The police trainees' attitude towards policing and citizens in Gauteng province: South Africa

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ABSTRACT: *Members of law enforcement are often categorized under a singular police culture or police personality that is highlighted by cynical attitudes and an "us versus them" mentality. The present study examines a cohort of police recruits enrolled in a police training academy on their attitudes towards policing and typically disenfranchised groups (racial and ethnic minorities, women, members of the LGBTI community, senior citizens, and juveniles) before and after their police training experience. Previous police research has focused largely on defining the police personality and most recently the interaction between the police and members of the community about the community policing initiative. Understanding recruit attitudes and how they are influenced is crucial because these attitudes are believed to influence the decisions officers make in the field, namely who to stop and who to arrest. While no statistically significant relationships are identified, there are several trends presented within the data that may be useful to future research. Future research ideas are also explored.* **Method:** *this was a quantitative method where 309 police trainees were part of the interview session. The respondents were in the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality (Tshwane academy) in the Gauteng province of South Africa.*
KEYWORDS: *Police trainees, Policing, attitudes and citizens*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Describing the "police personality" is not a simple task. Many scholars have examined this police personality as attitudes and behaviours exhibited by officers in the broader context of a "police culture." One such attitude that has gathered the attention of most research has been police suspicion. Several key findings resulted from these studies: (1) police cynicism increased with length of service, (2) college-educated officers who were denied promotion became more cynical than other officers, and (3) the type of training recruits endured caused them to be more cynical about themselves, the department, and the community as a whole (Regoli & Poole, 1979).

Statistics South Africa has also indicated decreasing levels of satisfaction in the police, which compromises police legitimacy. Therefore, police unprofessionalism has far-reaching consequences on policing (StatsSA, 2010). Such anomalies open uncertainties about the effect of the SAPS Basic Police Development Learning Programme and continuous training's ability to realise a professional police service (StatsSA, 2010). As it stands, even in the wake of cases of police misconduct, police brutality and police killings, it is not clear whether it is poor police training that contributes to anomalies within the SAPS (DCS,2017). Moreover, Rauch (1992) argued that even though "basic training is the most important point of socialisation of the recruit into the organisation, it alone cannot change the organisational culture unless the organisation itself changes".

1.1 AIM OF THE ARTICLE

This article aims is to analyse police trainees' and constables' attitudes towards policing and citizens in Gauteng province.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Police Training and Attitudes

The impact that police attitudes and police discretion have had on police-citizen interactions, as illustrated by previous research, leads us to question where these attitudes emerge (Ghoston,2012). Concerning this study: Do they emerge in the training academy? Public service professions, such as law enforcement are known to have training and camps that attempt to erase individual identities and re-socialize recruits based on their organization's beliefs (Ghoston,2012).

Fielding (1986) highlights work that disputes the idea that the police, and similar agencies, search for recruits who exhibit characteristics preferred by that organization. Rather, the selected recruits are socialized to reflect organizational initiatives. This study found that a change in attitude was reflective of recruits' internalizing and better understanding of the role of police officers (Fielding, 1986). In a similar study, Haarr (2001) found that while police training academies positively influenced attitudes, these attitudes often changed as a result of organizational culture, which was determined by a recruit's assigned agency and field training officer. The influence of field training officers (FTOs) over recruits led Sun (2002) to examine socialization between field training officers, and non-field training officers, to see if the officers differed across attitudes toward their peers, supervisors, top managers, and the community. The socialization of new officers was believed to positively influence how field training officers viewed their profession Sun (2002). Specifically, Van Maanen (1975) found that recruits were highly motivated and excited upon joining their department, but other officers viewed this excitement negatively. Although recruit motivation declined over time, this study showed that urban police departments socialized officers to "not make waves" and go follow the lead of their superiors and veteran officers (Van Maanen,1975). Sun (2002) found that FTOs were more critical of their superiors, which was likely the result of having specified knowledge in training and developing higher expectations of their profession. FTOs, like officers identified as non-FTOs in this study, held similar attitudes toward squad members and communities (Sun, 2002). The latter finding is also reflective of the socialization process that occurs during training, which leads individuals to regard components with the same mindset (Sun, 2002).

Police-Citizen Interaction

While some scholars have focused on the influence of situational and organizational factors on police behavior, others have focused on psychological explanations, including an officer's predispositions or the way that officers interact with an individual citizen (Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005). As previously mentioned, attitudes affect decision-making; these decisions lead to behaviors that affect how citizens perceive law enforcement (Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005). To understand how police attitudes towards different groups, or society in general, impact discretionary practices, it is necessary to examine the literature on police-citizen interactions (Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005).

Previous research on police-citizen interactions stemmed from an interest in how the public and law enforcement interacted. Over the past few decades, this interest has become more substantial as more police departments have moved towards a community-oriented method of policing to further reduce crime (Lai & Zhao, 2010). As more departments have incorporated community-oriented policing, police-citizen interactions have become more significant (Cordner, 1995; Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005; Lai & Zhao, 2010).

Much of the afore-mentioned police culture stems from the media's perception of the police (Ghoston,2012). Many would even argue that these typically negative characteristics frequently associated with the police hinder the effectiveness and efficiency of law enforcement in the eyes of the public, particularly programs that require input from both the police and the community (Greene & Decker, 1989; Webb & Marshall, 1995). Frank, Smith, and Novak (2005) administered a survey to residents concerning their general and specific perspectives of local police. Findings from this survey found that despite the negative characteristics highlighted by the media, citizens were generally pleased with law enforcement (Frank, Smith & Novak, 2005).

This perception varied inconsistently within and between different social groups (Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005). As other research has emphasized, one of the most important factors that contribute to community perceptions of the police is personal contact (Frank, Smith, & Novak, 2005). Although millions of citizens interact with law enforcement annually, only a small portion of citizens viewed their contact negatively, and even fewer filed complaints of misconduct (Langton & Durose, 2013). Scaglion and Condon (1990) found that personal contact had a great influence on citizen attitudes. Personal contact with the police encompasses both voluntary and involuntary interaction. Several bodies of research have found that positive voluntary interactions with the police have very small effects on citizen attitudes toward the police whereas negative interactions, both voluntary and involuntary, significantly impact police perception (Furstenberg & Wellford, 1973; Hawdon & Ryan, 2003; Jacob, 1971; Walker, et al., 1972; Webb & Marshall, 1995). Like other research findings concerning police-citizen interactions, Scaglion and Condon (1990) found that race had the greatest impact on police perception and that this variable often hides the effects that belonging to a specific neighborhood, gender, or socioeconomic group have on perceptions. Vicarious police encounters are also important to one's perception of the police (Scaglion & Condon, 1990).

Rosenbaum, Schuck, Costello, Hawkins, & Ring (2005) found that both positive and negative vicarious experiences influenced how favorably citizens viewed the police. They found that positive vicarious experiences led to a greater, more positive, change to citizen attitudes toward the police than did direct contact and negative vicarious encounters (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Alongside previous findings, Rosenbaum et al. (2005) also

found that minorities were more prone to rely on vicarious police experiences than Caucasians. Another important finding by Rosenbaum et al. (2005) was that attitudes toward the police are difficult to change. This finding is important because it is possible that the police training academy will not be enough to produce a significant change in recruit attitudes pre and post-enrollment (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Outside of the influence of personal contact with law enforcement, several other variables have been linked to less favorable attitudes toward the police race, socioeconomic status, age, gender, and neighborhood cohesion (Decker, 1981; Hawdon & Ryan, 2003; Jones-Brown, 2000; Kusow, Wilson, & Martin, 1997; Scaglion & Condon, 1980; Webb & Marshall, 1995).

Research concerning police interaction with racial and ethnic minorities has received the most attention among scholars, and studies regularly find that minorities tend to view law enforcement less favorably (Furstenburg & Wellford, 1973; Hadar & Snortum, 1974; Jacob, 1971; Lai & Zhao, 2010; Parker, Onyekwuluje, & Murty, 1995; Skogan, 1978). Specifically, the research found that minorities tend to believe that they are targets of the police (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Engel, 2005; Lai & Zhao, 2010) whereas law enforcement believes they are constant targets of accusations of discriminatory and prejudicial behavior (Carter, 1985).

The significance of these findings leads to several questions relevant to the present study. First, do police officers have negative perceptions of minorities that cause their discretion and behavior to negatively influence how minorities view them?(Schuck, Rosenbaum & Hawkins, 2008) If so, where do officers acquire these negative attitudes: do they exist before entering the police training academy, are they the outcome of the academy, or do they arise throughout the officer's career? (Lai & Zhao, 2010; Schuck, Rosenbaum & Hawkins, 2008). The present study will focus on the perceptions of police recruits immediately before and after their experiences in the police training academy. While minorities overall assume behavior by the police is prejudicial, Hispanic attitudes tend to be less favorable of police than their Caucasian counterparts, and more favorable than the perception of African Americans (Lai & Zhao, 2010; Schuck, Rosenbaum & Hawkins, 2008). Carter (1985) found that Hispanics were mostly unsatisfied with law enforcement because of the high expectations they held for the police that were unmet. African Americans on the other hand tended to disfavour the police because of the underlying racial tensions that have plagued U.S. society since the establishment and later abolishment of slavery (Carter, 1985; Jones-Brown, 2000).

One incident that highlights these tensions and has continued to hold significant weight on minority perceptions of law enforcement, was the beating of Rodney King in 1991 (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Jesilow, Meyer, & Namazzi, 1995; Lasley, 1994; Webb & Marshall, 1995). Despite video evidence, juries acquitted each officer involved (Brown & Benedict, 2002). Public perceptions about the lack of fairness and legitimacy within the criminal justice system as a result of this verdict sparked the Los Angeles riots in 1992 (Brown & Benedict, 2002). Although studies have supported the finding that African Americans tend to view the police less favorably, it is important to note that among every racial or ethnic group, there are notable differences in perception of the police based upon socioeconomic status, marital status, gender, age, and the crime rate of each individual's neighborhood (Parker, Onyekwuluje, & Murty, 1995). For instance, some studies suggest that middle-class African Americans and other minorities without criminal involvement tend to view the police more negatively than their counterparts (Browning et al., 1994). Jones-Brown (2000) examined the perceptions of African American males in high school toward law enforcement. She found that the participants recognized most police tactics aimed at reducing drug and youth crimes as specifically targeting minorities; the participants also attributed an individual's race to the frequency with which he, or others who look like him, had encounters with the police (Jones-Brown, 2000). This research concerning juvenile perceptions of law enforcement is important because it illustrates how different variables, in this case, race/ethnicity and age, can interact to better explain attitudes toward the police (Jones-Brown, 2000). These findings again solicit questions about how police officers view this group within society and whether the academy influences these views (Jones-Brown, 2000). Despite consistent findings of negative perceptions toward the police by minorities and juveniles, scholars must consider that these attitudes are only perceptions and not reality (Jones-Brown, 2000).

III. METHODOLOGY

For this article, the quantitative method was used which "involves collecting and analysing" responses from the participants. This assisted the researcher to determine the attitude.
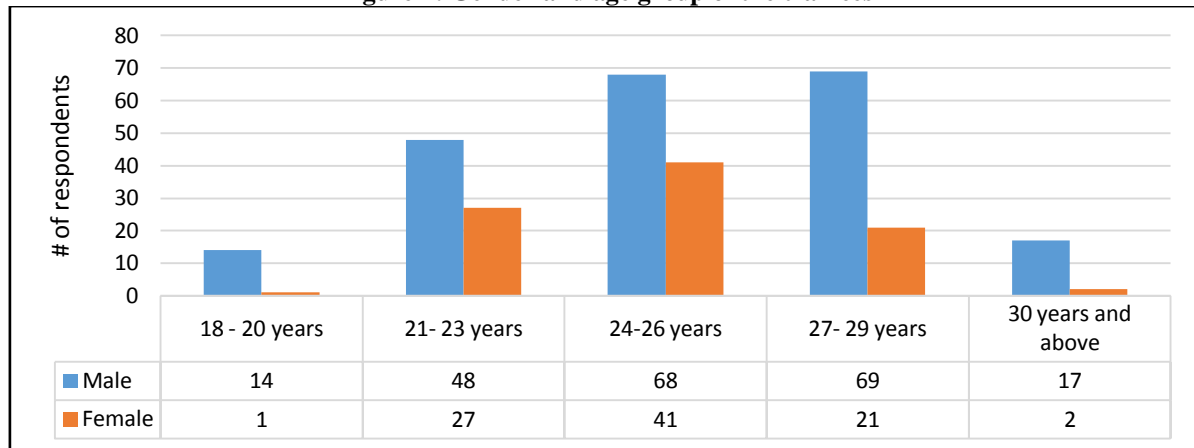
Data collection: The questionnaire was developed to simplify the collection of the data. Data was collected from 308 trainees who were at the training institutions in the 2019 training programme.

Data analysis: The Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data from the respondents.
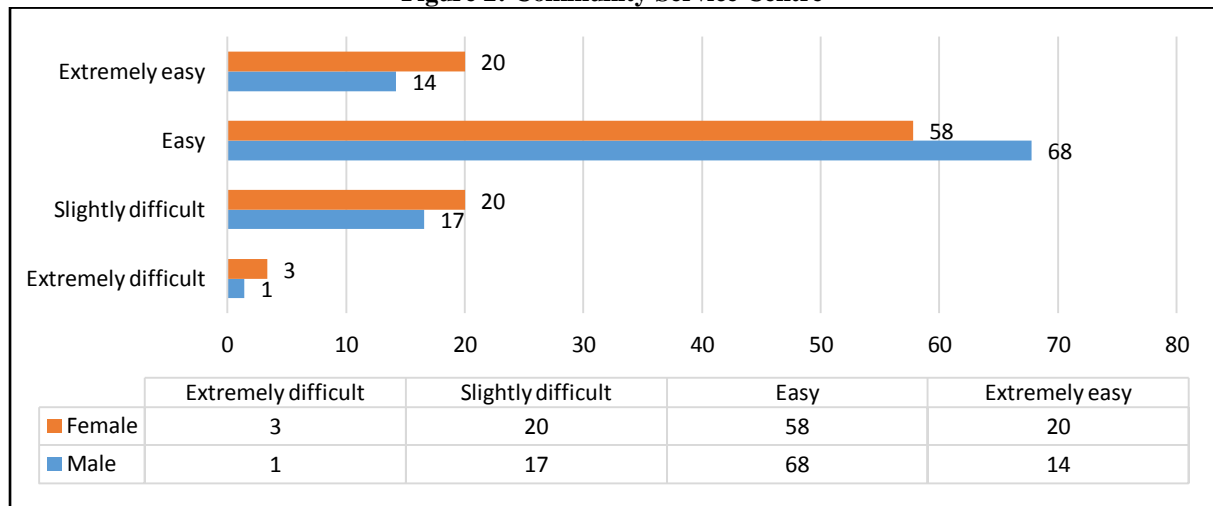
IV. FINDINGS

This article will present the findings on the attitudes of the police on policing and citizens. The demography of the respondents will be presented in this section as well.

Figure 1: Gender and age group of the trainees

	18 - 20 years	21- 23 years	24-26 years	27- 29 years	30 years and above
Male	14	48	68	69	17
Female	1	27	41	21	2

A total number of 308 respondents were interviewed. Of the 308 respondents, most of them were male (216) and the female respondents total was 92. The figure above depicts the breakdown of the male respondents according to age group. Most of the respondents interviewed were males aged 27-29 (69), followed by those aged 24-26 (68), then those aged 21-23 (48), followed by 17 respondents aged 30 and above. There were 14 male respondents interviewed aged 18-20 years.

Figure 2: Community Service Centre

	Extremely difficult	Slightly difficult	Easy	Extremely easy
Female	3	20	58	20
Male	1	17	68	14

Most of the respondents find the community service centre experience very easy with the majority of male trainees (68) and female (58) trainees sharing this view. A few of the female respondents (20) and male trainees (17) indicated that the community service centre was slightly difficult.

Motivation to be a police officer and attitudes towards policing and citizens

The South African Police Services (SAPS) is a crucial organisation and it is pivotal that it attracts individuals who are passionate about policing and have a positive attitude about citizens. With that being noted, it was significant to engage with the trainees about the motivators to joining the SAPS and their attitude towards policing and citizens.

- **A need for a job by trainees**

The majority of the respondents (42) in the study who were between the age of 24-26 indicated that a need for a job is somewhat important followed by 36 respondents aged 27-29. Generally, most of the respondents indicated that a need for a job influences the decision to become a police officer. Although there

were respondents who indicated that it is not very important, they were not as many as compared to those who said it is very important and somewhat important (DCS, 2019).

- **Desire to serve the community**

The findings on the desire to serve the community revealed that most of the respondents (98) between the ages of 24-26 years, indicated that this is very important to them, followed by 87 respondents of the age 27-29 years and 67 who are between the ages of 21-23years. Those who said the desire to serve the community is somewhat important were a few respondents with many (11) respondents between the age of 24-26 years followed by 8 respondents between the age of 21-23 years. It was only one respondent between the age of 30years and above who indicated that it is not important at all (DCS, 2019).

- **Growing up always wanted to be a police officer and age**

Generally, most of the respondents between the age of 21-23 and 27-29years indicated they grew up always wanting to be a police officer. There were few respondents (24) between the age of 24-26 years who indicated that they did not grow up always wanting to be a police officer (DCS, 2019).

V. CONCLUSION

To conclude on the police attitudes towards policing and it being for long thought of as a job with high danger and pressure. Why and what type of people join the police force is becoming one of the more important issues in criminal justice. Findings on this aspect were obtained using a research questionnaire with suggested reasons and decisions to become a police officer. The study found that most of the trainees were males as compared to females. The high number of male police trainees shows that there is more interest in becoming a police officer from males than females. The study concluded that the reason police officers choose a career in policing is that they grew up always wanting to be the police. The results of the study also showed that the reason for choosing a career in policing was a need for a job. There were positive responses in all the statements but the more positive responses on the decision to become a police officer came from people between the age of 24-29 years. All these reasons for becoming a police officer provided need to be assessed and evaluated once these trainees have completed their training to determine if they will be able to deal with citizens.

Examining police attitudes and how these attitudes are influenced could also lead police trainees to rewrite the police training curriculum, or even develop training specifically designed to counteract cynicism. Instead of training focused on the operational or procedural aspects of policing these new trainings would focus on changing officer attitudes like the Fair and Impartial Policing Training developed by **Lorie Fridell (n.d.)**

New strategies should be created to address any negative attitudes and create new strategies that allow law enforcement to engage with the community. Once the community and law enforcement establish a better relationship, the effectiveness of the community-oriented tactic should rise. It is important to note that while trying to understand each attitude it is necessary to adopt a stronger connection therefore the attitudes of law enforcement and citizens will vary.

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