Endangered in Service: Fatal Risks for JMPD Officers: The Community's Role in Protecting Protectors

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Abstract

The Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD) is one of the largest metropolitan police organisations in South Africa. This article focuses on the community's role in protecting the police. This study was conducted to illuminate the impact of police killings, the public's role and contribution in this undeclared 'war' against the police, and the role of the community in the reduction and inhibition of police deaths within the JMPD. A case study design was utilised to select thirty-two participants. Research was conducted, findings interpreted, and ponderings held. The results revealed that the killing of police officers has profound and multifaceted impacts on both the community and the economy. The death of a police officer not only disrupts the immediate family but also affects the broader police community, highlighting the need for enhanced safety measures and community support for law enforcement. The community can also play a critical role in ensuring the safety and effectiveness of law enforcement officers while actively participating in their own safety and security. Comprehensive support systems for police officers and their families are essential to address their emotional and practical challenges.

Keywords: Community, economy, police officer, safety, and security

Introduction

The duty of police officers around the world involves the eradication or combating of crime, protecting the lives and property of citizens, and maintaining law and order as reflecting the uprightness of the State (Longley, 2020:1). The well-being and success of all law enforcement officers is a concern because they are human beings who are yearning to serve their community (Marx and Friedman, 2025:58). In South Africa, the pre-1994 history and image of policing are associated with brutal repression against resistance to apartheid (Burger, 2015:77; Madzivhandila, 2019:16). However, the post-1994 democratic dispensation has attempted to change the negative image of policing by changing the system from a brutal "force" to a "service" to the community (Motsepe, 2019:22). Despite various reform efforts, and repeated calls for an end to the scourge of killing of metropolitan police

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officials, the overall number of police killings has remained high, indicating a need for more effective measures to address this issue. In March 2025, only, four (4) Metro Police were murdered, and the suspects are still at large.

This article focuses on the role that the community can play in protecting the police. This study was conducted with the aim of illuminating the impact of police killings, the public's role and contribution in this undeclared 'war' against the police, and the role that the community can play in the reduction and prevention of police killings within the JMPD. This article is organised as follows: Following the introduction is the literature review, which sheds light on police killings, the impact of police killings on colleagues, family, the community, and the role that the community can play in reducing police killings. This is followed by research methodology, findings, and a discussion.

Brief discussion and background

"Our cities are war zones, our country is in turmoil and police officers are being hunted in the streets" (Gamaldi, as quoted by Landen, 2022). Maguire, Nix & Campbell (2016:16) posit that the war against the police is troublesome not only for the police but also for the communities they serve. Ultimately, a war on cops could result in an insecure, unsafe society. In a Newsweek article, Landen (2022) highlights that in 2022, there were 1 192 police killings in the United States. This number reflects an increase in police-related fatalities. The Newsweek article also points out that the presence of guns in incidents involving the police has contributed to the rise in these killings. Similarly, the killing of JMPD police officers within the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) has recently gained attention because of how it affects the public's trust in the local governance system and its capacity to control crime (Thusi, 2018:116).

Every instance in which a police officer is killed in the line of duty constitutes a tragedy (Maguire et al., 2016:16). The persistent and extremely high level of police killings in South Africa has become one of the most disturbing attributes of police organisations (South African Police Union/ SAPU, 2019, SAPS, 2020:1). The spate of police killings is taking place in the context of the incessant risks and pressure under which they work, such as the constant possibility of being attacked by dangerous criminals (Bruce, 2016:7; Kwinika, 2019:1). According to the JMPD (2023: n.p.), the period between 2017 and 2023 witnessed a high rate of 40 police officers being killed in the JMPD organisation, which starkly contrasts with 26 TMPD police killings and 18 in the EMPD. According to the JMPD New Deaths System (2023: n.p.), 40 police officers were killed on and off duty for the period 2017 to 2023. Ten (10) of these police officers were killed on duty, while 30 were killed off duty. Of these 40 officers, 35 were male police officers and 5 (five) were female. Established in March 2001, the functions and roles of the JMPD (known as a municipal police service before 2001) are delineated in its seven (7) units: the academy, auxiliary services, by-law management, internal affairs, regional operations, fines and administration and specialised services. Furthermore, the JMPD is legislated by section 205(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996); the South African Police Service (SAPS) Amendment Act 68 of 1995; the Local Government Systems Act (LGSA) 32 of 2000 (South African

Police Service, 2020); the Administrative Adjudication of Road Traffic Offences Act 46 of 1998 (AARTO); the Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) 51 of 1977; and the National Road Traffic Act (NRTA) 93 of 1996 (Van Zyl-Gous, 2019:1).

The Newsweek article (Landen, 2022) discusses the ongoing issue of police killings in the U.S., noting that the number of police killings has increased. The same is true for South Africa within the JMPD, besides many instances of disregard for law and order by motorists and some members of the public. The role of increased gun presence in police incidents and the limited success of reform efforts in reducing police killings and increasing accountability is a concern (Landen, 2022).

Literature review (Theoretical and conceptual framework)

Danger, either in a present or imminent form, is embedded in law enforcement. During their training, police officers are reminded that survival on the streets is paramount and that even routine incidents may escalate to potentially life-threatening ones. In addition, police equipment (e.g., body armour, firearms, tasers) and protective elements (e.g., bulletproof windows in police cruisers) serve as further reminders that officer or civilian safety may be jeopardised at any point; thus, preparedness for survival is crucial. To this end, law enforcement officers are sworn and mandated to respond to critical incidents whereas, during those situations, civilians escape or receive help from emergency workers (Blumberg, Collins, Papazoglou, Schlosser, & Bonanno, 2020: n.p.).

The general high level of violent crime in the South African society is another cause of police killings currently occurring (Bruce, 2002:16). The nature of the work done by the police officers and the risk thereof expose them to danger and make them vulnerable to on-duty killings (Moyane, 2008:62). Minnaar (2003:6) posits that the lack of respect shown to police officials further contributes to the high rate of police killings. It is broadly accepted that law enforcement officers respond to a myriad critical incidents over the course of their careers, and their exposure to death-related situations may either be direct (e.g., shooting situations, dead body at a crime scene) or indirect (e.g., writing reports, participating in judicial procedures) (Blumberg et al., 2020: n.p.).

The impact of police killings

Various entities are affected and impacted by police killings. Minnaar (2003:5) emphasises that police killings affect not only the family of the deceased, but also colleagues, witnesses and the community served by the deceased police officer. Blair, Fowler, Fetz and Baumgartner (2016:55) emphasise that violence against law enforcement officials hurts the victims' families, colleagues, departments, the legal profession as a whole, and communities.

The impact of the killing of police officers on family members and colleagues

Losing a loved one is painful, and when it happens so suddenly and tragically, it could be even more difficult to cope with. Noxhaka (2019:3) posits that the death of the police official in the family causes severe trauma. The

grieving family might experience a range of emotions, including shock, disbelief, anger, sadness, grief, and loss. Even more common than anger, pervasive free-floating anxiety, or "fear of everything," begins to loom in the survivors' consciousness, starting with the news of the slaying and persisting for several years or more. Survivors' heightened sense of their vulnerability may spur them to change daily routines, install house and car alarms, carry weapons, or refuse to go out after dark or to visit certain locales (Miller, 2007:16).

Most police officers are sole breadwinners in their families, with the spouse and rest of the family depending on his or her salary for a living. Thus, when an untimely and tragic death occurs, a spouse or family member (relatives) has to look after the deceased children, since there will be no one to provide for them. This results in acute stress and pain affecting them for an exceedingly long time. The death of a breadwinner in a family has a greater impact on a stay-at-home spouse and mother who depended entirely on her/his late spouse for a living. The bereaved mother is now expected to readjust and parent the children herself, all of whom had suffered the agonising blow of a father's death (Moyane, 2008:1).

The family of a killed police officer would experience shock, pain, anger, and sadness. Additionally, the sudden passing of a family member could cause a major change in the standard of living, and the affected family may find it difficult to adjust. The loss of a family member could be devastating and life-changing, and the family may struggle to come to terms with the tragedy (Noxhaka, 2019:4). The killing of a police official can lead to hatred of the profession among the young generation who wish to join the organisation in the future. Losing a loved one is never easy, and when that person is a police officer who was serving their community, it becomes more difficult for the family members as they will be reminded of the late by either seeing his/her colleagues in uniform or JMPD cars. The process of healing thus becomes a very steep hill. Generally, the family might feel a sense of pride in their loved one's service and sacrifice but also struggle with feelings of injustice and a desire for justice to be served.

The killing of police officers affects not only the police's immediate family members but extends also to their colleagues. Moyane (2008:1) posits that considering police officers as victims and vulnerable is considered strange by some people within the community they serve. The popular image of a police officer is of a strong, skilled, and invulnerable individual. However, in reality, police officers are human beings like any other; they have weaknesses, lack some skills, and are often vulnerable. Minnar (2003:5) confirms that the morale of the surviving colleagues who were close to the deceased becomes low, and those who witnessed the killing are left traumatised and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Miller (2007:14) posits that officers may feel numbed and disoriented and "just go through the motions" of their jobs while trying to grapple with the enormity of what has happened. Many surviving officers continue to experience a feeling of profound sadness. Officers may experience a sense of overwhelming fatigue, of feeling "drained" most of the time, of dragging themselves through their shifts. Appetite and sleep may be affected and there may be dreams of the slain officer.

Police officers often experience a great deal of stress in their occupational, social, and family lives, leading to cynicism and other physical and emotional distress and sometimes even early retirement. Although most officers in most departments are able to resolve their grief and get on with their lives and work, a few are unable to let go of the line-of-duty deaths and may hold a permanently altered world view about policing, society, or life in general. A small percentage of these individuals may leave the police profession, but most hang on, although with a radically changed perspective of their job and their role in society (Miller, 2007:14). Kwinika (2019:5) shares Miller's (2007:14) sentiments and states that colleagues who witness a killing often develop a hatred for the profession, opt to be in the office, look for another occupation or resign before retirement age.

Prenzler (2006:148) mentions that police deaths are a workplace safety issue that affects productivity in the criminal justice system. They also leave a heavy personal toll on loved ones and colleagues left behind. Police deaths on duty therefore represent an overlap of issues of security (prevention of crime or deliberate harm) and safety (prevention of accidental harm). The untimely death of a loved one under any circumstances is a wrenching experience, and family members of a slain law enforcement officer and colleagues must undergo the further trauma of investigations, court proceedings, and media exposure, during which they will be forced to relive the tragedy again and again (Miller, 2007:15).

The impact of the killings of police officers on the community and the economy

The killing of police officers affects not only those close to the victim but also society, as it jeopardises community safety (Kwinika, 2019:1). Police officers' role is to protect and serve the public and represent the state. When they are killed, it suggests that criminals are indirectly challenging the government. Police officers must ensure society's safety, and as community members, their safety is also crucial. Police must consistently demonstrate professional conduct when interacting with society to earn respect. However, to address underlying societal issues that lead to violence and crime, law enforcement organisations and officers sometimes need to take action to protect themselves and prevent violent attacks. While police officers are being attacked and killed by criminals, extrajudicial killings by the police cannot be justified, either tacitly or outright. Moreover, a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) report (2010: n.p.) indicated that police killings are caused by officers' exposure to violent criminals, especially from certain areas associated with high levels of violence due to their poor and disadvantaged backgrounds.

The South African government spends a lot of money on crime instead of building the country's economy. Budgetary allocations to the police, courts, and prisons have increased over the past ten years, rising from R46,6 billion during 2005/06 to R126,71 billion (Gould, Mufamadi, Hsiao, & Amisi, 2017: n.p.). Crime negatively impacts the SA economy as the country spends a lot of money on offenders. Noxhaka (2019:98) argues that the existence of undocumented foreigners is a burden and a threat to the lives of police officers, even though she did not specifically mention conflicts with immigrants who

had moved to SA. Additionally, migration of people from other countries to seek job opportunities results in serious challenges to the country's economy. Furthermore, Rubin (2022:26) indicates that SA is a developing country with significant unemployment rates, especially among young people. The deprivation and poverty brought on by unemployment are factors that contribute to police killings. Other factors, such as high levels of unemployment and inequality, and a high rate of violent crime further contribute to economic challenges. Kwinika (2019:12) indicates that police officers are still more than twice as likely to be killed as ordinary citizens, as seen by the current police murder rate in SA, which is 56 per 100 000, compared to the country's overall murder rate of 35,2. Furthermore, this indicates that the likelihood of South African police officers to be killed is nearly six times higher than their United States counterparts. It is the researcher's perspective that police killings may lead to unrest and aggression as well as interference with business operations.

The economy may be affected if businesses are unable to operate normally because of the threat of violence. Furthermore, international investors may be hesitant to invest in a country where the police force cannot guarantee the safety and security of citizens and businesses. Police killings in JMPD could lead to a decline in foreign investment, as the CoJ is the economic capital in attracting investors, and this would have a significant impact on the economy. Moreover, SA is a popular tourist destination, and tourism is a significant contributor to the country's economy. However, if visitors do not feel safe due to violence like police killings, they may travel elsewhere. This could hurt the tourism industry and the economy as a whole. Generally, the country's economy may be negatively impacted if the problem of police killings persists, and this may discourage economic growth and development.

Burger (2015:20) emphasises the importance of supporting the demands made by the colleagues of the victims, unions, and others regarding safety measures to protect police officers. The majority of African society's sentiments towards the police were found to be negative, in contrast to the majority of white society's attitudes. In general, how society reacts when the police are killed depends on various factors, including the circumstances of the killing, community engagement, perceptions, and feelings toward police officers in a specific community.

The role that the community can play in reducing police killings

The police are typically the main state agency responsible for domestic crime control and prevention, but they are never the only actors engaged in policing. "Policing" has a much broader scope than state law enforcement, because it includes all activities that uphold the general social order and rules by which a society lives. This means that state law enforcement agencies, such as the police, are important actors in policing, but other state and non-state actors may also engage in policing (Modise & Raga, 2022:1271).

Kwinika (2019:1) suggests that society should play a role in maintaining police safety and keeping everyone safe. The foundational concepts for more positive police-community relations are the essentials of community. Without trust between police and citizens, effective policing is impossible (Katz 2024: n.p.). Research has revealed that the most effective

pathway for improving relations between law enforcement and the communities they serve is by organising collaborative events where both parties come together with a common purpose. While shared community activities are important, they are but one component of a programme that includes ongoing public engagement, along with a more approachable and friendly style of interaction between law enforcement personnel and civilians, where officers are perceived as being approachable and sociable, even when it is not a special holiday or sporting event (Katz, 2024: n.p.).

These types of tactics, among others, have proven to help create a greater sense of trust between local law enforcement agencies and the citizens they serve, which then leads to less crime. It also leads to a more positive sense of community, tending to improve the quality of life and well-being for all concerned (Katz, 2024: n.p.). Building trust starts with effective person-to-person communication. Regardless of race, class, culture or ethnicity, most law-abiding citizens generally only see police officers during a traffic stop, in various official operations or perhaps looking out from a patrol car, distant and officious. Police officers often engage in a linear style of communication, primarily by giving orders or commands. This type of interaction is effective in dynamic situations or circumstances where an officer needs to gain compliance immediately, but it also eliminates factors that make interactions more transactional, two-way conversations.

A community's sense of trust and rapport with police officers is impacted by body language, tone of voice and delivery style, perceived presence or lack of empathy and understanding, and so on (Katz, 2024: n.p.). Katz concludes that some agencies need to address the often distant, impersonal, demanding demeanour of their police officers, and suggests that one of the easiest and most positive ways that officers can generate goodwill is by simply stepping out of their patrol vehicles, taking a walk through the neighbourhood and engaging directly with the civilians in their communities.

Very positive effects can result from simple shifts in an officer's tone of voice and content. Citizens hold more positive attitudes toward officers whose demeanour is friendly and conversational. This increase in citizen satisfaction with their police leads to more civilian cooperation, which is a vital element in reducing crime (Katz, 2024: n.p.). The solution is to somehow regain the respect and support of the public. Changing the hearts and minds of the public is a complicated proposition. One cannot simply step up to a podium to demand more respect and ask for kinder treatment. It will take time and careful planning; it will require law enforcement to change its strategies without jeopardising officer safety or reducing crime-fighting effectiveness, all of which is no easy task (Gates, 2024:1).

Many police agencies have gone on the offensive by trying to bridge the division. Marx and Friedman (2025:59) emphasise the importance of comprehensive strategies that condition individual strength physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, as well as nurturing an agency culture of wellness with initiatives to establish the roots of trust and build bonds with neighbourhood and community leaders. Creating programmes to draw the police and those they serve together is a smart move, but it is only one small step. Involve your communities in the crime-fighting process. Step up to help

develop neighbourhood watches, provide no-strings-attached hotlines to report crimes, and ask for assistance via social media platforms in solving crimes. Communication with the public is paramount as it keeps the citizens abreast of your department's activities with press releases, even the seemingly mundane items such as crime stats, department productivity, and statements from the chief or sheriff about goals being met. When people are informed, they begin to build trust and feel less like outsiders and more like part of the solution. However, a single breach of this trust can cause a great deal of harm to any established relationship an agency might have with the citizens it protects (Gates, 2024:1).

Research Methodology

The researchers employed an empirical research design. This article employed a qualitative research approach. The target population in this study was JMPD police officers, and a case study design was utilised. Purposive sampling was used to select thirty-two participants from the JMPD. These participants included directors who worked closely with the JMPD officers who were killed in their units, as well as JMPD officers who witnessed the killings or worked with the victims. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants in this study.

Findings and discussions

This research delves into the critical aspect of the community's role in protecting the JMPD Officers from the danger and fatal risks and fatalities that they encounter while on duty serving their communities. The authors extensively reviewed both local and international literature on the impact of police fatalities on their families, colleagues, and the community that they serve. The study emphasises that the foundational concepts for more positive police-community relations are essential for community safety and, subsequently the safety of police officers while on duty.

The impact of the killings of police officers on family members and colleagues

The sudden and tragic death of a police officer has profound and multifaceted impacts on both their family and colleagues. Families experience a range of intense emotions such as shock, disbelief, anger, sadness, and pervasive anxiety. The loss of a breadwinner exacerbates financial and emotional stress, particularly for stay-at-home spouses who must now navigate life and parenting alone. The grieving process is further complicated by reminders of the deceased through interactions with the police community. Colleagues of the slain officer also suffer significantly, with many experiencing trauma, PTSD, and a decline in morale. The perception of police officers as invulnerable is challenged, revealing their human vulnerabilities.
Empirical data revealed that the participants do not feel safe on the streets after they have witnessed the killing of their colleagues.

MPO-12: "Exposure and high risk… once you are on the road, you are at risk already…"

MPO-11: "Streets are dangerous, that I can tell you, the streets are really dangerous… you will really have to look after yourself and your colleagues…The streets are rough…"

The above participant responses are an indication of the police officers' fear for their lives when conducting their duties, which even magnifies the general community's state of safety and risk (Perkins, 2018:216). The surviving colleagues also experience feelings of failing their slain colleagues, as they believe that their colleagues were killed because they had failed to protect them. This trauma can lead to changes in behaviour, such as increased security measures and altered daily routines. Some officers may develop hatred for the profession, leading to early retirement or career changes. Overall, the death of a police officer not only disrupts the immediate family but also affects the broader police community, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems to address the emotional and practical challenges faced by survivors.

The impact of the killings of police officers on the community and the economy

The killings of police officers have significant repercussions for both the community and the economy. These tragic events not only affect the immediate family and colleagues of the deceased but also undermine community safety and trust in law enforcement. The loss of police officers, who are essential in maintaining public order and safety, can encourage criminals and create a sense of insecurity within the community.

The persistent threat of violence and the high murder rates of police officers can deter foreign investment and negatively affect tourism, both of which are vital to South Africa's economy. Businesses may also suffer due to the instability and potential unrest caused by these killings. Investors may be hesitant to invest in a country where law enforcement cannot guarantee safety and security. Similarly, tourists may choose other destinations if they perceive South Africa as unsafe, affecting the tourism industry and the broader economy. Overall, the continued loss of police officers poses a serious threat to economic growth and development, highlighting the need for enhanced safety measures and community support for law enforcement.

Data from the literature revealed that crime negatively impacts the SA economy as the country spends a lot of money on offenders. The South African government spends a lot of money on crime, which could have been better spent on building the country's economy. Budgetary allocations to the police, courts, and prisons have increased over the past ten years (Gould et al., 2017: n.p.). It was also found that SA is a developing country with significant unemployment rates, especially among young people. The deprivation and poverty brought on by unemployment are factors that contribute to police killings. In addition, other factors such as high levels of unemployment and inequality, and a high rate of violent crime contribute to economic challenges (Rubin, 2022:26). According to Noxhaka (2019:94), factors such as poverty, high crime and a high unemployment rate in the CoJ, inequality, and substance abuse were identified as some of the main contributory factors in JMPD police killings.

The empirical data revealed that the criminals rob the police officers of their firearms to commit further crimes as a way of making a living out of crime. Some participants mentioned the following:

DIR-3: "The intent is to rob them of their firearms. I think that's mostly because people, when you're carrying a firearm, just look at it and say How can I rob that firearm? because the firearms attract the criminals".

MPO-25: "We are targets, especially when you have a firearm…".

MPO-22: "The reason for police killings, it's all about criminals trying to get away with crime…criminals trying to get away with murder…".

MPO-16: "We actually are the target of the criminals. When we are doing night shift, we come across robberies, Hijackings, whereby our officers get shot and lose their lives…".

High levels of unemployment and inequality contribute to the challenges faced by law enforcement. The economic strain on communities can lead to increased crime rates, further complicating the efforts of police officers to maintain order. The presence of undocumented foreigners seeking job opportunities adds to the economic burden and can exacerbate tensions within communities.

The role that the community can play in reducing police killings

The killings of police officers have a profound impact on both the community and the economy. Police officers are essential for maintaining public safety and social order, and their deaths can significantly undermine these efforts. The role of police officers extends beyond law enforcement to include maintaining social order and safety within the community. Effective policing requires collaboration between state law enforcement and other state and non-state actors. Trust between police and the community is essential for effective policing, and this trust can be built through positive interactions and community engagement. The community's trust in law enforcement is crucial for effective policing, and the loss of officers can erode this trust, leading to increased fear and insecurity. Hatred and resentment from society towards the police were identified as one of the causes for the killing of the JMPD police officers. Previous researchers stipulated that the killings may be associated with ongoing hatred and resentment among community members toward police officers, which is mainly due to the role performed by the police as perceived enforcers of apartheid brutality and violent police practices (Bruce, 2016:8).

The following empirical data from the participants are examples of the somewhat disharmonious relations between the community and police officers:

MPO-2: "Environment… where we stay… I can say in some neighbourhoods… It's not safe to live there as a police officer. Because my colleagues… the one that's been shot was living around the hostel…he was staying around the hostel".

SGT-1: "Police officers in many environments that we operate in, they are not being appreciated…For instance, if you an officer in uniform you can get attacked by a group of angry mobs, the community will stand by and watch and do nothing… clearly shows that there is still not a support, support from the community that we serve".

MPO-8: "…you will meet some people that are angry some people they are sad and some people they will disrespect you…".

MPO-15: "…most of the police killings are like of… I mean, disrespectful of motorist to police officers on the public roads…".

The lack of trust between the police and the community renders the work of the police more difficult (Govender, 2017:17). This was also indicated by Bruce (2002:15), who stated that trust issues between the police and the community may be related to continuing hatred among community members toward police officers, resulting from their involvement in preserving apartheid. Restoring trust between police and the community is essential.

Empirical data revealed that participants believe that community members are arrogant and lack appreciation for the officers when performing their duties. The participants indicated that while performing their duties, they sometimes meet angry participants who disregard the law, and arguments end in fatal shootings. Some of the participants in their responses indicated the following:

MPO-16**:** "… These are some of the things that we come across on a daily basis, some of the motorists that don't appreciate the job that we are doing…".

MPO-17: "It's people that use their anger issues and they don't address you properly and you end up, fighting. And then that's where things can lead badly. And shootings happen or stabbing…".

MPO-15: "Challenging because sometimes you come across people that do not understand what you're doing, and they become stubborn…the motorists that
are".

MPO-19: "Disregarding my commands, they start to make me lose my patience…".
MPO-23 "Some people are very difficult to deal with…".

SGT-1: "Police officers in many environments that we operate in, they are not being appreciated…For instance, if you an officer in uniform, you can get attacked by a group of angry mobs, the community will stand by and watch and do nothing…
clearly shows that there is still not support, support from the community that we
serve".

It is clear from the above responses that trust issues between the community and the police need to be addressed. The death of police officers compromises community safety and trust. Police are not the only actors in policing; other state and non-state actors also play roles in maintaining social order. However, the police are the primary agency responsible for crime control and prevention. The community must support police safety to ensure overall safety. It was also found that organising collaborative events and fostering a friendly, approachable demeanour among officers can significantly improve police-community relations. Effective communication, including body language and tone of voice, plays a crucial role in building trust. Officers who engage directly with community members and adopt a conversational tone are more likely to gain civilian cooperation, which is vital for reducing crime.

The empirical data revealed that the community is not supportive of the police, and the police were disrespected by motorists on public roads.

MPO-8: "…you will meet some people that are angry some people they are sad and some people they will disrespect you…".

MPO-9: "…when 'you're doing point duty…, conducting a roadblock, drivers, they 'don't focus, they don't care, they don't have respect for the police… its lack of respect, for officers".

MPO-13: "Because most of the members of the public, they kill as they attack us because they hate discipline and order because we are law enforcers and one of our duties is to enforce the law. of which causes inconvenience from their side…".

MPO-15 "…most of the police killings are like of… I mean, disrespectful of motorist to police officers on the public roads…".

MPO-20: "…Sometimes other people don't respect you as an officer… they are not respecting us".

MPO-24: "…sometimes we are working on the street and then you get people who are rude…".

SGT-3: "…most of the taxi drivers don't want to comply…".

MPO-26: "…They will start by disrespecting you…".

MPO-25: "…disrespects of the motorist, from the motorist…".

The participants also highlighted the issue of motorists' disrespect for the law as a challenge that also negatively impacts the capacity of police officers to execute their duties effectively. The JMPD has lost several police officers to killings due to motorists who disrespected the police officers and the law. In this regard, Bruce (2016:3) mentions that motorists' general disregard for the rules of the road (e.g., drunk, reckless, and negligent drivers) contributed to a high number of metropolitan police officers risking their lives while on duty, such as responding to emergencies, directing traffic in high-speed areas, or on the busy roads. Such accidents were the second major cause of police deaths within the JMPD (Bruce, 2016:3).

Positive police-community relations are built on trust, which can be fostered through collaborative events and approachable interactions. Effective communication, including body language and tone, is essential. Officers should engage directly with community members to build rapport and trust. To regain public respect and support, law enforcement agencies must implement strategies that promote transparency and community involvement. Programmes such as neighbourhood watches, crime hotlines, active social media engagement, and community training can help bridge the gap between police and the communities they serve.

Empirical data from one of the participants recommended education or awareness as a mechanism to build good relationships and rapport between the community and the metropolitan police, which is reflected in the following extract:

MPO-15: "…education about the relationship between the officers and the community…".

Based on the above-cited participant responses, it is clear that initiating public awareness campaigns is viewed as a viable approach to educate the public and communities about the need to maintain harmonious relationships with metropolitan police officers. Keeping the public informed about police

activities and achievements fosters a sense of inclusion and trust. Overall, building positive police-community relations requires time, careful planning, and a commitment to ongoing communication and engagement. By adopting these strategies, law enforcement can enhance public trust, reduce crime, and improve the overall quality of life within the community.

Recommendations

To ensure the safety and effectiveness of JMPD officers in the execution of their duties, and to enhance the community's role in safeguarding these officers while actively participating in their own safety and security, a comprehensive set of recommendations is proposed as follows:

- Comprehensive support systems for police officers and their families are essential to address the emotional and practical challenges they face. This includes providing resources for trauma and stress management, as well as ensuring the safety and well-being of officers on duty.
- Community engagement: Engage members of the community for the restoration of trust and confidence among all the relevant stakeholders by hosting public awareness campaigns and educational road shows through social media, radio and television to eliminate hostility among communities, the police and the JMPD police officers. Building positive police-community relations requires ongoing efforts to engage with citizens. Programmes such as neighbourhood watches, crime hotlines, and active social media engagement can help bridge the gap between police and the communities they serve. Transparent communication about police activities and achievements fosters a sense of inclusion and trust.
- Professional conduct: Police officers must promote professional conduct and earn respect from the community. Effective person-to-person communication, including body language and tone of voice, is crucial in building rapport and trust. Officers should adopt a friendly and conversational demeanour to encourage positive interaction with citizens.

Overall, the killings of police officers have far-reaching consequences that affect community safety, economic stability, and social order. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes community engagement, professional conduct, and robust support systems for law enforcement.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study underscores the critical role that the community plays in protecting police officers within the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department (JMPD). The findings reveal that police killings have a significant and multifaceted impact on both the community and the economy. The loss of a police officer disrupts not only their immediate family but also the broader police community, emphasising the need for enhanced safety measures and robust community support. Active community involvement is essential in ensuring the safety and effectiveness of law

enforcement officers. By fostering strong community-police relationships and implementing comprehensive support systems for officers and their families, we can address the emotional and practical challenges they face. Ultimately, a collaborative effort between the community and law enforcement is vital to reduce and prevent police deaths, ensuring a safer environment for all.

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