

Strategies to adapt in Breaking Barriers for Women in Law Enforcement in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the Metro Police Departments (MPDs) continues to be a matter of some concern, particularly in a traditionally male-dominated industry such as law enforcement. Research on gender and leadership has revealed that women continue to face challenges in advancing into leadership positions. Democracy, changes in law, and societal beliefs opened policing as a career to women and various legal frameworks provide for gender equality, therefore equal gender representation in the workplace is a developmental goal in South Africa. The objective of this study is to provide strategies for breaking barriers for women in leadership positions in law enforcement using qualitative analysis. 25 South African women from the Gauteng Province from Ekurhuleni, Tshwane, and Johannesburg MPDs were interviewed. The participants recommended that the South African MPDs review human resource practices and policies to promote a positive and constructive work environment for all employees.

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INTRODUCTION

The exclusion of women from historically male-dominated organisations is a global phenomenon. Discrimination at work was widespread prior to legal developments and the democratic dispensation.¹ Scenarios of gender prejudice were common. For instance, prospective employers have argued that it was not feasible to appoint women in senior ranks because of the demands of the position.² Legislation that addresses employment equity and gender discrimination accommodate family-work obligations. The South African government provides for structural change in a bid to ensure the inclusion of women in all spheres of life.³ However, women continue to face systemic barriers that affect their advancement into leadership positions in the workplace. According to the Commission for Employment Equity,

¹ O.C. Dupper, C. Garbers, A.A. Landman, M. Christianson, and A.C. Basson, *Essential Employment Discrimination Law*. (Cape Town: Juta Legal and Academic Publishers, 2007).

² Seth Carnahan and Brad N. Greenwood, "Managers' political beliefs and gender inequality among subordinates: Does his ideology matter more than hers?" *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 63(2), (2018):287-322; William T. Bielby, and James N. Barron, "Men and Women at work: Sex segregation and statistical discrimination." *American Journal of Sociology*, 91(4), (1996):759-799.

³ South African Human Rights Commission, Equality report 2017/2018: Achieving substantive economic equality through rights-based radical socio-economic transformation in South Africa. [Online] Available: https://www.sahrc.org.za/home/21/files/SAHRC%20Equality%20Report%202017_18.pdf. [Accessed 14 June 2022].

there was a mere 0.5% increase in the representation of women in top management between 2018 and 2020. In 2020, the percentage of women in top management was 24.9%.⁴

Globally, the police career has been regarded as exclusive to males, and women were not allowed to work in the police in the past.⁵ Labour practices were gendered, and women were restricted to caretaker duties aligned to cultural norms. Research shows that African cultures traditionally recognised males as societal leaders.⁶ In South Africa, cultural norms and beliefs perpetuate structural discrimination in rural settings.⁷ Structural discrimination in urban areas is evidenced in companies and industries, including the police service.⁸

The inclusion of women in policing in South Africa was enabled by democracy and the transformation of societal laws and beliefs.⁹ Legislation that addresses employment equity and gender discrimination has been implemented in police departments to prevent historical discrimination and address ongoing inequalities.¹⁰ More women are now entering the police service as a career, however, they are confronted with difficulties in police organisations.¹¹

Female officers are confronted with challenges that hinder their career advancement opportunities, despite the existing legal frameworks.¹² According to Prenzler and Sinclair, these challenges exist because chauvinism is deeply rooted in every aspect of policing. The gender dynamics that women encounter in the police force are sexual harassment, patriarchal domination, and gender stereotypes.¹³ The challenges women encounter includes male officers' negative attitudes.¹⁴ These attitudes are a manifestation of patriarchal beliefs about societal gender roles, and they impact policing organisational culture.¹⁵ The literature shows that male officers have viewed women's presence in the organisation as making the police profession ineffective and weak.¹⁶ Khosa shows that stereotypes,

⁴ Commission for Employment Equity, 2021. 21st Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report (2020-2021). [Online] Available: <https://www.polity.org.za/article/21st-commission-for-employment-equity-annual-report-2020-2021-2021-07-05>. [Accessed 11 July 2022].

⁵ Don L. Kurtz, Travis Linnemann, and L.S. Williams, "Reinventing the matron: The continued importance of gendered images and division of labor in modern policing." *Women and Criminal Justice*, 22(3), (2012): 239–263.

⁶ Ifi Amadiume, *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African Society*. (London, United Kingdom: Zed Press, 2015).

⁷ Shamilla Wilson, *The state, culture and oppression*. 2014. <http://www.osisa.org/buwa/regional/state-culture-and-oppression>. [Accessed: 25 June 2022]; Zingiswa Losi, *Gender inequality drags women down*. 2016. <http://www.iol.co.za/business-report/.../gender-inequality-drags-women-down-20012down-20012> [Accessed 20 June 2022].

⁸ Kurtz, Linnemann, and Williams, "Reinventing the matron"; Constitutional Court of South Africa. *Broadening the rights of women in the workplace: Automatically unfair dismissals and pregnancy: De Beer v SA Export Connection t/a Global Paws 2008 (29) ILJ 347 (LC) 2009 (72)*. [Online] Available: https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/13527/Barnard_Broadening%282009%29.pdf?sequence=1&disAllowed=y [Accessed 21 June 2022]

⁹ Constitutional Court of South Africa. 2014. *South African Police v Solidarity obo Barnard*. [Online] Available: <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZACC/2014/23> [Accessed 15 May 2022]; Gareth Newham, Thembo Masuku, and Jabu Dlamini, *Diversity and transformation in the South African Police Service: A study of police perspectives on race, gender and the community in the Johannesburg policing area (2006)*. <http://citeseerx.ist.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.488.85>. [Accessed: 25 June 2022].

¹⁰ Phiona Martin, and Antoni Barnard, "The experiences of women in male-dominated occupations: A constructivist grounded theory inquiry." *South African Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 39(2), (2013): 1099–1121.

¹¹ Ryan Baatjies, *Metro Police Welcome 111 New Law Enforcers*. 2017. <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/Local/PE-Express/metro-police-welcome-111-new-law-enforcers-20170308welcome-111-new-law-enforcers-20170308>. [Accessed 20 June 2022].

¹² L. Makapela, *Justice Today: A magazine of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development*. 2014. <http://www.justice.gov.za/newsletter/JT/jt-2014-vol04.pdf> [Accessed 25 May 2022].

¹³ Timothy Prenzler, and Georgina Sinclair, "The Status of Women Police Officers: An International Review." *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 41, (2013): 115– 131.

¹⁴ Evans M.Oruta, Maurine K.Lidava, and Collins R.Gaunya, "Challenges facing female police officers in service delivery in Kenya." *Journal of Resources Development and Management: An International Peer Review Journal*, 25, (2016):1–10.

¹⁵ Kurtz, Linnemann, and Williams, "Reinventing the matron."

¹⁶ Cara E. Rabe-Hemp, "Survival in an "all-boys club": Policewomen and their fight for acceptance." *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, 31(2), (2008): 251–270.

economic and socio-political dynamics, and physical fitness are the major barriers that continue to perpetuate gender inequality in leadership positions in law enforcement.¹⁷

There is a strong consensus in the academic literature that diversity in leadership is beneficial to society, organisations, and individuals.¹⁸ However, there seems to be no consensus on ways to assess impediments faced by specific populations, especially in South Africa. Furthermore, there is scant evidence on the strategies that could be implemented to address gender inequalities in law enforcement. It is against this backdrop that this study provides strategies for breaking barriers for women in leadership positions in law enforcement.

South Africa has had more than two decades of democracy and the MPD leadership positions have not been transformed to their full capacity. Issues such as gender inequality are still experienced in the police. This study is important in the sense that it will critically inform the MPDs of the challenges that are encountered by women in advancing to leadership positions in MPDs. This study contributes to the literature and philosophy on policing since it explores the representation of women in leadership positions in MPDs. This study advocates the improvement of working conditions and the creation of advancement opportunities for women who attempt to enter leadership positions. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the literature and philosophy on police science. To meet the research objectives, a sample comprising of 25 female senior and middle management officials from MPDs who had held their position for at least three or more years, was collected through the use of interviews. This study will use the thematic analysis method to search for patterns that emerged from the interviews conducted with the participants. Thematic analysis entails assigning codes to patterned responses, and the prevalence of a code across data creates a theme.¹⁹ The next section discusses an overview of women in law enforcement in South Africa, and then a brief review of the literature is undertaken. The methodology, research findings and conclusion of the study follow in subsequent sections.

Overview of women in law enforcement in South Africa

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the MPD continues to be a matter of some concern, particularly in a traditionally male-dominated industry such as law enforcement. Research on gender and leadership has revealed that women continue to face challenges in advancing into leadership positions. Figure 1 shows the representation of women in leadership positions, with a specific focus on MPDs comprising Tshwane MDP (TMDP), Johannesburg MPD (JMPD), and Ekurhuleni MPD (EMPD). TMDP has 45 women in leadership positions, compared to males that are 78. The JMPD has 23 women in leadership positions, compared to males that are 75. Also, the EMPD has 23 women in leadership positions compared to males that are 95. The statistics in Figure 1 indicate that there is gender inequality in the workplace, and indicate that women are still underrepresented in leadership positions in all three MPDs compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, Figure 1 indicates that out of a sample of 600 women, 91 are in leadership positions. This represents 15.6 %. This statistic in itself confirms the status as is currently found in the various MPDs that form the subject of the study. Some authors provide explanations for the unequal gender representation in workplaces.

¹⁷ Dee Khosa, "Gender and Police Leadership: An Analysis of Metropolitan Police Departments in South Africa." *International Journal of Criminology and Sociology*, 10, (2021):1333-1341.

¹⁸ Glenda Strachan, Erica French, and John Burgess, The origins and development of managing diversity. In French, E, Burgess, J, & Strachan, G (Eds.) *Managing Diversity in Australia: Theory and Practice*. (Australia; Mcgraw Hill, 2010), 1-16; Barbara Mazur, "Cultural Diversity in Organisational Theory and Practice." *Journal of Intercultural Management*. 2010. <http://www.joim.pl/pdf/MAZURv2n2.pdf>. [Accessed 20 May 2022].

¹⁹ Johnny Saldaña, *Coding and Analysis Strategies. The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2014. 581-605. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199811755.013.001; Gery W. Ryan, and H. Russell Bernard, Data Management and Analysis Methods. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, California, United States of America: Sage Publications.

For instance, Hlophe states that the alleged lack of career planning by women, in contrast to their male counterparts, contributes to the poor advancement of women to management positions.²⁰

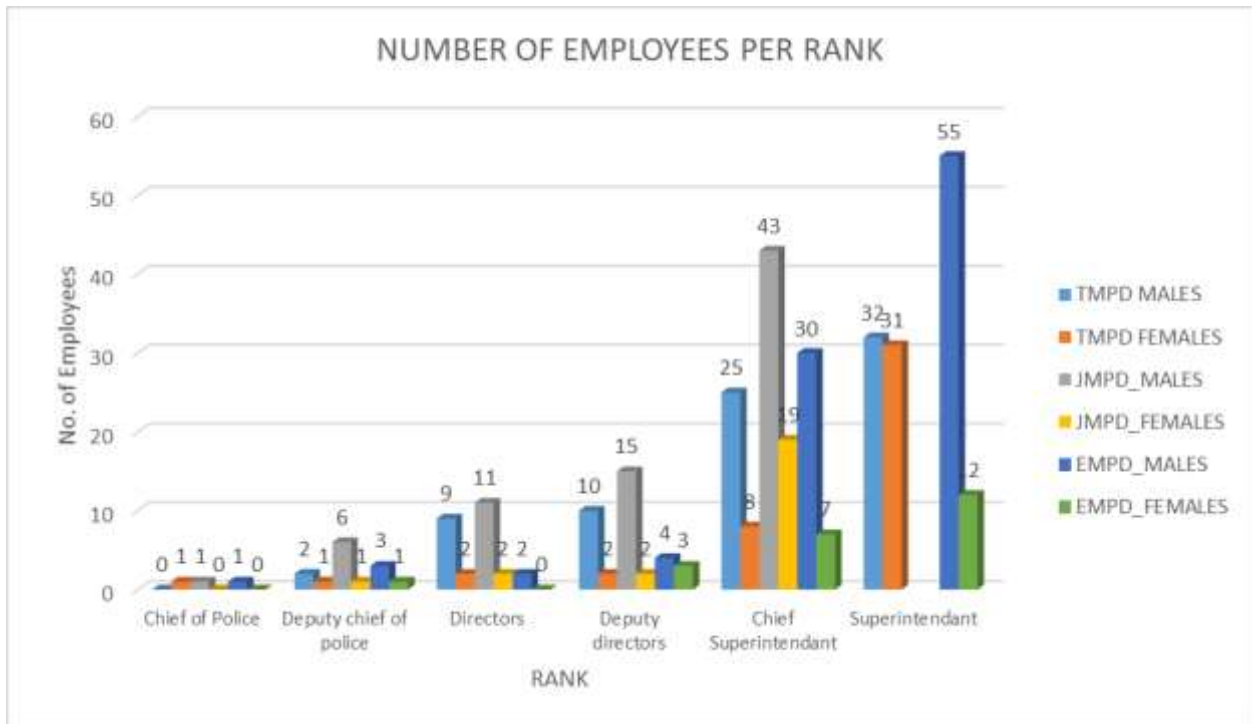


Figure 1: Male and Female employee statistics at TMPD, JMPD, and EMPD

The 2021 SAPS annual report shows that only 9 of the 24 (38%) top management positions are held by women and 285 out of 758 (38%) senior management posts are held by women. The report also shows that female employees constitute only 38% (69622 out of 182126) of total employees in the police service.

As one of the objectives to tackle the imbalances of the past, the local police services, such as the MPDs, are obliged to ensure the full presence and participation of women in various policing structures, from community policing to strategic policing for community safety. This obligation conforms to the Promotion of equality and prevention of unfair discrimination Act of 2000 and advances women in policing leadership positions and other workplaces.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical literature

Various socio-cultural factors influence people’s judgments regarding leadership by men and women. Traditional stereotypes of a good manager being masculine or male still exist.²¹ Theories exist that explain the role of socio-cultural factors on gender differences in leadership and the preference for male as opposed to female leaders.²² Stuhlmacher and Poitras discuss socio-psychological theories that explain the role of prejudice and stereotypes in people’s perceptions and evaluations of women’s

²⁰ Duduzile Rosemary Hlophe, *The perception of women regarding career barriers within a municipality in the KwaZulu Natal Region*. University of Western Cape University, South Africa, 2014.

²¹ Janka I. Stoker, “Factors relating to managerial stereotypes: The role of gender of the employee and the manager and manager-gender ratio.” *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 27(1), (2012): 31–42.

²² Virginia E. Schein, “A global look at psychological barriers to women’s progress in management.” *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), (2001): 675–688; Alice H. Eagly, and Steven Karau, Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. 2002. http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/pdf/Eagley_Role_Conguity_Theory [Accessed 20 May 2022].

managerial roles.²³ For example, the social role theory proposes that beliefs about women's attributes involve stereotype constructs, and these beliefs involve normative expectations of sex-typical gender roles for men and women. Furthermore, these beliefs influence how observers evaluate and express a preference for women over men in leadership.²⁴ Eagly and Karau improved on the social role theory and introduced the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders to theorise the effect of stereotypes and prejudice on women in leadership. According to the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders, people's evaluations of men and women reflect the perceiver's gender-role stereotype beliefs.²⁵

Leadership has mainly been defined with a masculine connotation.²⁶ The role congruity theory suggests that people perceive congruence between traditional gender roles and specific jobs men and women are expected to occupy.²⁷ This study uses the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders because it anticipates findings that underlying values and some of the misconceptions regarding female leaders still exist and that these factors may be linked to gender underrepresentation in MPDs.

The role congruity theory of prejudice towards female leaders is an extension of the social role theory.²⁸ The theory proposes testable predictions about prejudice and its consequences. The distinctiveness of the role congruity theory of prejudice from other theories of gender prejudice is that it argues that prejudice towards female leadership and potential leaders takes two forms. Firstly, the less favourable evaluation of women's potential for leadership is because leadership ability is more stereotypical of men than women.²⁹ Secondly, it argues that there is a less favourable evaluation of the actual leadership behaviour of women than men because such behaviour is perceived as less desirable in women than in men.³⁰ The theory provides that two consequences may arise from the prejudice, one being a less positive attitude towards female leaders in comparison to males, and another highlighting that women will have more difficulties in achieving their aspiration of becoming leaders. This theory indicates that the treatment of leaders as per the content of gender roles accentuates sex differences in behaviour.³¹

The role congruity theory of prejudice goes beyond the social role theory. It considers the congruity between gender roles and leadership roles, and the influence of prejudice on incongruent perceptions of women's leadership behaviour.³² Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt argue that the potential for prejudice against female leaders is inherent in female gender role expectations, and the prejudice follows from the dissimilarity in the expectations that people typically have about leaders.³³

Empirical literature

²³ Alice F. Stuhlmacher, and Jean Poitras. "Gender and Job Role Congruence: A Field Study of Trust in Labor Mediators." *Sex Roles* 63 (2010): 489-499.

²⁴ Eagly, and Karau, Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders; Stephanie K. Johnson, Susan E. Murphy, Selamawit Zewdie, and Richard J. Reichard, "The strong, sensitive type: Effects of gender stereotypes and leadership prototypes on the evaluation of male and female leaders." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 106(1), (2008): 39-60.

²⁵ Eagly, and Karau, Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders.

²⁶ Eagly, and Karau, Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders.

²⁷ Yvonne Due Billing, and Mat Alvesson, "Questioning the notion of feminine leadership: A critical perspective on the gender labelling of leadership." *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7(3), (2000): 144-157.

²⁸ Eagly, and Karau, Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders.

²⁹ Gary N. Powell, D. Anthony Butterfield, and Jane D. Parent, "Gender and managerial stereotypes: have the times changed?" *Journal of Management*, 28(2), (2002): 177-193; Gary N. Powell, and D. Anthony Butterfield, "The "good manager": Masculine or androgynous?" *Academy of Management Journal*, 22(2), (1979): 395-403.

³⁰ Powell, Butterfield and Parent, "Gender and managerial stereotypes: have the times changed?"; Powell, and D. Anthony Butterfield, "The "good manager": Masculine or androgynous?"

³¹ Alice H. Eagly, and Mary C., Johannesen-Schmidt, "The leadership styles of women and men." *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(4), (2001):781-797.

³² Eagly, and Karau, Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders; Eagly, and Johannesen-Schmidt, "The leadership styles of women and men."781-797.

³³ Eagly, and Johannesen-Schmidt, "The leadership styles of women and men."781-797.

This section discusses findings from various studies on the strategies that could be implemented to improve the representation of women in law enforcement. Harrison used a survey of 109 duty officers to show that social bonds such as support from co-workers enhance job satisfaction among females in law enforcement, and mitigates sexual harassment.³⁴ Schuck found that higher female representation in law enforcement is determined by higher levels of education, lack of physical fitness screening criteria and organisations that promote community policing.³⁵ Cambareri and Kuhns interviewed 387 male and female graduates to determine their beliefs and attitudes regarding law enforcement as a career option. The findings showed that women believed that female law enforcers are not respected in communities and there are fewer opportunities available for them for career advancements.³⁶ It is therefore suggested that recruiters should target female college students and encourage them to view law enforcement as a viable career option. Furthermore, the community-centred and service-centred aspects of law enforcement should be promoted.

Yu investigated the challenges faced by women in law enforcement and strategies that could be employed to promote career advancements in the United States.³⁷ Yu concluded lack of respect from male colleagues was a major hindrance to career advancement in law enforcement for females. Therefore, federal agencies should create an organisational culture that promotes gender equality in law enforcement and highlight the achievements of women.³⁸ Yu interviewed 20 female federal officers to determine the strategies that could be employed to promote resilience in law enforcement and suggested that mentorship programmes should be important mechanisms that could be used to assist women to cope with challenges faced in law enforcement. Furthermore, informal training and social networking among female law officers should also be initiated.³⁹ Yu found that career advancements by female law officers were determined by factors such as persistence, acceptance of job transfers, enrolling in leadership programmes, mentorship by senior leaders, Education, attending supervisory courses and networking in conferences.⁴⁰

Shjarback and Todak investigated the prevalence of women in leadership roles in law enforcement in the United States. The findings revealed that female representation in leadership roles in law enforcement remains. However, strategies such as the professionalisation of police departments, community policing initiatives and accreditation in professional bodies could increase the probability of women being employed in leadership roles.⁴¹ Todak, Leban and Hixon showed that women usually delay applying for promotions due to lack of belief in their abilities and lack of experience. Furthermore, women felt that they could not be promoted due to discriminatory practices in law enforcement agencies. Therefore, agencies should investigate cultural practices in their organisations and ensure

³⁴ Jill Hume Harrison, "Women in law enforcement: Subverting sexual harassment with social bonds." *Women and Criminal Justice*, 22(3), (2012): 226-238.

³⁵ Amie M. Schuck, "Female representation in law enforcement: The influence of screening, unions, incentives, community policing, CALEA, and size." *Police Quarterly*, 17(1), (2014): 54-78.

³⁶ Josie F. Cambareri, and Joseph B. Kuhns, "Perceptions and perceived challenges associated with a hypothetical career in law enforcement: Differences among male and female college students." *Police Quarterly*, 21(3), (2018): 335-357.

³⁷ Helen H Yu, "An examination of women in federal law enforcement: An exploratory analysis of the challenges they face in the work environment." *Feminist Criminology*, 10(3), (2015): 259-278; Helen H. Yu, "An exploratory analysis of the strategies women employ to cope with the challenges they face in federal law enforcement." *Women and Criminal Justice*, 28(4) (2018): 301-312; Helen H. Yu, "Multiracial feminism: An intersectional approach to examining female officers' occupational barriers in federal law enforcement." *Women and Criminal Justice*, 31(5), (2021):327-341.

³⁸ Yu, "An examination of women in federal law enforcement: An exploratory analysis of the challenges they face in the work environment." 259-278.

³⁹ Yu, "An exploratory analysis of the strategies women employ to cope with the challenges they face in federal law enforcement." *Women and Criminal Justice*, 301-312.

⁴⁰ Yu, "Multiracial feminism: An intersectional approach to examining female officers' occupational barriers in federal law enforcement." 327-341.

⁴¹ John A. Shjarback, and Natalie Todak. "The Prevalence of Female Representation in Supervisory and Management Positions in American Law Enforcement: An Examination of Organizational Correlates." *Women & Criminal Justice* 29 (2019): 129 - 147.

there are equal opportunities for training and development to enhance leadership skills.⁴² Hill et al found that women were discriminated against in the recruitment process to specialised law enforcement units in the United States. Strategies that could be implemented to increase female representation in specialised units include education through information sessions and shadow programmes for inexperienced officers.⁴³

METHODOLOGY

Three major research designs are applicable to social research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research designs.⁴⁴ This study employed the qualitative approach which is designed to understand situations in their uniqueness, as part of a particular content, and their interactions.⁴⁵ Qualitative implies that the data are better presented to a greater extent in the form of words and narrative, as opposed to numbers.⁴⁶ Using words rather than numbers can be especially valuable to readers because words, when organised into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, and meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader than pages of numbers or statistics.⁴⁷ Conger and Kanungo suggest that leadership is a topic that could best be explored using qualitative research.⁴⁸

Population and Sampling

The target population for this study was approximately 3121 metropolitan police officers who work in various leadership positions such as executives, managers and ordinary employees in the three MPDs in the Gauteng province. The study used a purposive sampling strategy which is widely used in qualitative research for the selection and identification of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest.⁴⁹ This sampling method involves selecting individuals who are knowledgeable and experienced in the phenomenon. In this study, the sample comprised 25 female senior and middle management officials from MPDs who had held their position for at least three or more years.

Data Collection Instrument

The data-collection instrument used in this study was individual interviews. The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews in the women's offices. The interview questions were semi-structured meaning that the researcher had the opportunity to ask follow-up questions if the responses were not satisfactory and to ensure that the data provided were sufficient. The participants were asked the following question: *What remedies can be applied to advance gender diversity in leadership within MPDs?*

Data Analysis

This study used the thematic analysis method to search for patterns that emerged from the interviews conducted with the participants. Thematic analysis entails assigning codes to patterned responses, and

⁴² Natalie Todak, Lindsay Leban, and Benjamin Hixon, "Are women opting out? A mixed methods study of women patrol officers' promotional aspirations." *Feminist Criminology*, 16(5), (2021): 658-679.

⁴³ Leslie Hill, Jacquelyn Theriault, Terry Cherry, and Wendy Stiver, "Is a seat at the table sufficient? Specialized unit participation and perspectives of female law enforcement officers." *Police Practice and Research*, 23(5), (2022): 569-583.

⁴⁴ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*. 4th edition. (London, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2012); John W. Creswell, and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing And Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. (Thousand Oaks, California, United States of America: Sage Publications, 2011).

⁴⁵ Creswell, and Plano Clark, *Designing And Conducting Mixed Methods Research*.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Henning, Wilhelm Van Rensburg, and Brigitte Smit, *Finding Your Way in Qualitative Research*. (Pretoria, Gauteng province, South Africa: Van Schaik, 2004).

⁴⁷ Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. (London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications, 1996); Letherby, *Feminist Research in Theory and Practice*. (Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press Gayle, 2003).

⁴⁸ Jay A. Conger, and Rabindra N. Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership in Organizations*. (Thousand Oaks, California, United States of America: Sage Publications, 1998).

⁴⁹ Creswell, and Plano Clark, *Designing And Conducting Mixed Methods Research*.

the prevalence of a code across data creates a theme.⁵⁰ Coding in this study was conducted using the Atlas tiTM software. All 25 research participants were asked to scrutinize the transcribed data, in order to ensure the credibility of the research. Lincoln and Guba argue that ensuring credibility is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness.⁵¹ For the purpose of this research study, the research was conducted at all three MPDs in the Gauteng province and thus the findings were limited to these departments only. The findings in this study can be transferable and be used in other MPDs in various provinces in South Africa in order to improve the representation of women in leadership positions. In this study, dependability consisted of ensuring that the process was consistent and ensuring that the research is reliable and auditable.⁵² To ensure dependability, the researcher used an electronic recorder to record all the participants’ responses. To ensure credibility, the researcher used the “bracketing” method which makes it simple for a researcher to obtain an overview of all stages of qualitative research, in terms of gathering and interpreting the research findings.⁵³

RESULTS

The participants in this study comprised 25 females from the MPDs in Gauteng from the Tshwane, Johannesburg, and Ekurhuleni regions. The biographical data of the participants are presented according to the MPD, work experience, and age in Table 1.

Table 1: Biographical data of the participants according to the MPD, work experience, and age.

Department	Participants	Experience	Age
Tshwane	T1	13	44
	T2	11	41
	T3	8	36
	T4	11	41
	T5	10	37
	T6	9	44
	T7	7	32
	T8	8	36
	T9	11	41
	T10	10	37
	T11	14	47
Johannesburg	J1	7	29
	J2	13	42
	J3	9	36
	J4	12	38
	J5	11	46
	J6	13	51

⁵⁰ Johnny Saldaña, *Coding and Analysis Strategies. The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2014. 581-605. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199811755.013.001; Gery W. Ryan, and H. Russell Bernard, *Data Management and Analysis Methods*. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) 2000. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, California, United States of America: Sage Publications.

⁵¹ Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Egon G. Guba, *Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences*. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.) 1999. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition. London, United Kingdom: Sage Publications.

⁵² Matthew B Miles, A.M. Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, *Qualitative Data Analysis. A Methods Sourcebook*. 3rd Edition. (Thousand Oaks, California, United States of America: Sage Publications, 2014).

⁵³ Lea Tufford, and Peter Newman, “Bracketing in Qualitative Research.” *Journal of Social Work*, 11(1), (2010): 80–96.

	J7	14	46
	J8	8	34
	J9	10	37
Ekurhuleni	E1	9	30
	E2	13	37
	E3	11	35
	E4	12	34
	E5	8	33

Possible strategies to the advancement of women to leadership positions

To answer the sub-question *what remedies can be applied to advance gender diversity in leadership within MPDs?* The participants were requested to provide information about their views on which strategies can be applied to advance gender diversity in leadership within MPDs. A number of themes emerged from the findings namely *equal opportunities, training and development, mind-set, development strategy, legislation, and mentorship*. The following discusses the themes in more detail.

- Theme 1, equal opportunities:** Some of the participants revealed that they needed to be viewed as equal. In this case, J9 pointed out: *“Build trust among each other; that will help males to see women as equal and capable because they are human beings.”* This was also indicated by T8 and T10, who said: *“We are all equal.”* One of the participants felt that the women in MPDs should be given the chance to exercise discretion. T7 revealed: *“Allowing the women the latitude to exercise their discretion.”* Some participants mentioned fear of the unknown; the participants felt that the management of the MPDs should arrange motivational speakers to motivate women so that they can get rid of this fear. Concerning this, T11 said: *“Get speakers from outside to empower women to get rid of fear.”* This was supported by T2, who posited: *“Women must stop taking a back seat and get rid of fear of the unknown”*.
- Theme 2, training and development:** The majority of the participants were of the view that MPDs should provide training and development for women as one of the strategies to advance gender diversity in leadership in MPDs. In this regard, T9 indicated: *“Provide training so that women can be considered for jobs when they are advertised.”* T5 and E3 indicated: *“More training for females.”* Some of the codes that also emerged were *workshops, train, educate women, empower, qualifications, and education*. Regarding *workshops and seminars*, the participants revealed that they would like the MPD to organise workshops and seminars. In this regard, J7 said: *“To create a career path of empowering and liberating women, send them to workshops and seminars.”* Regarding *training*, E1 indicated: *“To short-list and train women and balance everything.”* This was supported by J7, who said: *“Train and expose them to other assignments or positions.”* The participants also felt that women need to be empowered. In this instance, T5 mentioned: *“Empower women to dream bigger.”* J3 added: *“Let us empower women.”* In terms of *educating women*, T5 revealed: *“We need to educate women in changing their mindset.”* About *education*, T6 said: *“More education and awareness for women.”* J3 and E5 said: *“Education and mentorship.”* In terms of *qualifications*, T10 articulated: *“Encourage women, girls and youth to go to school and get better qualifications”*.
- Theme 3, mindset:** T5 felt that women should be educated in order to change their mindset, as she mentioned: *“We need to educate women in changing their mindset.”* T11 opined that the MPDs need to get motivational speakers to empower women, and stated: *“Get speakers from outside to empower women to get rid of fear.”* This statement was supported by T3, who said: *“Bring more motivational speakers to motivate female workers to make the department bigger.”*

One of the participants felt that women have to show evidence in most cases when they perform their duties in MPDs. In this case, T1 indicated: *“That can be achieved if you deliver, if you are pulling your weight; statistics must speak for themselves. So there is a need for tangible evidence to show that women have done it and they can definitely do it.”* One of the participants indicated that women are capable of taking and executing any task given. In this regard, J9 pointed out: *“Build trust among each other. That will help males to see women as equal and capable because they are human beings”*.

- **Theme 4, development strategy:** One of the participants felt that the MPDs should devise a strategy to empower women at the lower level to have interest in and exposure to the higher level. About this, J8 revealed: *“Implement strategies about developing women while they are still at a lower level and put out systems to prepare them for a higher level.”*

A participant indicated that there are positions in leadership, but the honour lies with women. In this regard, E2 stated: *“Because the opportunity is there for females to apply for leadership positions, it depends on how they prove themselves in interviews and I think if they can overcome that, they will find opportunities.”* Some of the women indicated that MPDs should create a career path for growth. In this instance, J7 expressed: *“To create a career path of empowering and liberating women and send them to workshops and seminars, train and expose them to other assignments or positions.”* One of the participants felt that women should be empowered in order to reach a higher level. In this regard, T8 indicated: *“Empowerment of women into higher positions”*.

- **Theme 5, legislation:** A participant indicated that effective legislation should be in place. In this case, T9 mentioned: *“Make effective implementation of the policies and legislation that address those kinds of issues.”* One of the participants stated that experience should be included in the strategy. About this, J4 said: *“First preference to be given to women with qualifications and years of experience.”* One of the participants indicated that developing a strategy to promote and support advancing gender diversity in leadership within MPDs would be important. In this case, T6 stated: *“Encourage women to have a support system and do more to achieve more; to conquer.”* Some of the participants pointed out that a change in strategies is required. In this regard, T1 indicated: *“The only thing that will balance the ratio is the change in the mindset of people.”* This was supported by T5, who pointed out: *“We need to educate women in changing their mindset”*.

- **Theme 6, mentorship:** Some of the participants felt that education and mentorship programmes should be included in the strategy. Regarding this, J3, E5, and E4 indicated: *“Education and mentorship.”* Some of the participants felt that the strategy that could be applied to advance gender diversity in leadership within MPDs should provide opportunities for women to work in leadership positions. In this regard, J9 stated: *“In policing, there are good opportunities.”* She was supported by E2, who stated: *“Because the opportunity is there for females to apply for leadership positions, it depends on how they prove themselves in interviews and I think if they can overcome that, they will find opportunities.”* One of the participants indicated that they should make women feel secure and trust the systems in the MPDs. J9 advised: *“Build trust among each other, that will help males to see women as equal and capable because they are human beings.”* Some of the participants felt that the researcher should give the findings of this study to MPD management. E3 stated: *“... recording this and giving feedback to top management.”* She was supported by J5, who stated: *“Go and give this feedback of the interviews we are doing to the top management, so they can see how we are struggling.”* One of the participants believed that the strategies that could be applied to advance gender diversity in leadership in MPDs should incorporate employment equity. Concerning

this, J1 indicated: “Use the employment equity and give first preference to women and the less privileged”.

In summary, the participants perceived that first preference should be given to women with qualifications and years of experience, and trust must be built to help men see women as equal and capable because they are human beings. Creating a career path of empowering and liberating women and sending them to workshops and seminars, and training and exposing them to other assignments or positions were also highlighted. In addition, the participants mentioned a need for education and mentorship and to empower women to dream bigger. These response patterns or codes highlighted factors that were seen by the participants as strategies or remedial steps necessary to be in place in the MPDs to advance gender diversity in leadership positions. The conclusion is that the participants advocated equality, balance, incorporation of legislation, mentorship, motivational speakers, training and development, a development strategy, and a change of mindset.

DISCUSSION

Several factors were considered as indicators of possible remedial steps for the advancement of women to leadership positions. These included training and development, mindset shifts, legislation, and mentorship. Extracted examples of the participants’ responses to the coding mindset and the integration of the overall codes indicated that a change of mindset fostered through training and mentorship programmes would remedy the unequal gender representation in leadership positions. The participants indicated that adherence to legislative remedies catering for the development and skills training of women would improve women’s capabilities and promote equal gender representation in leadership positions. This study’s findings are supported by existing literature that discusses remedies for the advancement of women to leadership positions. For instance, Yu also suggested that mentorship and training programmes are important for female career advancements in law enforcement.⁵⁴

The participants in this study suggested that women should view themselves as equal to men and refrain from taking a back seat in their agencies. Todak et al., also highlighted that females usually delay applying for promotions due to a lack of self-belief and discriminatory practices in recruitment.⁵⁵ Therefore, it is imperative that agencies create an environment or a culture where females are respected and treated similarly to their male counterparts.

The research results showed that the participants perceived that gender diversity and equity should be included in the MPDs’ strategies in order to facilitate the appointment of women in leadership positions. The Republic of South Africa provides that women in the police and women in leadership positions should be protected against inequality of access and that women should be given opportunities within the MPDs.⁵⁶ Although the policy is in place to address equity in the workplace, Percy-Smith argues that gender inequalities in nature and multidimensionality cannot be reduced to some single and universally agreed upon set of priorities.⁵⁷ The research results indicate that the participants wanted MPDs to consider providing training and development for women as a strategy to advance gender diversity in leadership positions within MPDs. In this instance, MPDs should introduce the following measures: the creation of career paths, introducing empowerment programmes, and training and seminars to build trust among male and female colleagues.

⁵⁴ Yu, “An exploratory analysis of the strategies women employ to cope with the challenges they face in federal law enforcement.” *Women and Criminal Justice*, 301-312; Yu, “Multiracial feminism: An intersectional approach to examining female officers’ occupational barriers in federal law enforcement.” 327-341.

⁵⁵ Natalie Todak, Renee J. Mitchell, and Rachel Tolber, “Well Boys, Welcome to the New Law Enforcement”: Reactions to Women on Elite Specialty Units.” *Women and Criminal Justice*, (2022): 1-19.

⁵⁶ Republic of South Africa South Africa, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) 4 of 2000. Pretoria, Gauteng province, South Africa: Government Printer, 2000.

⁵⁷ Janie Percy-Smith, (ed.) *Policy Responses to Social Exclusion: Towards Inclusion*. (Buckingham, United Kingdom: Open University Press, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to provide strategies to be implemented to break barriers for women in leadership positions in law enforcement. MPDs are a hostile environment for women striving for leadership positions. The study employed the qualitative analysis approach with 25 women in leadership positions in Gauteng MPDs interviewed. The participants were requested to provide information about their views on which strategies can be applied to advance gender diversity in leadership within MPDs. A number of themes emerged from the findings namely: the promotion of equal opportunities, the provision of training and development, shifts in the mindset of women in law enforcement, development strategy, adherence to legislation, and the provision of mentorship.

Remedial strategies that address men's mindsets, underlying prejudice, and discrimination were identified as necessary for the advancement of women to leadership positions in MPDs. Legislation and mentorship were seen as important to developing a strategy that would bring balance and advance gender diversity in leadership positions within MPDs. The researcher recommends that MPDs should strictly adhere to the LRA.⁵⁸ This act is an effective remedy against gender inequality in MPD leadership positions. Institutions globally are advocating the empowerment of women and equal gender representation at work. MPDs should give preference to women applying for leadership positions, as the affirmative action approach is mandated by the Constitution.⁵⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

MPDs should implement training on gender equity policies to prevent discrimination against women, including pregnant women. Another recommendation entails mentorship and coaching to empower women to have the self-confidence to seek promotions and apply for leadership positions. When one learns from these experiences, it leverages the strength and helps address development areas. It is necessary to empower women so that they are able to capitalise on the opportunities that are available so that the cycle of discrimination can be broken. Women who are empowered can advocate for themselves and others. It is recommended that employment equity policies and training and development be incorporated in the strategies of MPDs, and empowerment of women be practised. The LRA provides equal skills development training. MPDs should implement the provisions of the LRA to complement affirmative action programmes they introduce in order to fast-track equal gender representation. This will assist in diminishing prejudice and stereotypical behaviour that impact the representation of women in the workplace in leadership positions in the MPDs.

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