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An Assessment of the Role of Management to Sufficiently Ensure Security Access at Hercules SAPS since 2018 to Prevent Attacks on Members at the Station

¹ Yesufu S, ² Ndala TV

¹ Postgraduate Supervisor, Department of Policing, Stadio Higher Education Krugersdorp, South Africa

² Postgraduate Student, Department of Policing, Stadio Higher Education Krugersdorp South Africa

Corresponding Author: **Yesufu S**

Abstract

South Africa is faced with the problem of police station robberies. Very few studies have been conducted to understand this problem. In 2018 five police officers and a retired South African National Defence Force member (SANDF) lost their lives when they were fatally shot during a robbery at Ngcobo police station situated in the Eastern Cape province. Therefore, this study aims to assess, understand, and create a framework of processes and procedures

that management at Hercules police station must undertake to prevent attacks on members at the station. Police Station robberies are becoming a common trend in South Africa. Reports of these police station robberies indicate that these criminals/robbers were targeting firearms, be it those that members carry, those belonging to the SAPS, or even those that are kept in the police station as exhibits or those which are being processed for destruction.

Keywords: Police Safety, Crime Prevention Methods, Loss of Firearms, Crime Elements, Causes of Crime

Introduction

South African Police Service

The South African Police Service (SAPS) is a government department that is established in terms of the SAPS Act 68 of 1995, mandated by Section 205 (3) of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996. To prevent, combat, and investigate crime; maintain public order; protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic of South Africa and their properties; to uphold and enforce the law.

South African Police Service Police Stations

A police station is a South African Police Service (SAPS) facility that is built/established in a community to ensure that resources needed to render policing and law enforcement services that are needed in the community are available in proximity. With different buildings/offices and sections such as the Client/Community Service Centre (CSC), Cells, Exhibit room, Support office/Station Management section. Services rendered at police stations include but are not limited to, reporting crimes, certifying legal documents, assisting community members with affidavits, escort duties, providing temporary refuge for stranded people, and if there is a need to stop and search a delivery vehicle for whatever reason, most delivery companies will have a sticker affixed to the body of their delivery vehicle with information or instructions which state that the driver must proceed to the nearest police station and stop there, giving an impression that the police station is a haven.

Background to the problem

The South African Police Service (SAPS) is a government organization that is responsible for the safety and security of South Africans, established in terms of the Constitution of South Africa under the SAPS Act 68 of 1995, mandated by Section 205 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. It aims to prevent, combat, and investigate crime; maintain public order; protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic and their property, and uphold and enforce the law. Police stations are meant to be a haven where people may go for help with the world's problems with crime (Etsebeth, 2019). There is an understandable assumption that police stations are a place of safety; therefore, there is no need to have strong security to protect the police stations and their members. However, criminals in South Africa have displayed an unprecedented amount of disregard for authority and the law to the point where they brazenly enter police stations armed with firearms and rob those

inside. Currently, most SAPS police stations do not have access control, including Hercules SAPS, some do not even have fences/walls/gates on the Client Service Centre which is a section of the whole police station that in most station structural designs links and gives access to other offices and buildings of the whole police station, which means that anyone can enter the police station without resistance or security assessment. At some police stations, you enter the Client Service Centre (CSC), and you will find a counter that separates the police officers and civilians or members of the public only. This design presents an opportunity for robbers to gain access, subdue the members, and threaten their lives. According to Criminal Procedure Act 52 of 1977, armed robbery is also known as robbery with aggravating circumstances in legalese. While carrying a weapon, a robbery is being perpetrated. Being armed simply implies possessing a weapon of some sort, most often a gun, however armed robbery may also include a knife or another dangerous device.

(Wilson, 2018) Sowetan news headline reads: Five police officers killed in attack on Eastern Cape police station which might have to send given shock to most police officers as they reflected from on that incident at personal viewpoint. After the Ngcobo SAPS incident, the SAPS top management developed the Police Safety Strategy 2020, which was implemented in 2021. The strategy guides the integrated efforts to address attacks on police officers and places a responsibility on SAPS station/unit commanders to prevent police attacks in the police stations and against its members. This also is in line with the employer's constitutional obligation, according to the SAPS National Instruction 1 of 2008, a regulation of implementing the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1993 (Act 85 of 1993). The Act states that the employer (SAPS) must, where reasonably and practically possible, provide and maintain a safe, healthy workplace without risk to the employees. It appears by observation of the security deficiencies, lack of access control, and old design of police stations that the management of may not be complying with this Police Safety Strategy. This study will endeavour to understand how this happens and what causes the non-compliance with the Police Safety Strategy and the SAPS National Instruction 1 of 2008 and explore the possible dangers of failing to comply with these obligations.

(Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022) further states that there are many firearms in criminal hands in South Africa. Historically, South Africa's firearms were trafficked across regional boundaries; however, the domestic market for illegal firearms has mostly taken over in recent years. There is a constitutional responsibility for the SAPS to enforce the law against illegal firearms and ammunition to combat violent crimes. According to Statistical South Africa, 2023 indicates that the official unemployment rate in South Africa for the first quarter of 2023 was 32, 9% which is approximately 7.9 million unemployed people (Smit, 2023). Economic challenges and social deprivation are noticeable influencers of crime. It is important to note that there is a growing trend of robberies occurring at police stations in South Africa, between 2019 and 2021, 13 police stations have been robbed, and firearms were the main target (BUSINESSSTECH, 2022). This is because criminals use firearms to commit crimes such as armed robbery, car hijacking, murder, and cash-in-transit heists as a means of survival, making a living, and funding

lavish lifestyles. This study will endeavor to understand the role and responsibility of the management at Hercules SAPS in creating a safe police station by preventing robbery incidents from occurring at the police station, in line with the implementation of the approved integrated police safety strategy which was approved by the former National Commissioner of the SAPS on the 23rd of March 2021.

Problem Statement

A report from (BusinessTECH, 2022) indicates from 2018/2019 to 2020/2021 financial year 13 police stations were robbed in South Africa, and these are the firearms that were taken; 40 x 9mm Pistols, 4 were recovered representing 10% recovery, 24 x R5 rifles robbed, with a recovery of 6 or 25%, and 15 x 12-Gauge Shotguns robbed with a recovery of 7 or 47%. This suggests that police stations have become the go-to place for criminals when they want firearms. The Minister of Police delivered the fourth quarter 2021/22 crime statistics which reveal that contact crimes which include murder, attempted murder, armed robbery, and cash-in-transit robberies were on the increase, and the instruments that were used are firearms.

Research Approach

The qualitative research methodology will be considered in the endeavour to interact with members of Hercules SAPS to determine their experience working at the police station and how they feel about their safety whilst working in Hercules SAPS.

Research Objectives

Primary:

- To assess the current level of secure access control at Hercules SAPS.
- To analyze if the current security measures can prevent the occurrence of a station robbery.
- To assess if the current design of the police station can protect the lives of police officers and employees working in the station.
- To study the SAPS National Instruction 1 of 2008, which regulates the implementation of the Occupational Health and Safety Act 1993 (Act 85 of 1993), analyze the Police Safety Strategy 2020, which came into effect in 2021, and compare it with the current status quo at Hercules SAPS.

Secondary:

- To understand the Hercules SAPS management structure, its roles, and its responsibilities.
- To understand the processes and procedures of management in the SAPS and at Hercules SAPS concerning facility management and access control.
- To understand the views and perspectives of the members at Hercules SAPS about the current security of the station.
- Explore existing legislation that regulates the safety of employees in the workplace.
- To create safe, secure, and friendly access for members of the public in case of emergency.

Research Approach and Methodology

Approach

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative design since the research is based on an interactive

approach. The narrative approach will be used, due to the research question(s) or problem(s) that involve individuals and their experiences. It is suitable to employ this approach since the researcher interviews police officers, collects data and information from personal views and responses from research participants, and discusses and describe the workplace experiences of police officers and other employees at the station.

(Fouche, *et al.*, 2021) Explains that the qualitative method addresses issues related to the complex character of events to explain and understand a phenomenon from the participants' perspective. The explorative nature of qualitative research often allows the researcher to build on their observations to develop a hypothesis. Therefore, access control and security of Hercules SAPS thus becomes an observation point for the researcher and the management of the police station facility, safe locations.

Research Design/Paradigm

According to (Fouche, *et al.*, 2021) a research design is a rational plan for acquiring data to support desired knowledge. It must be effective, which means that the knowledge sought will be obtained; it must be the most straightforward, least expensive technique of getting the knowledge; it must be acceptable to all stakeholders (including clients); and it must be as methodologically "tight" as feasible.

Therefore, in qualitative research exploratory, descriptive, and predictive research designs will be considered in this study to understand the management processes at Hercules SAPS and to assess the current safety and security of the station as well as to the prevention of possible and predictable incidents of police station robberies.

Target Group/Population

The total population of Hercules police station staff is 58 (excluding detectives who are accommodated in a different building located not far from the police station), managers (comprising of male and female officers including the station commander), 44 police officers (male and female, with different age groups) working in 4 groups/shifts of 11 members per shift. Lastly, 8 Public Service Act (PSA) employees which include, the secretary of the station commander, cleaners, and support administrative clerks may or may not be significant for this study based on their working hours/operational schedule.

Sample

According to (Fouche, *et al.*, 2021) the sampling theory a small sample of observations can provide a general picture of what can be anticipated in the study's intended study group. The intended sample frame of this study is to observe a smaller number of members of Hercules SAPS that will be a representation of the whole station. It consists of management and support services which include supply chain management, finance, and human resource management, police officers working client services, firearms registry, evidence office, and crime prevention. For this study, the researcher will consider a sample of 08 members working shifts, 2 members from each shift gender distribution will be fairly considered, and one member from SCM and one manager at the station.

Sampling Technique

A probability sample in a stratified sampling will be used to ensure that all members are divided into their groups. Members will be randomly selected, giving everyone a chance to be chosen. Although probability sampling is best suitable when applied in a quantitative research design, for this study, it is used because the problem of safety and security can be observed from an assessment of any person working in the police station and does not require a team of experts to understand or a target group that is sought after.

Police station robberies are becoming a common trend in South Africa. Reports of these police station robberies indicate that these criminals/robbers were targeting firearms, be it those that members carry, those belonging to the SAPS, or even those that are kept in the police station as exhibits or those which are being processed for destruction (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022). However, in one unfortunate and terrible incident, criminals robbed firearms and murdered five on-duty police officers and a retired soldier (Etsebeth, 2019).

In this evaluation of the literature, the researcher will consult and analyze written material that is already available relating to Police safety, Access control, Occupational health and safety, and the problem of illegal firearms in the country, including media reports, SAPS reports, and directives, policies, and procedures, to gain a more thorough understanding of the nature and origins of the SAPS. Undocumented information will also be considered if it complies with the law, upholds fundamental human rights, adheres to the SAPS code of conduct, and fosters personnel and data security. The next section will deliberate more on Police stations.

Police Stations

A police station is a state facility built/established in a community to guarantee that the resources required to provide policing and law enforcement services to the community are nearby. This is supported by (Joseph, 2017) following the SAPS mandate towards the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP), which seeks, among other things, to ensure greater access to and improvement in the quality of public services for the people of South Africa, the Dysseldorp police station was built and established to serve 16 000 residence and 31 farms, according to the then-acting National Police Commissioner Lt Gen Phahlane.

Police Station Architectural Designs

Most police stations are designed in this way, the police station will be a building mostly immovable/fixed structure with the following sections, a client/community service center (CSC), Exhibit office, Support and administration block, detention cells, kitchen (for preparation of food for the detained individuals), restrooms, some might have a boardroom, storeroom and some will have the detectives block as well.

The exhibit office

Also known as the SAPS 13 office is where all evidence and exhibits are safely kept. Items such as confiscated firearms, cellphones, knives, documents, money, drugs, and any other item which was recovered/seized and is/was a subject of crime. In some stations, second-hand goods are also

administered and controlled from this office. This office is often secured with good security doors and strong concrete walls making it difficult but not impossible to break into and, the control of that office is often given to one individual for accountability purposes.

The Client/Community Service Centre (CSC)

This is an important section of the police station which is mostly located at the front of the entire building, in which all members of the public will first find themselves. The CSC is where most police operations are managed and controlled.

Safes

Safes are strong and well-secure containers that are used to store firearms, ammunition, hand radios, pyrotechnics, explosives, and keys to other safes, offices, and buildings such as detention cells. These facilities are legally accounted for by the station commander; however, the station commander will delegate the office of supply chain management, and facility management to manage and control the facilities in terms of maintenance, security, and serviceability. The management of the contents in the safes will mostly fall under the control and management of SCM while some will be under the control of the exhibit management office.

Firearms

South African Government, 2014 defines a bylaw and scientific specifications as a device manufactured or designed to propel a bullet or projectile through a barrel or cylinder through burning propellant, at muzzle energy exceeding 8 joules (6 ft-lbs); a device manufactured or designed to discharge rim-fire, center-fire or pin-fire ammunition; a which is not at the time capable of discharging any bullet or projectile, but which can be readily altered to be a firearm; device manufactured to discharge a bullet or any other projectile of .22 caliber or higher at muzzle energy of more than 8 joules (6 ft-lbs), through compressed gas and not through burning propellant; or barrel, frame or receiver of a device.

A firearm and ammunition must, per the Act, be kept in a strong room or gun safe that complies with SANS 953-1 or 2 anytime they are not in the license holder's or in direct control of a member who has been assigned to with the said firearm and ammunition for the execution of their duties. This, therefore, compels police stations to have safes to store these firearms in line with the act. Safes are often placed within the police station building, particularly in the strong room which is accessed from the CSC. These safes will possess all types of firearms needed for the execution of duties by the police members.

Unemployment as an influence on crime

When a country experiences a period of high unemployment a lot of pressure is felt by its citizens as the means of survival become more and more challenging to those that do not have income. This is often related to economic conditions which are not producing enough employment opportunities and do not allow private businesses to expand and create jobs for people to be able to take care of themselves and their families.

Unemployment levels

Reports from the government department Statistics South Africa indicate that the official unemployment rate was at 32,7% in the final quarter of 2022, which is approximately 7.5 million people, which is a 2.6% improvement from the 2021 final quarter report (Mail & Gardian, 2023). A report in the Daily Maverick (2022) further states that youth unemployment in South Africa is at an astounding 65.5% which is a 1% less difference from the 66.5% reported by the office of the President.

Causes of crime

Crime is caused by several factors including unemployment and poverty. According to Mr. H.S. Kubende (2018:17), it is challenging for little-educated rural immigrants to get a well-paying job because of their lacking skills and knowledge in the competitive job market. Even most tertiary graduates struggle to secure employment. Mr H.S. Kubende (2018:18), further states that the high unemployment rate of young people harms the law enforcement capability to combat crime effectively and efficiently as they are faced with overwhelming commission of crime. Therefore, there is a noticeable relationship between the challenges of economic decline, unemployment, poverty, and crime.

Consequences of crime

In the SAPS annually there is a mass parade that is held in commemoration of all police officers who died in the line of duty which is held at the Union Buildings. This is also (Kempen, 2022) considered as part of police killings, and a consequence of crime against the police Those who survive these incidences often struggle with healing from the traumatic event and will often sink into anxiety and depression which is not healthy considering the stressful nature of policing. The ability of the state to enforce its laws and the public's belief in the SAPS's capacity to carry out its constitutional duty of battling crime are both compromised by an assault on or killing of a police officer. (Pienaar, 2020)

Police attacks

(South African Police Service Visible Policing, 2014) police attacks refer to the unlawful acts of violence directed towards an employee of the SAPS, police vehicle, or police premises which includes mobile CSC, home of police employees. The Minister of Police Minister Bheki Cele and the former National Commissioner have made public announcements that the attacks and murders of police officials are a call for great concern. The incident at the Ngcobo SAPS and other incidents around the country show how serious this problem is.

Loss of life

Firearms are tools/equipment which can be replaced, but the worrying factor to consider in these police stations attacks is the loss of human life, the lives of the members working in the police station, and the lives of innocent community members that can be found in the police station for services they need. The SAPS annually hosts a commemoration ceremony of all police officers who died in the line of duty which is held at the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

According to the South African Police Service, 2018, Minister Bheki Cele said in his speaker notes *"Since taking over as the Minister of Police late February 2018, I have, almost every weekend, attended about 27 funeral services of our members. This cannot be right. In 2021 the Police Safety Plan was approved for implementation with the intent to proactively create interventions to address police attacks and create intense safety of all police stations, buildings, premises, and infrastructure. The Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993 the employer must where reasonably practicable, provide and maintain a safe, healthy work environment that is without risk to employees.*

Robbing Police stations for firearms

When criminals rob a police station of firearms and ammunition, a probable conclusion can be drawn that those criminals will most likely commit serious and violent crimes. (Makungo, 2022) 10 suspects appeared in the Magistrate court in Limpopo in connection to the robbery of the Malamulele Police Station and more than 100 offenses in Limpopo. After stealing 14 different firearms from the station, they committed 9 more crimes in the vicinity of the police station on the same night.

Police Stations have become "a large source of illegal firearms" where 78 firearms and 982 ammunition have been robbed from the 13 police stations between 2018 and 2021 with the recovery of only 17 firearms. (Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022) also states that Between 2002/2003 and 2018/19, 26 277 police-issued firearms were reported lost or stolen, according to available data. 18 538 of these were lost or stolen during the eight years following 2002/2003, but only 7 739 were lost or stolen during the nine years that followed, up until 2018/19. Risk management within the SAPS is applied within the context of section 38 a (i) of the Public Financial Management Act (Act 1 of 1999). Risks identified include Fraud and Corruption. Many firearms in the country are in the hands of criminals. There is a concerning number of those firearms that were once the property of the state and some of these were obtained by criminals through the corruption that some members of the state were involved in.

Corruption

Chapter 2 of the Prevention and Combating of Corrupt Activities Act, 2004 (Act 12 of 2004) states that a person commits an offense of corruption when they provide, receive, or agree to give or take any gratification that amounts to an unauthorized or inappropriate incentive to behave or refrain from acting in a certain way. Oxford Dictionary corruption defines as the dishonest or fraudulent actions by people in positions of authority in most cases involving bribery. The SAPS has been faced with a problematic situation where some of its members engage in unlawful business with criminals. Additionally, some reports such as (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022) indicate that members of SAPS, the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), and the private security sector contributed to some of the criminals' firearms.

As stated by (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2022); (Molepo, 2020) the former Colonel Prinsloo illegally sold over 2400 firearms to gang members in Cape Town. He was arrested, charged, and convicted to 18 years in prison after pleading guilty to 11

charges that were put on him. In 2015 a member of the SAPS was suspended after stealing firearms and supplying them to hitmen that were hired by bosses of a rival taxi association. One person that is associated with violence in the taxi industry indicated that they buy firearms from army officials and some firearms are bought from private security companies.

This gives birth to a problem of possession of illegal or Prohibited firearms (Bharath, 2023) as defined by the Firearms Control Act 60 of 2000 which states that the following firearms may not be possessed or licensed in terms of the Act. Any fully automatic firearm (e.g., high caliber rifles such as the AK47), any firearm with its serial number or identification mark has been removed or changed without written permission from the registrar. Any person who possesses a firearm that belongs to the state without the concerned state institution's permission is in possession of an illegal firearm. That is in the instance where the person is found in possession, the biggest problem is that no tracking device can locate a firearm and any person who possesses a loaded firearm can commit further crime.

Ability is the physical capability of the person to commit the crime, their bodily features, and structure. Lastly, opportunity which are conditions that are conducive for the crime to be committed in combination of desire and ability elements. For this study, the focus is on eliminating the element of opportunity as it is a critical element to address, and it is practically achievable to prevent attacks on members at Hercules SAPS police stations.

The opportunity to commit armed robberies in police stations is presented by the physical structure and level of security of the police stations. Currently, the SAPS has 1 154 stations wide and most of them are in the same condition as they were first built, some have been improved to be user-friendly for persons with disabilities. The robbing of 13 police stations since 2018 indicates that there is still much that needs to be done in terms of security upgrades. Hercules will be assessed to determine if it has sufficient security to prevent possible robberies and address the element of Opportunity to commit the crime.

Environmental Design

Crime prevention through environmental design research by (Al-Ghiyadh & Neamah Al-Khafaji2, 2021) research about Crime prevention in the urban environment and approaches for manipulating behavior through environmental alteration has passed through numerous disciplines such as urban planning, sociology, architecture, and criminology. The study focuses on the modification of the architecture or physical structure of Hercules police station in addressing crime prevention through environmental design. This requires the management of the SAPS to put in place measures to prevent criminals from attacking police stations and police officers. Police officers who were taught and trained in crime prevention during Basic Police Development Learning Program (BPDLD) know that for crime to take place, three elements need to be present, as stated by (SAPS HRD, 2011) these are the same desire, opportunity, and ability as stated by (Glenn, n.d.).

Improving environmental design to prevent police station robberies.

The way to disrupt these elements of crime is to consider crime prevention from an environmental design perspective. (Geldenhuys, 2019) expounds that Target-Hardening is a

process of reducing the vulnerable state of a potential target. In this study the physical strengthening and installing security measures that will require increased effort to commit the crime of police station robberies by criminals, reducing the risk of harm to the members and give them an advantage to fight back and prevent the loss of their lives, firearms, and any other property of the state.

Access control

According to (South African Police Service, 2019) Access Control is a process in which several measures are applied to make the SAPS premises safe by ensuring that any object or person requiring access to premises is safe; has a *bona fide* reason to enter; is entitled and authorized thereto; and will not expose the SAPS and its employees to danger or security breaches.

Doorewaard (2019) attests to this statement by stating that environmental design also called situational control, is a prevention effort that reduces the opportunities for criminals to commit crimes. Banks in South Africa suffered a lot of robberies which saw many employees' lives at risk. This led to banks improving their access control and security measures which caused a dramatic decline in robberies at the banks. The management of Hercules SAPS can apply the same strategies of reinforcing security at the station to prevent potential attacks on the station.

If you consider the design of most post office facilities you will realize that their design is preventative of anticipated crimes as the post office was built and made to facilitate the transport and distribution of posts, packages, and sometimes money to receivers of such posts or goods. You would find a counter which is either protecting the teller through bulletproof glass, which is like the one found in most banks, especially in the teller section (Anonymous, 2023). Some shops such as PEP have also adopted some security measures such as a barrier in the form of burglar-proof bars separating the teller and customer because of the robberies they've experienced since they introduced their postage services.

Access control

The SAPS national instruction 17 of 2019 is aimed at creating a risk-free environment through the protection of personnel, property, and information, and to foster uniformity in the execution of access and egress control measures for the protection of personnel, property, and information. This is complemented by (Mbobu, 2023) who stated that in the unit in which he is heading, he observes a six-pillar strategy toward the safety of his members which is in line with the police safety strategy. Safety of the facility and infrastructures, proactive interventions, reactive interventions, governance, monitoring and evaluation, and support interventions.

Entry/exit screening

To ensure that every person that walks into the police station is properly and thoroughly screened metal detecting walk-through scanners like the one used in the airport can be installed to detect any potential weapons for police officers to respond and react accordingly.

Limitations

(de Vos, *et al.*, 2013) every study has its limitations which may necessitate the researcher to list the limitations, to be

cognisant of these limitations. In this study, the limitations which have been identified are the distance to be travelled to meet and interview the participants, obtaining certain policies that govern the management of the police station, communication and conducting of the research is governed by a coordinated request to relevant authorities and not direct from researcher to participants. The research instrument that will be used for this study (interview schedule) (de Vos, *et al.*, 2013) carries some limitations as interviews take a personal interaction making cooperation very important.

Conclusion

The attack on police officers in South Africa taking place at police stations is very alarming for citizen in state of fear and anxiety. There is imperative need for the government and police leadership must invest more on the security systems and technology in all police station in South Africa. Criminal gangs seem to be targeting police stations for firearms. The fear and anxiety on citizens are that if policemen are being under attack and physical assaulted where does live ordinary and defenceless citizens?

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