those interventions will be. Not only will this reduce crime, but it will do so without displacing it to other areas. Bringing in community partners and focusing on the community's needs can improve crime-fighting efforts and impact.

### **Theme 7: The Effect of Unsolved Murders on the Community**

The majority of the participants highlighted that communities do not come forward with information anymore. Communities losing trust in police officials is a problem that creates a sense of fear among communities, while the police cannot solve murders without their help.

The participants further raised the concern that unsolved murders create distance between the community and the police and that the community feels that the whole criminal justice system is failing them. To support the above statement, some participants said:

*“Lack of trust in the police and that the community believed the police are incapable to perform their duties in a correct manner. The light sentences also create the illusion that there is no justice out there” (P5).*

*“The effect [that] these unsolved murders have on the community is that they are losing trust in the police and without trust, the police will not be able to work hand in hand [with the community]. If there is a gap between the police and the community, it means this will have led to violence whereby the police members as well as the community members can get hurt” (P10).*

*“The unsolved murders led to bigger mistrust in [the police], as [the] system is already failing the community. The police and the Department of Justice are failing the community. If these murders stay unsolved and that the police do not show them that they are capable of solving them, this create a distance because the relationship is not there; hence the whole system is failing them. The community become[s] more fearful to cooperate with the police because the witnesses are getting killed; hence the system is not offering witness protection. For as long [as] the system is failing the community, there will never be trust and the police will never solve murders” (P4).*

*“The community feels that the law is taking too long and many begin to distrust the police. They are not informed from time to time about the status of the docket and when they enquire, they discover that the docket has been withdrawn [and] they tend to take the law into their own hands. The community felt that the police had let them down and they end up committing again another murder” (P8).*

*“The community will not provide [the police] with valuable information because they feel that the police are useless and cannot even solve murder cases” (P9).*

*“The concern is on the ability. If the police are competent and skilled enough for the task to bring closure to the families who suffered the loss of a murdered family member and if not, then there will be always [be] that gap of mistrust between the police and the community” (P11).*

The above quotations indicate that unsolved murders might bring fear to the community with a view that the public often do not trust the police and that some are even scared of the police (City Press 2015a, 2015b).

### **Theme 8: The Effect of Unsolved Murders on the Police**

One of the most serious concerns of the participants was the increased workload of detectives. The common reason that causes detectives to fail to solve murder cases is the fact that the court withdraws cases even if the offender confessed to killing the victim, which leads to the community distancing themselves from the police. These unsolved murders cause frustration for the police because they feel that they fail the community. Some participants said:

*“The detectives [are] already overworked [and] they feel like [they are] failing. They solved lot of murders; however, they have more unsolved than solved murders. The unsolved murder leads to a bigger workload. The justice system is so focused on human rights and is not doing [the detectives any favours], that is why the community does not want to cooperate. The community says the guy is known that he committed murder but he walks freely and that means he will commit another one. That is a bad effect and it defects the detectives’ work” (P4).*

*“The police officials feel frustrated attending to [a] murder scene knowing that the community will not come forward to provide information to identify possible suspects to be*

arrested. People are scared to provide the statements to the police because they know they can become targets and the police are not in a position to safeguard them 24 hours” (P9).

“Murder is not supposed to be closed, undetected, or withdrawn; however, if the murder is not solved, it create[s] [a] big workload to the detectives and basically goes to inquest and it takes time to be finalised” (P1).

“Less information coming through to the police create[s] a sense of hopelessness in members that a murderer is still out there committing another murder” (P5).

“The unsolved murders put a lot of strain on police officials that they have lost [the] trust of the community by not arresting the suspects. These unsolved murders lie for years on the detectives’ table whereby the deceased has already been buried and the family members still do not have closure regarding who is responsible for the murder. Then it brings a lot of confusion whereby the community say[s] the detectives or the police officials are not doing their job proper[ly]; however, seeing the detectives’ workload, it is impossible for them to attend to all those cases in an eight-hour day’s time” (P10).

The above quotations indicate that the detectives felt that they were not doing enough to solve murder cases, which placed a great deal of strain on them, especially when the community did not want to cooperate with them. The other factor noted through analysis was that the workload had an impact on failing to solve murder cases. Stegman (2014) indicated that detectives failing to take dockets to court led to numerous violent crime cases being struck off the court roll, which interfered with the administration of justice. Madisha et al. (2017) confirmed that the pressure that police officials are working under is unbearable. The police are failing to solve high-profile cases, and families who are seeking closure feel like they are let down by the police.

### **Theme 9: The Strategies That Are Currently in Place at Police Stations to Reduce Stabbings**

The participants indicated that the Crime Prevention Unit (CPU) is deployed to hotspot areas where murders via stabbing are usually committed. Taverns or illegal shebeens and people carrying knives dominate many of these cases. The participants’ comments are as follows:

“Stop and searches to retrieve dangerous weapon and closing of the shebeens to ensure that the victims are not targeted. More police visibility in problematic areas and tracing operations of wanted suspects” (P8).

“CPU focused on liquor outlets and arresting people for dangerous weapon[s] is good. If the police focus on people carrying dangerous weapon[s], hopefully the detectives will sit with assault with the intent to cause grievous bodily harm and not with murder cases” (P4).

“Focus [the] approach on arrests of people for dangerous weapon[s] is crime preventative. More visits to licensed liquor premises to ensure compliance with the liquor law. Focused tasking, visibility at known hotspot[s], and identification of known groupings and gangs in the area” (P5).

“Most of the shebeens are illegal so the police concentrate on closing them because most of [the] contact crimes, like robbing of people, usually happen when they are on their way home and 90% are under the influence, so they get robbed and stabbed” (P10).

The above quotations indicate that the CPU focuses on drug outlets, stop and searches, closing illegal shebeens, and patrolling hotspots, which are preventative measures. However, Tswana (2017) indicated that the most effective way to reduce murder is to address the root causes of violence. Murders that can be reduced by effective police action are those caused by conflict between groups and robberies. Developing effective murder reduction strategies should

help South Africa in the near future if the police establish a forum where all data from both governmental and non-governmental organisations can be shared and analysed.

### **Theme 10: Current Training to Empower Police Officials with Necessary Skills to Respond to Murder-Related Cases**

The majority of the participants identified that current training is not adequate. It appears that police officials attending to murder scenes do not have adequate training in crime scene management. This includes safeguarding a crime scene and crowd control to avoid contamination of the scene. Some participants said:

*“The members are not adequately trained, especially first responders to the crime scene. The first responders do not know what to look for, how to write up statements to avoid loopholes when dockets come to court, and valuable evidence is left behind”* (P7).

*“The training is a generic one, which does not focus on murder-related cases only. Therefore, the training is not sufficient to empower the police officials to solve these murder cases. And most of the police officials are sent to the detectives without proper experience or special training in that field”* (P8).

*“Currently, the training of detectives for [a] three-months course is based on investigating any case and [the] focus on the murder case is very small. Detectives should have specialised in murder cases and have attended courses in that regard”* (P4).

*“The current training is not adequate. More focus and training to be given to crime scene management. Senior detectives must be appointed to investigate cases, maybe a murder investigation unit per station who only handles murder cases [must] be established”* (P4).

The quotations above indicate that lack of training of detectives is one of the factors that causes detectives to fail in murder investigations. The available training is based on investigating every case and the focus on murder is very small. It appears that appointing experienced detectives and providing crime scene management to members are the key to successful murder investigations. Madisha et al. (2017) confirmed that lack of experienced detectives is a challenge, where detectives who used to handle shoplifting cases are now handling murder dockets, for which they have no experience or training. It is important that the detectives are fully equipped with experience and resources if they are to increase the numbers of murders solved. Ensuring dedicated forensic capacity is also important to assist the detectives in identifying possible suspects, particularly if there are no witnesses.

### **Theme 11: Better Provision by the Government for Police Officials to Perform Better When Responding to Murder-Related Cases**

The majority of the participants commented that the government must recruit more specialists to assist detectives in investigating murder cases. It appears from the participants' responses that the government should upgrade the technology and the standard of training of police officials. Motivating the detectives by paying allowances can also serve as a coping mechanism for the detectives. Some of the participants' comments are as follows:

*“The government needs to bring in [a] special investigative unit; hence murder cases have increased over the years. Very little success on murder cases or convictions due to lack of evidence or witnesses and some murder cases are even cold, [a] more specialised unit needs to be implemented to bring closure to these cold cases”* (P11).

*“Better tools to do the job proper of crime scene management. Appoint more specialists in the detective branch”* (P5).

*“Upgrading of technology, better resources, proper training, and ongoing courses regarding murder-related cases should be provided to the detectives”* (P7).

*“The government needs to subcontract specialists in murder-related cases to assist detectives with specialised investigation. Special equipment to assist in investigation must be [made] available to assist detectives” (P6).*

*“Better training for detectives by focusing on detectives that will work only on solving murder-related cases. Giving the detectives allowances for working [on] standby and public holidays or pay the detectives specialising in solving murder-related cases. The government must put money into bettering the detectives and assisting uniformed members responding to [a] crime scene, because if you do not have crime scene management, you lose [a] lot of evidence, which helps in building up cases in situations*

The above quotations indicate that the SAPS must improve the detective branch by supplying it with a special investigative unit. Better training, specialised equipment, advanced technology, and paying allowances are the key to detectives responding better to murder-related cases. Madisha et al. (2017) indicated that shortages of detectives in the SAPS have been blamed for the unresolved crimes in the country, which has a disastrous impact on the government’s crime-fighting measures. Experienced detectives are also leaving the force for better remuneration in the private sector.

### **Theme 12: Improvement of the Service by the SAPS in Responding to Murder-Related Cases**

It emerged that the participants viewed continuous training courses as very important. The participants further indicated that the more competent police officials are in responding to murder cases, the more confidence the community will have in them. It appears that adequate crime scene management, better resources, recruiting specialists to deal with murder cases, building community trust, and better training for detectives are key to how detectives respond to murder-related cases. Some participants said:

*“Training on crime scene management and proper supervision by a detective superior” (P6).*

*“Basic crime scene management must be taught at all levels. Thorough investigation must be done before the perpetrator is arrested. The increase of skilled detectives to problematic stations to assist in solving murder-related cases” (P8).*

*“Quicker response to a scene in securing the crime scene to avoid contamination of the crime scene and more manpower [are] needed. Witnesses to be placed in witness protection programmes and providing of proper victim support” (P9).*

*“The SAPS must equip members with crime scene management courses. Better communication with the community by working on building the trust again between the police and the community. Improving the working relationship with [the] Department of Justice” (P5).*

*“Better training for all, especially the detectives, better crime scene management, and a better relationship with the community and Department of Justice [must] be established” (P4).*

The above quotations indicate that crime scene management training must be provided to police members to avoid contaminating crime scenes. The other factor noted through analysis was to work on building a relationship between the criminal justice system and the community to improve murder investigations. Mofokeng (2020), Aphané and Mofokeng (2021) confirmed that the police must be well equipped to avoid disorganised investigations that weaken prosecution. Geberth (2006) posited that the first responder to a murder crime scene plays an important role and his/her actions are crucial to successful investigations. In order to reduce the high rates of murder, it is important to use only qualified professionals who are well trained and have practical experience in investigating homicide cases.

### Conclusion

This study explored perceptions regarding contributing factors for the police to fail to prosecute offenders. The majority of the participants identified that inexperienced detectives, first responders contaminating the crime scene, and low conviction rates have a significant effect on failing to prosecute offenders. Appointing experienced detectives, providing crime scene management training to members, and implementing a best practice approach for securing evidence on a crime scene are key to successful murder investigations. As highlighted earlier, it appears that resource shortages in the organisation are a concern, as the findings indicated that the shortage of manpower and resources affected the SAPS in effectively preventing and combatting violent crimes. Mofokeng (2020) suggested that it is essential to equip detectives with experience and resources to increase the numbers of murders they solve. Reducing murders and ensuring successful prosecution require other stakeholders to intervene since the police alone cannot handle the situation.

The majority of the participants highlighted a lack of partnerships as a constraint. The SAPS management should therefore create capacity for increased partnerships between the police, the Department of Justice, and the community. In this study, community members were not interviewed to explain why they do not want to cooperate with the police. There is thus a need for further research that will focus on the opinions of the community. From the above discussion, it can be concluded that problems encountered by the study exist in the Wallacedene policing area in the Western Cape province. These findings may be helpful by making clear the contributing factors to the police failing to prosecute offenders, which can be used to provide successful prevention programmes and to resolve encountered problems. Surprisingly, very little research has been conducted on the determinants of clearance rates for murder in South Africa. The review of existing literature found no comparative studies and no systematic attempts to understand the determinants of clearance rates. While there has been some speculation about what affects clearance rates, this speculation has not involved systematic research, which presents an opportunity for further research.

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