

**EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG
POLICE OFFICERS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

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DECLARATION

I, Constance Singo, hereby declare that the *exploration of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa* for the degree of Master of Public Health at the University of Venda, School of Health Sciences has not been presented or submitted by anyone at this university or other universities. The work that has been developed and designed is my own and the other work that was used from various sources was fully acknowledged.

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

This mini-dissertation is dedicated to my late mother, Nndanganeni Gladys Phungo and to my children Junior and Makhadzi, you are my inspiration.

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I would like to give my sincere gratitude to the Almighty for this work; by myself it was not going to be easy.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

<i>AIDS</i>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<i>EHW</i>	Employee Health Wellness
<i>HIV</i>	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
<i>PTSD</i>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<i>SAPS</i>	South African Police Service
<i>Stats SA</i>	South Africa Statistics
<i>WHO</i>	World Health Organisation
<i>USA</i>	The United States of America
<i>WHO</i>	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

Over the past years, suicide and suicidal ideation are being increasingly recognised as important issues for public health policy, especially, among police officers. Suicidal ideation is one of the tragic issues among police officers, causing serious emotional, spiritual, medical, social and psychological distress for the individual, their families and friends, however, not much is known about it in the Vhembe District.

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers in Vhembe District. The study was conducted in the Thohoyandou cluster, which is situated in Limpopo Province, South Africa. A study had a qualitative phenomenological research design. The data saturation were reached at the number of 12 police officers, the target population were selected by means of convenience sampling and data was collected through a semi-structured interview. The data collected was analysed using the thematic analytical approach and conclusion were made based on the findings of the study.

The study findings show the following as the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers - domestic violence, financial problems, divorce, extramarital affairs, lack of social support, health problems, contradicting the law and organisational factors that include organisational structure and working with guns.

The study recommended that the South African Police Services should continue to provide support and counselling to police officers after they have attended to traumatic cases and that police officers need to be more open about their problems and avoid attempting to deal with them by themselves.

Key words: Exploration, factors, suicidal ideation and police officers.

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2012) estimated that about 1 million people across the globe commit suicide, annually. The organisation also estimates that by 2020, 1.5 million people will die from suicide. Shane (2013) confirmed that suicidal behaviours are one of the ten leading causes of death in the world which accounts for over a million deaths per year. It is very apparent that suicide is a global problem that needs to be taken seriously. In addition Mark, Chae and Douglas (2012) found that suicide is not isolated to the general public but is also identified as contributing to death among police officers. Studies have indicated that among law enforcement personnel in the USA, roughly 80-90 percent of police suicides involved the officer's revolver. Schlebush (2006) mentioned that a study conducted in Europe had showed that suicide attempts are 10 to 40 times higher than completed suicides; a total number of 9 to 36 million suicide attempts are estimated every year, worldwide and that more suicide attempt were found among police officers. Bachmann (2018) found that the exact number of suicide is unknown, due to the fact that some cases of suicide are reported as accidents.

South Africa suffers from a higher rate of suicide than, for example, the United Kingdom and America, the countries that have five times the number of population of South Africa. South Africa has the highest suicide rate in the world with almost 450 men and women taking their lives a month with four or five deaths being the result of suicide among police offices (Luvhengo, 2017). Suicides are very problematic as they leave behind friends and family members who fail to understand and accept why their loved ones decided to commit suicide (Luvhengo, 2017). The Government Gazette (2018) reported that South Africa has a suicide rate of 10.7 per 10 000 people, and this is higher than other countries, such as Botswana at 9.7, Egypt at 2.6, Malawi at 5.5 and Nigeria at 9.9 per 10 000.

Suicide ideation is the first warning sign of potential suicidal behaviour. Over the past years, suicide and suicidal ideation have become increasingly recognised as important issues for public health policy, especially for police officers. According to the report from the World Health Organisation in 2000, approximately 10 to 20 police officers are more likely to attempt suicide, than other groups, worldwide. This is because there are a wide range of activities involved in police work and that increase stress and lead to serious suicidal attempt. Parsons (2004) indicated that the police officers are involved in a variety of activities, from proactive patrol

activities, to specific criminal activities such as narcotics investigations. The working environment in the South African Police Services is traumatising and stressful and it leads to repeated exposure of these offices to disturbing events among the police officers. Police officers experience more stress-related physical and psychological complaints than workers in most other professions.

South Africa's suicide rates are eight times higher than those of the United States and 20 times higher than those of many western countries. Suicide attempts are up by 20% more than completed suicides. Mental disorders are associated with more than 90% of all cases of suicide. Depression affects approximately 25% of those with chronic illness including HIV/AIDS. South African policemen and women are far more regularly exposed to brutal and gratuitous violence than would be the case if they worked in many other parts of the world. It would not, therefore, be surprising to learn that their own violent behaviour may first and foremost be a product of the very violent world that they inhabit. It will not be possible to properly address the problem of violence within the police's ranks without paying close attention to and having great sympathy for the circumstances they are forced to confront every day (Ndebele, Lebone & Cronje, 2011).

Violanti (2018) he reported that the stressors related to suicide among police included lack of organizational support, traumatic events, stigma associated with asking for help, shift work or problems related with fitting in with the police culture. Problems related with domestic relationships and alcohol use were commonly mentioned as precursors to suicide or as correlates of suicidal ideation and were hypothesized to arise from stressful working conditions.

In South Africa, each year about 6 to 8 thousand people commit suicide, making suicide the greatest cause of unnatural death after homicides and unintentional causes. It has been calculated that for every suicide that occurs in South Africa, there are 20 unsuccessful suicide attempts. Du Preez, Steyn and Booyens, (2015) reported that every year, between 137860 and 160 000 South Africans try unsuccessfully to commit suicide. This means that there are 13 333 attempts every month, 3077 a week, 438 a day and 18 or more every hour; these calculations exclude unreported attempts.

Statistics show that many police officers commit suicide. A study conducted by Ndebele *et al.*, (2011) cites from The Star newspaper an article on 6 April 2010, on a 32 years old woman who was killed by her husband who was a policeman; he then shot himself and was found dead by his colleague at his home in Kagiso, Krugersdorp in Gauteng Province. It was reported that he had a gunshot wound to his head. Existing programme for the debriefing of

officers who have experienced traumatic incidents may be inadequate, partly because they are voluntary.

It has been said that when a person commits suicide, their family members are not compensated, the family are only compensated if the person died or was injured on duty. An upsetting rate of 4 suicides per 10000 people has been indicated in previous years. Due to the increase, suicidal behaviours are regarded as a major public health concern (Swanepoel, 2003). According to Violanti, Mnatsakanova and Andrew (2013) depression as a major predictor of suicide ideation, especially due to the fact that the work exposures are commonly related to trauma. Some of these traumatic exposures are fatal accidents, crime, child abuse, homicide, suicide and rape; these are all potential factors for suicide.

Ndebele, *et al.*, (2011) indicated that in a survey of the extent of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and suicidal ideation in police ranks, it was recommended that there should be an important policy intervention that the Government should consider in dealing with the problem of police harshness and criminality. The authors add that the level of discipline, command and control in the police appear to be low. This is primarily over the internal respect for the chain of command that exercises order in any armed force profession. Where this order breaks down the chain of command also breaks down. Fixing the police will therefore require fixing discipline which will in turn require reconstructing in respect for the chain of command (Ndebele, Lebone & Cronje, 2011).

Ndebele, *et al* (2011) indicated that public health professionals advocate fighting against the increase in suicide. The other health-related professionals, such a psychologist, medical doctors, psychiatrist, social workers and nurses report that suicidal behaviour is becoming an epidemic and a worldwide problem. South Africa remains a violent society despite the progress made by the police and the private security sectors in reducing the country's murder rate by 50% over the past 15 years. This has led police officers to continually handling of difficult cases that put their lives in danger and which induce suicidal ideation because of the stress and depression they encounter (Wellington, 2010). The researcher has observed that there is a high rate of suicide among police officers in South Africa, as compared with other professions.

Wellington (2010) notes that suicide among the police officers is due to police officers' experience from the nature of their work and certain features of the organizational culture - inadequate resources, insufficient remuneration for services rendered, lack of recognition, lack of promotions and limited availability of support and counselling services.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The South African Police Services Annual Report (2013) indicated that between 2012 and 2013, 115 South African police officers died from suicide; the highest numbers were in Limpopo, Gauteng and Free State. From 2014 to 2015, 87 police officers committed suicide in South Africa, of which 23 were from Limpopo Province. The Limpopo Mirror (2015) also reported that a senior police officer from Thohoyandou cluster shot himself and died in November 2013; 36 police officers have committed suicide at Vhembe District between 2014 and 2015 (SAPS Annual Report, 2015).

Suicide is a solitary act that has severe impact on the family and friends, they are left behind with unanswered questions about the triggering factor of the suicide. The family and friends are also overwhelmed by emotions, pain, sorrow and guilty feeling. The family and friends continue with their life a while adopting variety of coping skills to deal with loss (Spillane, Larkin, Corcoran, Matvienko-Sikar and Arensman, 2017). The suicide among the police officers should be taken into consideration as this will have an impact on the children growing without parents, due to the fact that other police officers killed their spouses before they commit suicide.

1.3 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The South African Police Force (SAPF) is a critical ingredient for South Africa to successfully combat the scourge of violent crime. A study conducted by Rothman and Pienaar (2005) showed that the highest incidents of suicidal ideation were in Limpopo, Gauteng and Free State. If nothing is done to prevent this scourge, SAPF will have few police officers who may fail to combat the country's crime. Not much has been researched about the study topic, both nationally and internationally. Since little is known about the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in South Africa, the researcher saw the need of conducting a study especially focusing on this topic; previous studies have focused on topics like coping, stress and occupational health and safety among police officers. There are no studies conducted on the exploration of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation amongst the police officers in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province.

1.4 SIGNIFICANT OF THE STUDY

This study may enhance the understanding of health practitioners and policy-makers about the risk and protective factors for suicide; this may also enable the formulation of recommendations and subsequent development of effective and well-targeted preventative measures or programmes that could help in reducing this scourge. The South African Police Services may benefit from the recommendations that could assist in reducing the stress,

thereby enhancing the work productivity of the police officers. Furthermore, this could minimise the number of suicidal behaviours and the death rate among police officers. The family and community members may also benefit from the study because suicide remains a major devastating event for families; families are left with unanswered questions as to why the family member committed suicide. This also has an additional impact if the person who committed suicide was the breadwinner as the family will be left with emotional as well as financial gap. The Government and law enforcement may also benefit in terms of dealing with the problem of police brutality and criminality and also implement programme that may help police officers to better develop coping skills and identify any protective factors.

1.5 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, South Africa.

1.6 THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To determine the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers
- To identify coping strategies of police officers against suicidal ideation.

1.7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following are the research questions:

1.7.1. What are the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers?

1.7.2. What are the coping strategies of the police officers against suicidal ideation?

1.8 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

1.8.1 Exploration

Brickford (2005) defines 'exploration' as the act of searching thorough in order to have understanding of a certain content. For the present study, exploration refers to an understanding that police officers have concerning the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation.

1.8.2 Factors

Brickford (2005) defined factors as circumstances and influences that contribute to a result. A factor in this study refers to the circumstances that could be influencing the development of stress and suicidal ideation among police officers.

1.8.3 Suicidal ideation

Pienaar (2005) defines 'suicidal ideation' as the thoughts and cognition about suicide. In the present study, suicidal ideation is regarded as the thought of ending your life.

1.8.4 Police officers

Bezuidenhout (2010) defines a police officer as an agent who works under a law enforcement and also a serving member of the community. For the purpose of the present study, a police man/woman is personnel serving the community and working in Vhembe District.

1.9 STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

The structure of the study consists of the following five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter focused on the background and introduction of suicidal ideation among police officers. The introduction of the study helps a researcher in identifying the gaps and what has been studied on a topic, in this case on suicidal ideation. The chapter has discussed aspects of the study - the problem statement, rational, significant, aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter provides a detailed discussion on the literature reviewed, in relation to the aims and objectives. The aims of the study was to explore the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers, focussing on the psychological, social and economic factors, the working environmental factors and the coping strategies employed by the officers.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the research methodology. The study research design is phenomenological qualitative research design; a qualitative method enables a detailed and in-depth understanding of the study. The sampling procedures, study setting, data collection method, ethical considerations and the measures to ensure trustworthiness have also been discussed.

Chapter 4: Results and discussion of the study

In this chapter is a discussion of the findings of the study. A thematic analysis was performed on the data, where the findings were discussed in themes, subthemes and categories.

Chapter 5: Summary, limitations, conclusions and recommendations.

This chapter has presented a summary, conclusion, limitations of the study and recommendation of the study; these are based on the findings of the study.

1.10. Summary of the Chapter

This chapter has presented the background of the study which explores the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The process of searching the existing literature relating to a research problem in order to develop theoretical and conceptual perspective for a study and to integrate the current research finding with what the literature says about the research problem is known as a literature review (Kumar, 2011). This section will critically discuss, review and examine the literature that focuses on suicidal ideation among police officers in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province. The study literature will be reviewed on what has been done and published by credited scholars and authors. Nicholas, Rautenbush and Maistry (2010) explains that the sources where the literature can be reviewed include books, journals, articles, official reports and databases. According to Nicholas *et al* (2010) mentioned that suicidal ideation among police officers is caused by a number of issues, such as organisational stressors, psychological stressors, behavioural factors, family issues and the lack of social support.

2.2 CONTRIBUTORY FACTORS TO SUICIDAL IDEATION

According to the literature reviewed, the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation are the following: psychological, socio-economic and work-environmental factors. Psychological factors cover depression, mental health problems, burnout and stress, while socio-economic factors cover family, conflicts and financial issues. While work-environmental factors relates to the trauma cases the police officers handle and working with guns.

2.2.1. Psychological factors

Joiner (2005), on the interpersonal-psychological theorist of suicide behaviour, has suggested that people who die of suicide do so because they have the capability to die of suicide. Joiner (2005) adds that a person commits suicide when he or she experiences a sense of loneliness, burdensomeness and a sense of low sense of belonging amongst the family and community. In his book titled "The suicidal mind" written in 1996, Joiner found that people who experiences psychological pain are more likely to commit suicide that the people who do not have psychological pain. This was also supported by Li, Luo, Ke, Dai, Zheng, Zhang, Cassidy, Soares, Zhang and Ning (2017) indicated that people with Major depressive disorder have higher risk of committing suicide. Other risk factors which were significantly associated with suicidality were: living alone, higher education, self-reported depression, getting psychiatric diagnoses. Significant risk factors for MDD were also noticed with comorbid anxiety disorders, self-reported anxiety, insomnia PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and borderline

personality disorder. Approximately 24 million people worldwide suffer from schizophrenia, with equal rates (7 per 1000) conveyed amongst men and women [16]. It is expected that there is a 4 to 10 percent lifetime possibility for suicide among persons with schizophrenia and a 40% lifetime risk of suicide attempts (Gao, Fan, Di, Xia, Long & Zhu, 2017)

2.2.1.1. Depression and mental health problems

Depression is characterised by sadness and feeling down. A person with depression feels down continually and they might not see any goodness in living. They often lose interest in the normal activities they used to participate in and they become less involved and withdrawn from family, friends and co-workers. The disorder's features can become so severe that a person frequently feels down without any apparent reasons and committing suicide for them is something they think about in their everyday life; they experience impaired cognitive and behavioural symptoms (Burke, 2014). People with mental health problems such as schizophrenia report a higher degree of suicidal attempts and completed suicides. This is because schizophrenia has symptoms such as delusion and hallucinations. People with schizophrenia can hear voices that they should kill themselves and the development of schizophrenia can start anytime without alerting the person about what is coming into their minds (Association, 2013).

The following are symptoms that were identified by Bezuidenhout (2015) as some factor that can contribute to suicide:

- A history of mental illness,
- Intense depression,
- Feeling of hopelessness,
- Expression of self-hatred, humiliation and guilty,
- A desire for punishment or any self-destructive behaviour,
- Wanting to put an end to suffering
- Failure to identify an alternative way to deal with a problem and
- Failure to cope with changing demands

2.2.1.2 Burnout and stress

A set of negative psychological experiences, reflecting as a wearing out from prolonged exposure to work-related stress, is considered as burnout (Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Maslach and Leiter, (2016) defines burnout as a syndrome related to work and stress; it is described as a continued response to chronic stress at work affecting employees and employers across the various professions and industries, in both professional and personal ways. Salvagioni,

Melanda, Mesas, González, Gabani and de Andrade (2017) report that over the past 25 years, burnout was seen as a negative influence for the individual as well as the organisation at large. For instance, it was found that burnout and depression can develop into a feeling of failure, fatigue, and loss of control; this can lead to job-related stress and the development of suicidal ideation among individuals, including police officers.

Abu Akar (2013) conducted a study and found that burnout can have numerous effects on individuals especially in the South African Police Force. This can contribute towards work-stress and suicidal ideation among the workers. It was further indicated that burnout is also related to low morale, impaired work performance, and reduced productivity, absenteeism, hostile interpersonal relationship with the community members and colleagues, negative attitudes towards their work, no job satisfaction and low quality of life.). Abu Akar (2013) revealed that work rewards aspects, such as individual supervision and performance feedback play an important role in safeguarding against work-related demands and burnout.

2.2.2. The socio-economic factors

The socio-economic factors in this present study include the family conflicts and financial concerns.

2.2.2.1. Family Conflict

Family stress, in specific situations, is linked with suicide ideation. The changes in one's relationship may cause stress. This is supported by various researchers, who believe that a number of suicidal ideation, attempted suicide and completed suicide are prone to family conflict (Bezuidenhout, 2015). It was further indicated that many people who commit suicide are people who have divorced with their loved ones, followed by those who are single, those failing to get the right spouse and the widowed, the least prone are those who are married. In addition, people who are married and have children can committing suicide, but due to the responsibilities that they have; being married with children tends to be a protective factor that helps to minimise the suicidal ideation. This is because children and husbands promote a circle of communication (Becvar & Becvar, 2012).

Ogbuanu, Glover, Probst, Hussey and Liu (2011) indicated that employees are more likely than the unemployed people to become concerned with how to balance their work and personal life; failure to do so, results in stress in the workplace. Work and family conflicts are related to the health and wellbeing of the persons. Ogbuanu, et al (2011) add that hours worked, work overload, non-work stressors such as the number of children and difficulties in relationships all have a negative impact on work performance and personal outcome.

A family undergoes a variety of crises, such as a crisis of relationships, power sharing and defining of values. During those crises, the vulnerable groups are children, women and elderly adults, depending on who is working, ones who are prone to tensions and those expected to cope with them. Zastrow (2010) indicated that stress and suicide involving spouse and family members are significant concerns, especially for fulltime working parents. A wife or husband who is frustrated at work may come home and take out her/his stress on their children and other family members. There are high statistics of domestic violence which is with -related to work related stress (Zastrow, 2010).

Stack and Scourfield (2015) also reported that correlation between suicide and divorce, the separation couple who are failing to cope with divorce are said to have developed suicidal ideation. Podlesek, Kuzmanic, Demsar and Zaletel (2011) also reported that divorced couples are more likely to commit suicide due to the low level of support from the family members.

2.2.2.2. Economic problem

Pridmore and Reddy (2012) has shown that low socio-economic status increases the risk of suicidal behaviour, as do low educational levels and long-term unemployment. On the other hand, economic development can also result in social problems that can increase suicidal ideation. Examples include reactions to major economic losses in families, increased pathological gambling, increased divorce rates, increased alcohol and drug abuse, increased health-care costs that make it difficult for families to access this, weakening of family ties and social support, migration to urban areas and an increasing economic and social gap between the rich and the poor, result in high levels of frustration (Pidmore & Reddy, 2012). Pidmore and Reddy (2012) also reported that about 15 individuals who completed suicide following a major financial loss were identified.

A South African study conducted by Cook (2013) has found that socio-economic issues that contribute to suicidal ideation risks, in particular, are financial problems and associated feelings of loss of parental support, the effects of rapid urbanisation, and increased competitiveness in education and employment, as well as rising children's needs. Bond and Holkar (2018) reported that financial problem can be a silent killer and can contribute to an individual to develop suicidal ideation silently. It also reported that people with debts are three times as likely to develop suicidal ideation. Holkar (2018) reported that 13 per cent of individuals with debts problems have ruminant about suicide and 3 per cent of them have committed suicide. Sudden financial triggers can also lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviours an unexpected income tremor, the rapid accumulation of fees, charges and interest on debts

can challenge a person's sense of self, their role in their family and their sense of security, and leave a person feeling like having difficulty about the likelihood of resolving their situation Holkar (2013).

2. 2. 2. 3. Health-related experiences

Health-related problems also has an influence on the development of suicidal ideation among individual. The most common known disease that people fail to cope with is HIV/AIDS and diabetes mellitus. Ceretta, Reus, Albelaira & Jornada (2012) estimated that 150 million people are affected by diabetes mellitus globally. Diabetes mellitus is one of the public health problems. People affected by diabetes mellitus are more prone to depressive symptoms and some meet the criteria of major depressive disorder. One of the symptoms of major depressive disorder is recurrent thoughts of suicidal ideation, sometimes with specific plan of committing suicide.

South Africa is experiencing an HIV/AIDS epidemic of shattering dimensions. HIV/AIDS has devastating effects in terms of personal and family suffering. The disease is highly stigmatized and there are many instances of discrimination against sufferers and their families (Bezuidenhout, 2015). This could lead to the development of suicidal ideation in both the infected as well as affected individuals. This especially becomes a problem if the person did not receive counselling and if the families are not supportive enough of the infected individual. HIV/AIDS infection is accompanied by depression, anxiety and chronic stress. It is also characterized by feeling of helplessness and hopelessness and can lead to suicidal ideation (Bezuidenhout, 2008).

2.2.3. The perceived work-environmental factors

Chae and Douglas (2013) note that the functional aspect of the police organisation has growing evidence that it is related to a high risk of health-related problems among police officers. The inconsistent working hours and the unstable working shifts have long been identified as factors contributing to suicidal ideation and stress among police officers. In addition, a study conducted by Gerber, Hartmann, Brand, Holsboer and Puhse (2010) found that 50 per cent out of 70 per cent of people who work night shift and overtime experience repeated work stress, occupational dissatisfaction and sleep disturbance as compared with other professions where they work the normal working hours.

The effect of working night shift and uneven hours have serious consequences for police officers as they are expected to play their unique role as peace-makers within the community

most of their time. The police officers are also expected to work extended hours, leading to failure to have their leisure time to release the work-related stress (Chae & Douglas, 2013).

2.2.3.1. Organisational structures

Violanti *et al.*, (2011) argue that police work is comprised of 80 % of unpredictable events, such as exposure to trauma, extended periods of boredom, inconsistent shift work and tension associated with organisational issues. These are regarded as highly stressful issues in a police officer's occupation. Shane (2010) identified multiple factors that contribute towards stress among the South African Police officials and being exposed to trauma. Stress among police officer is attached to both organisational factors such as structural and financial stress from the police organisations and operations as associated with the day-to-day strain from routine police work. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop after exposure to an event in which death, severe physical harm, or violence occurred or was threatened (Klimley, Van Hasselt and Stripling, 2018).

Organisational stress emerges as a result stress related to aspects of organisational life in law enforcement. Structural stressors are ascribed to the departmental and administrative culture around issues such as, the leadership styles of management, lack of autonomy, and interpersonal conflicts between officers (Violanti, Andrew, Mnatsakanova, Hartley, Fekedulegn and Burchfield, 2016). Violanti, *et al.*, (2016) notes that operational stress emerges from daily policing responsibilities within the community. Operational stressors manifest from the cumulative effects of exposure to extended periods of inactivity and boredom, punctuated by emotionally-intense experiences of potential trauma and fear. The police officers are chronologically exposed to work stress that is associated with high risk suicide. The police officers are reported to be exposed to trauma cases that have high potential for suicidal ideation.

2.2.3.2. The availability of means to commit suicide

Bezuidenhout (2015) mentioned that the availability of the means to commit suicide plays a significant role in increasing the desire amongst the police officers to attempt or complete suicide. About 99 per cent of police officers in South Africa (SA) and in other countries are now more in a position to acquire alcohol, firearms, and other lethal means by which to commit suicide (Bezuidenhout, 2015). This is regarded as one of the causal factor for the police officers to show high statistics in suicidal behaviours and spousal homicide.

On the average, 94 percent of suicides involve the officers' firearm; this is from data from census in 2003 to 2007 which indicated that over 80 percent of completed suicides among

police officers in New Jersey were involved a firearm (Chae & Boyle, 2014). The most common method of committing suicide in South Africa, however is through hanging. It was recorded that in South Africa, between 1999 and 2004 the commonly-used method to commit suicide was through hanging at 69 per cent, followed by firearms at 13 per cent and lastly by poisoning (Chae & Boyle, 2014). According to Bezuidenhout (2015) and Shilubane, Ruiters, Bos, Reddy, van den Borne (2014). The method of committing suicide depends on the availability of the means to commit suicide. It has been mentioned that police officers mainly commit suicide through shooting themselves.

2.3 THE COPING STRATEGIES

2.3.1. Substance abuse

Substance abuse is defined as the excessive use of substance; substance refers to any chemical compound that can alter your thoughts, mood or behaviours. This means that legal drugs like alcohol, nicotine and caffeine are also included in this definition. This substance can affect your mood and behaviour and can be very addictive. They can also cause health problems and possibly death. Once sober and calm after taking such substance, the person feels ashamed, but the problem is that when a person is not under the influence, their remorse is genuine but they again take the substance only to regret later (Bezuidenhout, 2015).

Lindsay and Shelley (2009) claim that alcohol dependency and abuse has long been viewed as a problem among police officers which leads to unwanted behaviours. As indicated by a number of studies, such as by Love, Davidson and Valenti (2014) and Maurizo, Serafini and Innamorati (2017) substance use amount the police officer is a leading factor in substance abuse as by many police officers; they consume alcohol as a way to cope with the daily stressors and tension inherent in their work. The police departments have historically been recognized as having a culture of drinking not only in the United State of America, but in African countries, too (Innamorati, *et al*, 2017).

Lindsay and Shelley (2009) add that police officers use alcohol as a way of coping with tensions, however, excessive drinking and the consumption of alcoholic beverages has been recognised as a major maladaptive approach to coping, which has contributed to increased risk for suicidal behaviours and other health-related concerns.

Bezuidenhout (2015) asserts that there is a correlation between a history of substance abuse and suicide. Violanti, Slaven, Charles, Burchfiel, Andrew and Homish (2011) found that police officers who consumed excessive amounts of alcohol to manage symptoms of traumatic stress and suicidal symptoms were substantially more likely to develop suicidal ideation. In addition

South African police officers who use alcohol as a means to relieve psychological strain were more likely to report job dissatisfaction and chronic marital problems.

Violanti *et al.*, (2011) reveals that in a sample of 852 South African police officers, 48 per cent of the men and 40 per cent of the women engaged in excessive drinking such as hazardous and binge drinking, Another study which was conducted by Lindsay and Shelley (2009) shows that over 50 per cent of deaths among the police officers in Australia were associated with alcohol-related problems. Alcohol consumption is not only a socially acceptable way to cope with stress, but it also serves as a means to socialize within the police community.

Alcohol is reported to be a problem within the police enforcement, the use of alcohol is mostly associated with job stress and family stress. The increase of alcohol among the police officers is due to difficulty in resolving their own problems as individual and they then resort to alcohol (Violanti *et al.*, 2011).

2.3.2. The Employment Assistance Programme

Donnelly, Valentine and Oehme (2015) states that the employment assistance programme involves the assessment, counselling and therapeutic services for employees and their dependents who experience personal, emotional and psychological problems. The employment assistance programme aims to help the employees overcome the challenges they face, which are either caused by the working environment or their personal problems. An assessment conducted amongst the employee involves detailed counselling, life skills programmes, as well as formal training, rehabilitation and referral, if the client's situation requires this (Zastrow, 2010).

Nicholas *et al.*, (2010) also adds that there are several areas that the programme should assist the employees with include dealing with family stress, work place violence and trauma experienced by employees. Meyer, Rothmann and Pienaar (2019) recommended that there should be an effort and support that emphasize the intervention and support on how stress and suicidal ideation are addressed, however, police officers have negative attitudes towards professional counselling because of the social stigma. Officers may assume that others will label them as weak or unfit if they go for counselling. Others may be unwilling to do so due to the fear that they may be forced to hand in their firearms. The United State law enforcement agencies are engaged in energies to promote officer wellness and prevent suicide. Officers' views of confidentiality was inhibited in the use of in-house or contracted mental health services, while a weak or inconclusive evidence-base raises questions about common

approaches like peer support or critical incident stress debriefing (Ramchand., Sunders, Osilla, Ebener, Kotzias, Thornton, Strang & Cahill, 2018).

Westeret, *et al.*, (2010) mentioned that police officers may perceive the idea of seeing a counsellor as violating traditional masculine norms such as being self-reliant, being in control, and being able to overcome life challenges without the help of others, sentiments observed more with male police officers. This was supported by Berg *et al.*, (2006), who indicated that among all the police officers, 81 per cent of female officers and 61 per cent of male officers were more likely to turn to their primary-care physicians for health care and counselling. Furthermore Westret et al (2010) found that the stigma associated with seeing a professional counsellor was the most common reason given by police officers for their unwillingness to seek mental health services. In the light of the stigma and shame associated with seeking professional mental health services, researchers have encouraged law enforcement agencies to develop alternative methods of helping through the development of 24 hours helpline programmes which are aimed at peer counselling. A study conducted by Dipela (2016) found that police officers affected with HIV/AIDS, often faced with emotional, mental, physical and spiritual distress, hence the Employee Assistance Programme intervene by providing counselling to the police officers in order for them to cope more effectively with their problem.

2.3.3. The family relationship

Interaction with family members can contribute to assistance in a range of personal experiences. Individuals who solely identify with their own interests or exclusively with the family interests may be more likely to develop suicidal ideation than individual who identifies with family more often (Frey, 2016). It was also emphasized by Bronfenbrenner theory that interaction within the multiple systems such as family system can contribute to suicidal on an individual (Frey, Hans & Sanford, 2016). The structural family therapy focuses upon the individual within the family system, rather than solely on the individual. The major emphasis is that the individual symptoms are best understood when examined in the context of family interaction. The man in the family is not viewed as an isolate, therefore within the family system, every member in the family affect one another (Becvar & Becvar, 2012).

A study conducted by Roskar, Podlesek, Kuzmanic, Demsar and Zaletel (2011) revealed that a divorced man is twice more likely to commit suicide compared with a married man and also the former is at risk of committing suicide. The change that occurs within a marital status is a leading factor that contributes towards suicidal ideation. Roskar *et al* (2011) in their study, found that forty-six per cent of those who are divorced are more likely to commit suicide while

thirty-seven per cent of people who are divorced commit suicide. This is because there is a low level of support among divorced family members.

Among married couples and partners in a committed relationship, conflicts and personal problems are commonly dealt with through respectful dialogue. Chang, Chang, Martos, Sallay, Lee, Stam, Batterbee & Yu (2017) contend that when couples can work through their natural struggles and disputes inherent in most relationships, the attachment becomes increasingly strong and resistant to unnecessary stressors. This sense of resilience among committed couples has been supported in other research with police officers (Chang, *et al.*, 2007).

Pienaar and Rothman (2005) indicated that police officers involved in a committed relationship experienced lower levels of work-related stress and suicidal ideation than those who are single. Berg *et al.*, (2006) found that officers who were married or in a committed relationship experienced lower levels of organizational stress and were more productive in their work. Burke and Mikkelse (2007) claim that single police officers are at substantially greater risk of suicidal ideation, compared to officers who were married or committed in a relationship.

2.3.4. Interpersonal relationships (colleagues and friends).

Bezuidenhout (2015) defines interpersonal relationship as a close association between two or more people. This friendship can be in the form of love, solidarity and regular business interaction. The interpersonal relationship serves as the protective factor in terms of dealing with a difficult time. A lack of social interaction and support has also been connected with suicidal ideation. The interpersonal relationship that supports a person who is going through challenges is support from peers and colleagues.

Interpersonal relationships form the most important network. Colleagues and friends' support is classified as the emotional and physical comfort for the individual. The support that the friends and family give to their loved ones increases self-esteem and value within the individual. This network provides emotional support, such as the care, love and acceptance that are conveyed by others. In addition, friends and family help to give guidance, advice, facts about the reality of life and helping to make reasonable decisions and create a plan of action (Burke, 2014).

Shilubane *et al.*, (2012) indicated that the circle of peers can be the most protective factor that can reduce the stress and depression that people encounter in their daily life. Friends are regarded as the foundations of support during the time of crisis. This is because friends help in time of need and give support and comfort to their friends during difficult times.

Zastrow (2010) suggested that individuals who experience occupational stressors at the community and organizational level may unintentionally redirect feelings of frustration and tension onto the spouse and family member, however, there are a number of factors that can assist in mediating the effects of police stressors. One example of a protective factor at the community and organization level is peer assistance and counselling. Historically peer support has played an integral role within the insular culture of law enforcement agencies. Professional counselling services are available to officers who struggle with mental health problems, although they have generally been unwilling to seek help (Zastrow, 2010).

2.3.5 Suicide and religion

Religion is best understood as a continual decision to save the person himself /herself or others. Religion also assists in maintaining the social or ritual equilibrium. Religion provides a protective factor against a contemplated suicide. This is because there are many dimensions in religion such as affiliation, participation and doctrine to strengthen people. Religion does not necessarily protect against suicidal ideation but rather protects against suicidal attempt, hence the protective of religion against suicidal ideation depends on the culture-specific implications of affiliation with the particular religion (Lawrence, Oquendo & Stanely, 2016). Lawrence, *et al* (2016) also add that religion attendance is associated with decreased odds of suicide attempt and remain an adjustment for social support.

2.4 THE PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT MODEL (P-E FIT THEORY)

The fit-environment model highlights many of the factors that constitute the stress-strain process. This includes family, financial issues, health conditions and stress (Copper, 2008). Copper (2008) argues that organisations which are characterised by environmental doubt will make it difficult for people to achieve their objectives, as well as maintain any sense of personal well-being because it is characterised by a variety of working experiences, for instance the South African Police Services. The relationship between a person and the environment may contribute to stress; that increases the likelihood of suicidal ideation which have been formalised in the person-environment fit Cooper (2008).

This theory identifies two types of fit: the fit between the demands of the environment and the abilities of the person (demand-ability fit) and the fit between the needs of the person and the supplies in the environment that relate to the person's needs (needs-supplies fit). The principle of the theory is that when problems arise, the environmental supplies do not meet the person's needs or when the environmental demands exceed the person's abilities. Needs are characterised in this theory in general terms, encompassing innate biological and

psychological requirements, values acquired through learning and socialisation, and motives to achieve desired ends (French & Kahn, 1962; Harrison, 1985).

This study focused on the exploration of factors contributing to suicidal ideation, the previous studies were conducted in South Africa with police officers in South African Police Services, hence there were no study conducted in Vhembe District. There is a need to conduct the study in Vhembe with Police officers as no study has been conducted with Vhembe Police officers.

2.5. SUMMARY

This chapter has covered the literature review of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers. The factors included psychological, socio-economic and environmental factors.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This section presents the research methodology as well as the study design. The focus was on the study population and study setting together with the sampling method. The data collection procedure, instrument and analysis, as well as ethical considerations and measures to ensure trustworthiness were detailed.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is the conceptual blue print within which research is conducted and it is an approach that holds elements in research together that chain the relevance to the research purposes with economy and procedures in which the researcher reaches research participants and collect information from them (Akhtar, 2016). The study used a phenomenological qualitative research method. The method allowed the police officers to express their views concerning the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation. It also provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the factors that lead to suicidal ideation among police officers.

Phenomenology is known as an educational qualitative research design that looks at the meaning created by a group of individuals and explores how each person's experience about the said occurrence is applied to make the experiences significant (Padilla-Díaz, 2015). The design was chosen because it focuses on the lived experiences of participants, explaining their experiences of everyday life. Phenomenology provide the researcher with information about the participants and an opportunity for the police officers to share their views about the factors contributing to suicidal ideation, while looking at their everyday life in the working place as well as their life outside the working environment.

3.3. STUDY SETTING

The study was conducted at six police stations in the Thohoyandou cluster. The Thohoyandou cluster is located in Vhembe District, which is one of the five districts in Limpopo Province. The Thohoyandou cluster has 21 police stations, including the satellites, however, only six police stations were considered for this study. These police stations are, Thohoyandou with 134 police officers, 70 per cent of them are males and 30 per cent are females; Siloam has 93 police officers, 75 per cent of them are males and 25 per cent of them are females; Moswodi has 19 police officers of whom 78 per cent are males and 22 per cent of them are females; in

Tshaulu has 68 police officers, 64 per cent of them are males and 26 per cent are females; Mutale has 120 police officers and 72 per cent of them are males and 28 per cent are females while Vuwani police station has 125 police officers of whom 66 per cent are males and 34 per cent are females.



Figure 3.1. Map of Vhembe District (Vhembe District Municipality) (2017)

3.4. THE STUDY POPULATION

Rahi (2017) defines a population as the study objects and consist of individuals, groups, organizations, human products and events that the researcher wishes to understand. The study population were the police officers who are working in the Thohoyandou cluster; both males and females participated in the study; their ages ranged from 40 to 59 years.

3.5. SAMPLE, SAMPLING METHOD AND PROCEDURE

Sampling is the process of selecting segment of the population for investigation. In the current study a sample was drawn using non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is the sampling approach in which the chance or probability of each unit being selected is not known or confirmed (Rahi, 2017). The police stations were selected in a manner that a balance of the geographical areas was taken into consideration, hence, rural and urban areas were included in the study.

For the purpose of the study convenience sampling was used to select participants. Convenience sampling defines a process of data collection from population that is close at hand and easily accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling allows researchers to comprehensively interview or get replies in a cost effective way (Rahi, 2017). 12 police officers participated in the study. The number of the participants was determined by data saturation also applied, when data collection ceased, due to the fact that participants no longer gave any new information.

3.5.1. Criteria of inclusion

- The police officers who are permanently employed at Vhembe District
- Police officers with 10 years or more working experience

3.5.2. Criteria of exclusion

- Police officers with 9 years' experience and below.

3.6. INSTRUMENT (INTERVIEW GUIDE)

The researcher used an interview guide as an instrument tool for collecting data through an in-depth semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is defined as the instrument which can be added with other question while having other structured questions and it consists of an open ended questions in order to explore and understand the lived experiences of the participants (Mogorosi, 2010) and Willig & Rogers (2017). The interview guide was guided by the specific objectives of the study. The researcher used an interview guide based on its ability to give guidance on what questions to ask. The interview guide also allows for probing; this enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions that assisted in gaining an in-depth understanding of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers at Vhembe district.

3.7. DATA COLLECTION

The data was collected using interviews. An interview is “a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the participants” with respect to their interpretation of the meaning. An interview is an extendable conversation between the researcher and the participants that aims at providing an ‘in-depth information’ about a certain topic or subject (Alshenqeeti, 2014). The interview was used to collect data, because the researcher was interested in finding more from the participants. The researcher visited the six police stations where 12 police officers were interviewed; before data collection, permission was sought from the station commanders. The interview was administered in English, however, a few

participants were comfortable to speak in Tshivenda. Their data were translated from Tshivenda to English by a translator. The researcher collected data through use of a voice recorder, after permission had been sought from the participants. Not all the participants were comfortable to be recorded, although some sketchy notes were taken.

3.8. PRE-TEST

Babbie and Mouton (2010) define 'pre- testing' as the stage that involves the testing of elements such as an interview guide. Pre-testing was conducted with 3 police officers who did not form part of the study, but have the same characteristics as the study participants. The pre-testing was conducted using the same interview guide as for the actual study. This was done to evaluate whether the researcher is focused during data collection and also to check the relevancy and applicability of the questions structured, on the interview guide, for the topic under study.

3.9. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is central to qualitative research, it is defined as the process of understanding, describing and interpreting experiences and perceptions and it is key to uncovering meaning in particular circumstances and contexts (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Data was analysed using thematic analysis. According to Braum and Maguire and Delahunt (2017) thematic analysis is a qualitative analytic routine for identifying, and recording themes within data. The goal of a thematic analysis is to identify themes such as patterns in the data that are significant or interesting and use these themes to address the research or say something about an issue (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This is much more than simply summarising the data; a good thematic analysis interprets and makes sense of data. Collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, in line with the objectives of the study. In addition the researcher gain a deeper understanding of participants' views about the factors contributing to suicide ideation among the police officers through using a thematic analysis. The data analysed was presented in themes, subthemes and categories. The following steps were adopted when analysing data

- Becoming familiar with the data

The researcher became familiarise with the complexity and range of the content. This included a thorough reading by the researcher before coding the ideas and the identification of any possible trends. This was done during the process of reading through the data. This also involved listening to voice recorder several times and looked at the notes taken when collecting data.

- Transcription of verbal data

The transcription of verbal data informs the early stages of analysis and then the researcher advance a far more thorough understanding of the data through having it transcribed. The close attention needed to transcribe data facilitated a close-reading and interpretative skills to analyse the data.

- Generating initial codes

The data was initially coded and collated, and there were a long list of dissimilar codes; the researcher acknowledged this across the data set. In this phase the researcher re-read the data and then took notes and made transcription of the most important things such as words and statements thereby generating codes.

- Reviewing themes

The researcher revised the set of themes, and these were refined. During this phase, some themes were collapsed into each other, while other themes were broken down into separate themes.

- Defining and naming themes

The researcher had a satisfactory thematic map of the data. At this point, the researcher defined and further refined the themes that were analysed. By 'define and refine', is meant detecting the 'essence' of what each theme was about and determining what part of the data every theme captures.

- Producing the report

It is important that the analysis provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story from the data, within and across themes. The write-up provided sufficient evidence of the themes within the data.

3.10. MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Anney (2014) each research approach employs different evaluation criteria to ensure the rigour of the inquiry because of different philosophical and methodology assumptions which guide each approach, so as to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is the extent to which the study is worth taking note of. As a way of ensuring trustworthiness, the

concepts of credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability were used to describe various aspects of trustworthiness.

3.10.1 Credibility

Anney (2014) defines credibility as a way of evaluating whether the findings of research are actually interpreting what the participants were saying; it is more concerned with the truth value and is the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. In this study credibility was achieved by the researcher by engaging thoroughly with the participants to uncover the real truth about the issue being investigated. The researcher also make use of tape recorder and taking of brief notes during data collection in order to capture all the information and transcribe the exact information presented by the participants. An independent transcriber was asked to transcribe the data that were presented in Tshivenda language. The main aim of this was to ensure validity of the data collected.

3.10.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of a qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other respondents. It is the interpretive equivalent of generalizability (Anney, 2014). Transferability can be achieved through a thorough portrayal of the methods used to gather data. In the study transferability was achieved by outlining the context and setting in which the research took place, so that a reader can decide looking at the context of police work and personal issues that can lead to the development of suicidal ideation. The researcher gave a clear description of the study population, the instrument and data collection method used as well as how data was analysed. These was done to ensure transferability.

3.10.3 Dependability

This is about the consistency of the research, whether it would yield the same results if it were to be conducted again; this is to test the reliability of the study. In trying to check the dependability of a study, a researchers can check to see if they did not make mistakes in collecting the data, interpreting and giving a report of the findings (Maputle, 2010). In the proposed study, dependability was achieved by keeping a detailed record of the research methods used, including how data was collected, analysed, instruments used, so that another researcher can use the information as reference. The use of a tape recorder and brief note ensured dependability. The presentation of the proposal to the Department of Public Health, School Higher Degrees, Higher Degree Committee, and obtaining ethical clearance all ensured dependability. This also include the ongoing consultations with the supervisor.

3.10.4 Conformability

On the last element of trustworthiness, conformity, the emphasis is on eliminating bias in the study and striving for objectivity. To address the conformability issue, the researcher made sure that the findings of the research are indeed representing the reality of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers (Anner, 2014). This also was ensured during the discussion of the findings, where the relevancy findings and literature reviewed were correlated to identify the similarities and differences.

3.11. Ethical considerations

Ethics is the responsibility that researchers should bear towards those who participate in the research as sponsors and potential beneficiaries of the research (Resnik, 2011). The following were taken into account when conducting the study permission, anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent and voluntary participation.

3.11.1. Permission to conduct the study

The proposal was presented to the School Higher Degree Committee (SHDC) and was submitted to the University Higher Degree for approval and quality assurance. The proposal was also submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Venda for ethical clearance. Permission to conduct the study was requested and granted by the Provincial and National Department of the South African Police Services.

3.11.2. Avoidance of Harm

According to De Vos, *et al.*, (2011) everything we do in life can possibly harm someone, therefore researchers should weigh the risk against any importance and possible benefits of the specific research projects. Core ethical principles when applied to participants, means we must anticipate them before beginning the research (Neuman, 2011).

3.11.3. Anonymity

Anonymity refers to keeping secret, by not identifying the ethnic or cultural background of respondents; refraining from referring to them by their names or divulging any other sensitive information about participants (Akaranga and Makau, 2016). Respondents' identities were not revealed to anybody or anyone in order to protect them from potential victimisation. Furthermore, to ensure anonymity, the participants were not expected to provide their names and date of birth during interviews.

3.11.4. Confidentiality

Gibson, Benson and Brand (2013) defined confidentiality as way assurance to protect and make the participants information unavailable to anyone, other than the researchers, the information provided by participants, mostly sensitive and personal information. The researcher consider the ethic of confidentiality by not asking the names of the respondents and whatever information was discussed during the interview or data collection were kept confidential. The participants were ensured that the information recorded and transcribed data or notes taken during the interview, would be kept confidential and only the researcher and the research supervisor will access the information.

3.11.5. Informed consent

According to Akaranga and Makau (2016) 'informed consent' means that the participants knowingly and intelligently gave consent to participate in the study after being fully informed by the researcher. The researcher informed the respondents about the background of the study, explaining to them what the study entails and what is required of them. Before commencing with the interviews, the respondents were asked to sign consent forms to ensure that they have agreed to take part in the study. This was done in the languages that the participants understand well (English and Tshivenda).

3.11.6. Voluntary participation

The participants were informed before the data was collected about their rights when it comes to participation, so that they can make a choice whether to participate in the research or not. To ensure voluntary participation, informed consent form was handed over to them to sign before the interviews. The participants were informed that if they wished to withdraw from the study they can do so, without fear of being victimized.

3.12. PLAN FOR DISSEMINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF RESULTS

The study findings and recommendations will be kept at the University of Venda Library. A copy will also be submitted to the South African Police Services (SAPS) (Vhembe District). The study findings will be published in peer-reviewed accredited journals and presented at national and international conferences.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the results and findings from the participants. The purpose of the study was to explore factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers in Vhembe District, South Africa. The data were collected with 12 (twelve) police officers who are working in Vhembe District at the Thohoyandou Cluster. Table 4.2 presents the findings categorized in terms of themes and subthemes.

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To determine the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers.
- To identify the coping strategies of police officers.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF THE FINDINGS

Twelve Police Officers participated in the study; the data was collected through an in-depth one-on-one interview with a semi-structured interview schedule. There were probing that occurred during the interview.

4.2.1. Participants socio-demographic information

The summary of the participants' demographic information is given in Table 4.1. A total of 12 police officers (8 males and 4 females) took part in the study. Ten participants were between ages 50 to 59 years and 2 participants were between ages 40-49 years. The majority of the participants were married; one participant was single, one was a widow, one a widower and two participants were divorced. The majority of the participants have matric certificate and four participants have a tertiary qualification; most participants have worked for a period of 30 to 39 years. Few of the participants' working experience ranged between 20 to 29 years whereas a one participants reported having worked for 10 to 19 years. The majority of the participants are Christians.

Table 4.1. The socio-demographic information of the participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Highest Qualification	Marital Status	Years of working Experience	Religion
1	50-59	Male	Grade 12	Married	20-29	Ancestral belief
2	50-59	Male	Bachelor degree	Married	30-39	Christianity
3	50-59	Female	Grade 12	Divorced	30-39	Christianity
4	50-59	Female	Grade 12	Divorced	20-29	Christianity
5	40-49	Male	Bachelor degree	Married	10-19	Christianity
6	40-49	Male	Grade 12	Married	20-29	Christianity
7	50-59	Male	Grade 12	Widower	30-39	Christianity
8	50-59	Male	Grade 12	Married	30-39	Christianity
9	50-59	Male	Bachelor Degree	Married	30-39	Christianity
10	50-59	Female	Grade 12	Single	30-39	Christianity
11	50-59	Female	Grade 12	Widow	30-39	Christianity
12	50-59	Male	National Diploma	Married	30-39	Christianity

4.3. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG THE POLICE OFFICERS

The researcher explored the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, Thohoyandou cluster. The findings of the study generated three main themes, namely: socio-economic factors, working environmental factors and the coping strategies the police officers adopt to handle their daily life stress. The sub-themes are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis

Theme 1: Factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers	Theme 2: Coping strategies by police officers
Sub-theme 1: Family problems	Sub-theme 1: Working environmental support
Sub-theme 2: Lack of support	Sub-theme 2: Sports and exercise
Sub-theme 3: Contravening the law	Sub-theme 3: Spare time
Sub-theme 4: Overtime and working structure	Sub-theme 4: Family and colleagues' support
Sub-theme 5: Working with guns	Sub-theme 5: Religion

4.3.1. Theme 1: Factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers

For socio-economic and health factors three sub-themes emerged: family problems (domestic violence and financial problems, divorce and extramarital affairs), lack of social support (health problems) and contravening the law. The participants indicated that work overload, as one of the factors while others indicated having to work overtime. The participants also identified stress that they encounter in the working place; a few participants added working with guns as one of the contributory factors to suicidal ideation.

4.3.1.1. Sub-theme 1: Family problems

The family problems which police officers encounter in their lives seems to play a role in the development of suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, Thulamela Cluster. The family problems include: domestic violence, financial problems, divorce and engaging in extramarital affairs.

4.3.1.1.1 Category 1: Domestic Violence

The participants were asked of their perceived factor that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers. The majority of the participants identified domestic violence as one of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers. The domestic violence as precipitated by financial problems experienced in the family is characterized by behavioral changes of the wife after being taken to school by the husband, when the women is earning more salary than the husband. These become a threat to the husband and this leads to homicide and the police officer will end up committing suicide.

“Domestic violence, and it happens especially when the wife earns more salary as compared to the husband and the husband develops jealousy, insecurities and feels less respected in the household (P 12).

“The emotional problems take place due to domestic violence in a family. This on its own affects a person in such a way that he or she may commit suicide. As of now if I hear that a woman or man is being abused it affects me emotionally. For an example, after getting your salary somebody decides to take your money, it disturbs ones` mind. Or a person of my status failing to buy myself a bra or underwear is not good. It makes me think of leave my family because I am working but I am suffering” (P 05).

“When you take your partner to school and after that, he/she starts to have affairs, and I start to see that now they are disrespecting me, and you imagine when you were paying her school fees with the loans that you took from the bank. The wife will not help you to pay back the loan. Family violence can start where now the wife will open a domestic violence case against me, and now my life will change. I`m being watched wherever I go and what I do, because of the protection order” (P 09).

The participants also reported that the police officers do not adjust to their salaries and budget their monthly salary accordingly. Failure to budget has a diverse effect on their daily life as they always think of paying back money that they actually do not have, as they take loan from loan sharks and from the banks and fail to pay back in time. This leads to failure to meet family needs as they will be left with insufficient money to support their family after paying their debts.

“When you fail to adjust to your salary and you compete with others when they are buying something and you are also buying and end up having too much credit. The day you get paid, you will be left with R20 .00 in your account but you receive a lot of calls from the people you are owing; this is also a lot for any person to handle (P 08)”.

“For example the police are involved with the loan sharks; they owe a lot of money and they fail to pay back. They also take loans from the banks and then they realised that

the money they are owing is too much; that is the reason they think of killing themselves (P 05)”.

A South African study conducted by Schlebusch (2005) is in line with this findings as it indicated that socioeconomic status contributes to suicidal ideation among the police officers, particularly if the person has difficulty in budgeting their monthly salary. Fiksenbaum, Marjanovic, Greenglass and Garcia-Santos (2017) found in their study - “Impact of economic hardship and financial threat on suicide ideation” - that confusion and economic struggle can also have an impact on the individual family functioning and lead to domestic violence. In this situation one partners will kill the other due to financial problem; as a result the surviving partner will resort to suicide. Owing a lot of money leads to confusion as to what to pay and what to buy; failure to balance those needs can lead to the idea of suicide. This is in line with .Wang, Sareen, Afifi, Bolton and Johnson (2012) who demonstrated that the rate of financial problems and domestic violence is linked with thoughts of committing suicide. Similarly, Bezuidenhout (2015) found that a number of suicidal ideation, attempted and completed suicides were prone to family conflict, such as domestic violence.

4.3.1.1.2 Category 2: Divorce

When asked about the family factors that contribute to suicide, the participants indicated that divorce can contribute to suicide ideation. This is due to the fact that the individual may be so dependent on their partners that they will feel that they are lonely, they have lost all of their property, children will move away with one partner and they become single again.

“When you spend so many years with your partner and suddenly you divorce and you were too depended to them in terms of finances, physical and emotional support, this can be frustrating and painful and you find yourself being lonely (P 01)”.

“It is painful to go through the divorce and if you don’t have family support you can think ending your life is the most appropriate decision. This often becomes a problem especially if you are sharing your property that you worked hard for, the children leaving with the mother, being the single again (P 08)”

“When you are divorced and you still you partner, some people find it difficult to accept that their marriage is over and decides to end their lives” (P 12).

The literature is in line with the current findings. According to Rosenthal and DiMatteo (2001), relationship problems were primary seen as the cause of suicide among police officers wherein 57.6% of police suicide cases were reported to be related to relationship problems. Conflicts in interpersonal relationships was a factor found to be related to suicidal behavior

(Shilubane, Ruiter, Bos, van den Borne, James & Reddy, 2012). The current findings are also in line with Roskar, Podlesek, Kuzmanic, Demsar and Zaletel (2011) and Kposowa (2004) who found that divorced couples are more likely to commit suicide due to the low level of support from family members. Kposowa (2004) further observed that divorced people are 2.4 times higher in developing suicidal ideation than couples who are still married. The study conducted by Stack and Scourfield (2015) found that in Europe and in North America, there is a higher risk of suicide among divorced couple as compared with the married couple, both in men and women. For example, divorced people from age 35 to 50 years in 1997 were reported to be 2.7 more likely to die of suicide. According to Durkheim theory it is mentioned that marriage is assumed to protect people against suicide, because of the elevation of social support towards family members (Thorlindsson & Bernburg, 2004).

4.3.1.1.3 Category 3: Extramarital affairs

The few participants reported that extramarital affairs can contribute to suicidal ideation. When one of the partners engage in extramarital affairs some people fail to adjust and cope with stress associated with a partner being unfaithful in a marriage and resort to suicide as a way of coping with stress. The following is supported by the following quotation:

“The person commits suicide because of the failure to cope with the marital problems, such as if one of the partners is engaging in the extramarital affairs” (P 01).

The above does correspond with the findings, According to Charny and Parnass (1995) extramarital affairs have direct impact where the betrayed spouse experiences significant damage to their self-image and sexual confidence; there are also feelings of abandonment, attacks on their sense of belonging, betrayals of trust and/or a surge of justification to leave their spouses.

4.3.1.2. Sub-theme 2: Lack of social support

The participants were asked about the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation. The finding of the study reveals that participants do not have enough support from family and also from their working place. Family member infected with HIV/AIDS diabetes mellitus needs support from the family and failure to get support can lead to suicidal ideation among the police officers. The participants indicated that being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS can lead to suicidal thoughts among police officers because of fear of stigmatization from the family and the community. Few participants also mentioned that sugar diabetes can also have the same effect on police officers causing the development of suicidal ideation: this is because the officers feel that they are not good enough to provide conjugal rights to their wives. This is mainly due to the police officers not getting appropriate support from the family and failure to accept chronic conditions.

“When a person has a problem either at home or at work, support is of necessity, for example if a person is diagnosed with HIV/AIDS it is difficult for the person to accept that situation and that person will need emotional support from the family, they don’t see the purpose of living, they develop feeling of hopelessness just because of the situation they are in is hard to accept and people who surrounded them are not supportive” (P 02).

“HIV/AIDS and sugar diabetes, when you have sugar diabetes you fail to satisfy your wife’s sexual needs. As a man you develop the feeling of worthlessness and think you are a burden to your wife and that can lead to suicide. And sometimes when you are seated alone you think your wife is having an affair, this makes the relationship to develop insecurity issues.....and also in a situation where a person has HIV/AIDS takes the medication in car, because they don’t want to be seen by their wife’s when taking ARV. If they are discovered they deny the sickness and due to depression and embarrassment, they end up taking their life. ” (P 10).

“When diagnosed with HIV/AIDS it is difficult to cope; this has diverse effects, such as loneliness. This is worse when you are also stigmatized in the working place and the community” (P 12).

“I sometimes understand that when you share your problems with other people you don’t expect them to share with others, but it becomes a problem when you share it then you find that people are discussing your problems behind your back. That’s the reason the police officers don’t share their problems. And also after you share your problems with others, you tend to be suspicious of each and every person’s behavior; if you arrive at work and you find people talking, you then conclude that they are talking about you and if you find them quiet you also conclude that people are still thinking of your problems” (P03).

Hawton (1987) is also in line with this findings that one of the risk factors on the suicide risk scale identified is lack of a support system; this can be one of the risks factor that can contribute to suicidal ideation among an individual. Similarly, Shilubane *et al.*, (2012) also found inadequate social support as a factor related to suicidal behavior, especially lack of support around a chronic illness, like HIV infection. They further indicated that affected and infected individuals feel hopeless following the diagnosis, and these feeling may lead to a suicidal ideation and attempt mostly because they cannot share the diagnoses with anyone. If the person does not have a support system during difficult times, for example, support from the working place and at home when an individual is affected by HIV/AIDS or other severe medical conditions, this is regarded as a risk factor for suicidal thoughts. Tabaac, Perrin and

Rabinovitch (2016) is also in line with the findings that lack of social support was seen as contributing to the development of suicidal ideation. Tabaac *et al.*, (2016) further state that poor family support, from either spouse, children or extended family can contribute to suicidal ideation in a person. Koponen, Kautiainen, Lappanen, Mantysella and Vanhala (2015) note that sugar diabetes also increases the risk of suicidal ideation among the diagnosed people. The situation then becomes a problem when an individual do not receive support from both the family members and colleagues.

When asked about the major factor that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers, one of the participants also mentioned in ability to share one's personal problems with Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) personnel such as social workers, psychologist and chaplain or pastors as one of the contributing factors to develop suicidal ideation The participants further indicated that people do not talk about their personal problems because they fear being embarrassed when people know their problems. This is supported by the following quotation:

"The other problems is that as police officers we don't communicate about our problem and we tell our self that the problem is ours and should not be shared with anyone, but within our self we think a lot of our personal problems. Police officers failed to share their problems with others in order to get help. We were informed during our training that we should use the EAP office in order to help us to cope with our work and social problems. I can't really explain why as police officers we don't make use of EAP's office". (P 05).

The finding correlates with the literature reviewed as some participants indicated that keeping the problem to yourself can also precipitate suicidal ideation among the police officers (Papazoglou & Andersen, 2014). The findings are in line with the findings of Papazoglou and Andersen (2014) who mentioned that police officers may perceive the idea of seeing a counsellor as violating traditional masculine norms, such as being self-reliant, being in control, hence, not being able to overcome life challenges without the help of others, especially for male police officers is very stressful. Lokkesmoe (2018) also indicated that the police officers especially, the new generation ignore their emotional distress and the indirect trauma they face in their personal and working environmental. They keep the problem to themselves instead of sharing the problem with others.

4.3.1.3. Sub-theme 3: Contravening the law

When asked about the factor that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers, one participant mentioned that contravening the law can cause police officers to commit suicide

due to the reason that the police officers may find themselves in conflict with the departmental policies. The following quotation supports this.

“Taking extortion, such as selling docket, and with fear that you will be fired from work, you tend to decide that it is better to end your life” (P 12).

There is no literature found that support this finding that contravening the law can contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers. This is a new findings.

4.3.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Overtime and working structure

Some participants indicated that their working structure can contribute to stress and make the person to commit suicide. These include the work load, having so many cases that the person fails to meet deadlines at the end of the day, the poor support from the superiors and shortage of staff that leads to employee to do overtime unwillingly.

“Working environment is one of the main problems which cause stress, especially when there is shortage of staff, which may force one to kill him or herself. Due to this, your seniors will always call you when there are not enough people to do the work. Sometimes the working condition which includes horrible accidents that we come across on daily basis make people who have never been counselled, think of killing themselves. Lack of support by their seniors, when we are involved in accidents. Our seniors will never ask us about our safety or health but will ask if the car is not seriously damaged. This in itself discourages us and make us develop a feeling of despair” (P 04).

“It is too much in our workplace, the work is also overwhelming and we need therapy regularly in order for us to deal with the stress we encounter in our workplace.....Our work is also worse because the inmates have rights that lead to intense and prolonged distress for us, because we never know what are we supposed to do when arresting the offenders. This constitution needs to be changed” (P 01).

The finding corresponds with the study conducted by Vallone and Donaldson (2001) who demonstrated that hours worked, and work overload have a negative impact on performance and personal outcome. Vallone and Donaldson (2001) further mentioned that the effect of working night shift and uneven hours have serious consequences for the police officers as they are expected to play their unique role as peace-makers within the community most of their time. The police officers are also expected to work extended hours hence they failure to engage in leisure time, to release the work-related stress. The leadership style, lack of autonomy and interpersonal conflict between the co-workers have also been identified as

work-related stress that contribute to suicidal ideation (Villa, Morrison & Kennedy (2002), Zhao, He and Lovrich (2002). Chae and Douglas (2013) also supported that work-related stress can contribute to suicidal ideation; the pressure of working in the police environment, the cases they handle on a daily basis, the reporting structure and the change of daily structure, all contribute. These also include conflict with superiors, wife, and colleagues and with the community members serving in their allocated offices. A study conducted by Wellington (2010) is also in line with the findings that work-related stress can play a role in the development of suicide among the police officers. Duties such as working overtime, changing of shifts and a combination of all the work that is performed in the work place are other factors. Structural stressors are ascribed to the departmental and administrative culture around issues such as, the leadership styles of management, lack of autonomy, and interpersonal conflicts between officers Violanti, Andrew, Mnatsakanova, Hartley, Fekedulegn and Burchfiel, 2016). Robert (2017) reported that poor consultation with staff, shift work, erratic working hours, constantly shifting priorities and long period of repeated work.

The participants were asked about the work environment factors that contribute to suicidal ideation. Some participants reported that stress experienced by the police officers in their work place can contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers. Emotional stress due to trauma caused by the cases they attend to play a significant role in the development of suicidal ideation. Attending cases where children are killed, they reported always ring in their mind and thoughts of killing themselves become easy, especially if therapy or counselling was not provided.

For example, there is that situation when you are working outside, an incidence happens such assuch as people who have been murdered that kind of situation can lead to fear and stress. Seeing a dead body of a child especially a body of a young child, this can become worse especially when counselling was not received; coping with the trauma becomes difficult and you end up deciding that to be alive is useless (P 08)

Attending the incidents that is traumatizing can lead to suicidal ideation, especially if the person did not receive help such as counselling (P 02)

This literature is in line with the current findings. Brown and Campbell (1990) identify the following stressors as a cause of the development of suicidal ideation among police officers. These include witnessing traumatic events in the police's working environment, arresting an attacker and participating in court trials. The findings was also supported by Vawda (2018) reporting that witnessing trauma and being exposed to violence plays significant predator of lifetime suicide attempts. A report by Roberts (2017) indicate that police also experience

significant distress from repeated exposure to lower-level stresses. According to Violanti (2018) and Heyman, Dill and Douglas (2018) also supports that policing is an occupation complete with stress and traumatic incidents, such as encountering abused children, witnessing death and experiencing violent street combat weigh deeply as precipitants to alcohol use, depression and suicide among police.

4.3.1.4 Sub-theme 5: Means to commit suicide (Working with guns)

The participants were asked on factors contributing to suicidal ideation in their working environment. A few reported that working with guns can also contribute to suicide, even though suicide is precipitated by the problems that the person fails to solve in their life; a gun for them becomes a solution for the problem they are unable to solve. The participants further reported that using guns to commit suicide is mostly due to how the individual was trained in using their guns. This was supported by the following quotation.

“The participant laughs’ I can say for the police a gun it’s like a pen or a stapler, and then any person who becomes angry can use any material that is next to him (p2)”.

“I can say that working with guns can be the cause of suicidal ideation, but previously we were trained to use guns in such a manner that it was prohibited for the police officer to kill anyone with the guns. This problem has started in 2000. We were taught to respect our community, our firearms see I think the standard of training is contributing to the police to use the guns to commit suicide (P 07)”.

Bezuidenhout (2015) indicated that about 99 per cent of police officers in South Africa (SA) and in other countries are now more in a position to acquire firearms, alcohol and lethal means by which to commit suicide. This is regarded as the causal factor for police officers to have higher statistics in the suicidal behaviors and spousal homicide. The finding differs from the quotation as the majority of the participants reported that having guns does not lead to suicidal ideation, but they view personal problems as the causes of suicidal ideation, although a few police officers view guns as the leading factor of suicidal ideation. Firearms are lethal and working as police officers they have access to guns and this is a concern when facing difficult times as police officers tend to use the most available lethal weapon to commit suicide. WHO (World Health Organization) (2012) is in line with the findings as it was indicated that a person normally uses the available weapon to commit suicide, not merely because the person has guns, but rather due to the fact that there is a precipitating factor that leads to police officer in using the gun. For example if a person who has a certain medical or mental illness have been prescribed medication, there are probabilities that the person might use their medication to commit suicide as that is the only available method that he/she can use to commit suicide.

Bachmann (2018) reported that the method differs according to countries and professionals, hence further mentioned that the most common method that people use to commit suicide is the use of fire arms, hanging and self-poisoning with pesticides.

4.3.2: Theme 2: Coping strategies by police officers

Theme 3 included the variety of coping strategies the participants adapt to cope with the daily stress (in their home system and in the work system). To avoid the development of suicidal ideation police officers adopt the following strategies: the support received in the working environment, the support the participants receive from family and colleagues, what the participants do in their spare time as a way of coping with the daily stress problem and the religion as a support system in their life.

4.3.2.1. Sub-theme 1: Support system in the working environment

The participants were asked about the support they receive in their working environment, as ways of coping holistically with work-related stress, family problems and other problems they encounter in their life. Most of the participants indicated that they get support from work by means of counselling and prayers, though they have to call them EHP (Employee Health Practitioner) who are located in the cluster offices. A few participants mentioned that they know of the services but they have never used it.

“I have my own book in which I have number phones of those who counsel me when I have problems or when I feel something is wrong or I need to talk to someone. Yes! When I am not feeling well” (P 07).

“There are social workers, psychologist and pastors, it’s just that members turn to say I have this problem and they fear embarrassment to consult as they don’t want to be labelled. No one can come out and say I am HIV/AIDS because they fear to be stigmatized. Even though the social workers, psychologist and pastors are there to support us (P 02)”.

“There are social services for counselling the police officers, especially when you attend to a traumatic crime scene.....I attended a scene that was traumatic, but even today I still remember what happened, and I did not even receive counselling” (P 06).

And other participants have these to say:

“There is a spiritual office when you have problems, they call them and you get assisted (P 09)”.

“There is counselling and also the social worker, we also have legal representatives (p 08)”.

Zastrow (2010) is in line with the findings that the employee assistance programme aims to help the employees overcome the challenges they face in their lives. The challenges can either be caused by the working environment or the personal problems. The counsellors, psychologist and counsellors offer support to police officers in order for them to develop personal life skills, emotional adaptiveness and coping strategy. Muthomi (2014) demonstrated that the employee counselling programme is important in solving the employee personal problems that affect their job performance and family relationship. The employee counselling services is available to meet the employees' needs and to improve their life. Muthomi (2014) further indicated that police officers have shown a positive outcome after they were seen by the counsellors.

4.3.2.2. Sub-theme 2: Family and colleagues support

The participants were asked about the support they receive at home and from their colleagues. The majority of the participants indicated that their families and colleagues support them when they are going through a tough times; they help them to reduce and cope with stress, such as when one of their family members passed away they come and support them, whereas other participants mentioned that they do not see the importance of family support.

“Now that I don't have a wife, I stay with my nephew, he helps me with house chores. I play with him and feel relieved and healthy again. The person who supports me is also my colleague. The one who had just phoned me now. He helps me a lot because even if I phone him when am at home he can come to my home. Many people do not want me, they say I am disabled. When my wife passed away it was difficult and I got the support from my family members and my colleagues” (P 07).

“I have a good support from my family, me and my wife we are both working and I remember when I was transferred to work away from home and my wife also applied for transfer and we stayed together; we also came back to work near our home the same year” P12.

“I have a good relationship, we work here as a team, we advise each other on what we can do, we manage the work as a team, working to reduce crime” (P 11).

The findings correlate with the literature reviewed that shows how family and colleagues' support is important. Bezuidenhout (2015): Shilubane *et al.*, (2012) indicated that the absence of support and social interaction has also been linked with suicidal ideation in a person who is

emotionally distressed. The interpersonal relationship between peers, family members and intimate partner and the person who is going through tough times is the most important protective factor that reduces daily stress and the depression the person is currently experiencing. Pienaar (2005) also in line with the findings has indicated that friends are regarded as the grounds of support during the time of crisis, indicating that police officers who are involved in a committed relationship experienced lower levels of work-related stress and suicidal ideation than those who are single.

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Spare time

The participants were asked what they do in their spare time. Two of twelve police officers reported that they use or abuse substance as a way of coping with problems. Some participants reported that they engage in activities that are held in the working place, and state that this keeps them busy thus coping with their daily life challenges that could lead to suicidal ideation. Some participants reported participating in other activities such as assisting at church, reading books and ploughing in their yard in order to supplement their salary.

When asked about the coping strategies they use, participants mentioned that substance is also used as the way to cope with daily life stressors. Participants reported that substance use among the police officers is caused by an inability to deal with daily stress and that leads to police officers using substances. This was supported by the following quotation:

“There are some police officers who drink alcohol a lot, and some even use or smoke tobacco. They are even afraid to talk about their problems. Whereas some use substances in order to cope with their problems” (P 04)

The participants were asked about the coping strategies they adopt to deal with the daily stress. Some participants indicated that they engage in sport and exercise in order to deal with family and work-related stress and to minimize the development of suicidal ideation.

“In our workplace, we are encouraged to engage in sports on Wednesdays, I play soccer every Wednesday and it helps to cope with the daily stress and relieve all the distressing emotions we face at work and with our families as you will be engaging in sports with others. (P 01)”.

“Exercise is very much important, I am not merely saying that we should go to the gym, but jogging once a day. I also go to the gym and I play chess, I have competed at the SA open, with other police officers from various countries such as police officers from Australia and Kenya and so-on, and we won, even though we play with experienced people. We basically play once a year when competing with other countries. Last year

I was playing at Cape Town and this year we are going to Northern Cape. I will be representing SAPS Limpopo Province. (P 05)."

Few participants also reported that they have something positive to engage in, in their spare time; they engage in church activities such as attending Sunday services and helping the needy in their church; some spend time with their families and one participant indicates that reading books helps them to relax their minds and focus on improving their understanding on certain aspects of life.

And participant number 03 said.

"When I am not at work I go to church and assist, I also attend all night prayers and crusade....that's all that I do" (P 03).

"I plough at home in my backyard. I plough vegetables for me and my families" (P 11).

The findings of police engaging in sport as a way of coping with their daily life stress is in line with the literature. According to Nicholls, Jones, Polman and Borkoles (2009) engaging in sport reduces the stress individual's face in their life, but this was seen as coping strategy because of the commitment the individual have in participating in sport. Few police officers indicated that using substance is a way of coping with daily stresses that can contribute to the development of suicidal ideation and the findings is in line with Pastwa-Wojciechowska and Piotrowski (2016). These authors indicated that substance abuse by police officers is due to police officers' need to cope with stress that stems from a variety of factors from family and work-related stress. Pastwa-Wojciechowska and Piotrowski (2016) also reported on 5367 incidents involving substance abuse among police officers in 2015. People resort to substance use as a way of coping with problem as they find themselves without enough support to help them to cope with life stressors. Lindsay and Shelley (2009) also agreed that police officers use alcohol as a way of coping with personal problems, however, the approval of excessive drinking and the consumption of alcoholic beverages has been recognized as a major maladaptive approach to coping; this has contributed to increased risk for suicidal behaviors and other health-related concerns.

4.3.2.4. Sub-theme 4: Religion

The participants were asked how religion can be a coping strategy in their life. From the findings the majority of the participants indicated that religion can act as a protective factor against suicide ideation and helps them to deal with stress. A few participants indicated that when they are stressed they believe that traditional healer will assist, whereas the majority

indicated that praying and going to church assist them in coping with daily stress. This is supported by the following quotation.

“When I have problems I go to the traditional healer, I know I will get traditional herbs that will help, and if I have to perform libation I also do that to relieve all the stress and bad luck I encounter on daily basis” (p1).

“Religion helps as I’m not good at quotations, but its written thou must not kill, the person who is a Christian, are required to follow the Christian rules and one of the rules is love or agape, mm humbleness passion and perseverance” (p 10).

“It helps in the manner that it tells you the disadvantage of dying in some other way that..... There is a good way of dying. We chose to die in a manner that you will make us to go to heaven” (p 08)

“Ahhhh religion helps a lot hey because many of the problem I encounter in life and I find it hard to deal with the problem by myself. At work, we also have services on Thursdays” (p12).

And participant number 05 said

“When you are a churchgoer you can see that going to church helps in a variety of ways, you live life with Ubuntu and develop the love for other people, because two make light work. You also become aware that life does not end here, were are still going for judgment afterlife” (p 05).

This finding correlates with what was indicated by Lawrence, *et al.*, (2016) as they indicated that religion can be a protective factor against suicidal ideation and that depends on the culture-specific implications of affiliation with a particular religion. Rasic, *et al.*, (2009) also add that religious attendance is associated with decreased odds of suicide attempt but one becomes adjusted due to social support.

4.4. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

The participants explored the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District Limpopo Province, South Africa. The chapter covered the findings on the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers and the coping strategies were also covered, especially looking at way to cope with work and family-related stress. From the finding, it shows that suicidal ideation among the police officers is attributed to a variety of family problems and work-related factors. There was also evidence that the police officers engage in various activities in order to cope with work and family-related stress.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, LIMITATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the summary of the findings of the research study based on the data analysed in Chapter four. The following are also included in this chapter: limitations of the study, conclusion and recommendations.

5.2. SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to explore the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa. The study was qualitative and the sample comprised of eight males and four female. The participants were police officers working at the Thohoyandou Cluster. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected.

5.2.1. To determine the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers

The above objective covered the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers in the Vhembe District, South Africa. The objective was achieved as determinants emerged from the findings indicating that family problems, such as domestic violence, divorce, poor social support, extramarital affairs can contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers. The majority of the police officers, hence, emphasised family problems as the most significant contributing factors to suicidal ideation. For example, divorced couple reported that they find it difficult to adjust to their new environment when the spouse is no longer there as they were dependent on one another.

Domestic violence was also seen as a precipitating factor to suicidal ideation among the police officers. Couples often have difficulties in communication which is usually caused by financial problems, wherein the couple have a high level of debts and have difficulty in paying them. This results in them seeking divorce and then the other partner might develop a feeling of being cheated; this can contribute to suicidal ideation.

Health-related problems were also isolated as contributing to suicidal ideation. The participants indicated that difficulty in accepting the current diagnosis of chronic illnesses, such as HIV/AIDS and diabetes mellitus can contribute to suicidal ideation.

It is evident from the findings that the police officers' suicidal ideation is also precipitated by poor social support. There are police officers who do not want to share their problems with others, fearing that if they confide with their networks, these people will share the information without their consent. This forces them to keep their problems themselves.

The police officers that their working structures contributes to suicidal ideation. The working context includes exposure to traumatic cases they handle in their daily basis and the poor working support, where police officers do not have enough time for themselves, as they are expected to attend to cases during their leave days. It was also reported by the police officers that working with guns can also lead to suicidal ideation.

5.2. 2. To identify the coping strategies used by police officers

The above objective covered the coping strategies that the police officers use in order to cope with life stressors. The objective was achieved as the data reported a variety of coping skills participants adopt in order to cope with their daily life stressors. Police officers reported that they engage in various activities such as soccer, chess and ploughing that help them to cope with their daily stressors. The police officers also reported that they attend churches and people from church help them to cope with their problems. It was also evident from the findings that libation and believing in gods also help the police officers to cope with their problem The police also included substance use as a way of coping with their life stressors.

5.3. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The fact that the study was conducted with police officers working at Vhembe District at Thohoyandou cluster coupled with the qualitative nature of the study, means the results cannot be generalized to the entire population.

5.4. CONCLUSION

The following are the conclusion of this study:

- ✓ Suicidal ideation among police officers is precipitated by family problems, which include domestic violence, extra marital affairs and poor social support.
- ✓ Failure to have an adequate support from families and colleagues can lead to the development of suicidal ideation among the police officers.

- ✓ Financial difficulties can contribute to the development of suicidal ideation among the police officers.
- ✓ The police officers do not talk about their problems as they fear they will be ridiculed.
- ✓ The police also reported that being in contravention of the law can also contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers due to fear of losing their jobs.
- ✓ The working environmental such as working overtime, the cases they handle and working with guns can also contribute to suicidal ideation.
- ✓ The police officers indicated that they adopt varieties of coping strategies in their daily activities, some of which such as substance use can contribute to the development of suicidal ideation. They also indicated other positive coping strategies such as attending counselling, participating in family activities, spare time activities and religious support
- ✓ Social support from family and colleagues acts as a protective factor for the police officers.

5.5. RECOMMENDATION OF THE STUDY

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

5.5.1 Recommendations for police officers

- ✓ Communication is the best remedy to relieve stress, depression and everyday life problems, communicate with closest person, with the EHW officers for any problem you might encounter in your life.
- ✓ Learn to understand and appreciate your salary, to avoid financial problems.
- ✓ The Police officers should attend workshops conducted in their working place. This will help in minimising the development of suicidal ideation.
- ✓ Share their problem with their supervisor or managers

5.5.2. Recommendations for the South African Police Services.

- ✓ The EHW (Employee Health Wellness) should visit where the police officers are located to conduct counselling, therapy and prayers to the employees who have not received counselling after attending to trauma cases; even if the trauma was experienced a long time ago, police officers still need counselling.
- ✓ The SAPS should also consider having the counsellors in each station, rather than having counsellors at the cluster level.
- ✓ Working extra hours, should be evaluated; it can be replaced through hiring new staff.
- ✓ The Police Services should continue to conduct awareness campaign for the Police Officers and also identify issues to be covered on financial management, minimize stigma towards any health conditions and teach the employee to be open about their problems.

5.5.3. Recommendations for the family

- ✓ The family should support their family member, in a manner that they can easily detect early symptom of emotional problems occurring to their family members when they are stress or depressed.

5.5.4 Recommendations for the future researchers

- ✓ The researcher is recommending to the future researcher to investigate on the same topic in other parts of the country. A quantitative study wherein a representative sample will be used is recommended to ensure generalizability of the findings.

5.6 SUMMARY

The chapter presented the purpose and objectives of the study. It also highlighted the study's limitations and outlined recommendations for police officers, family members, the SAPS and future research.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-structure interview guide will be used for the study.

The researcher is intending on interviewing the participant in a one–one interview, the time limit will be between 45 to 60 minutes. The interview will be conducted when the participants are not at work. The researcher will introduce herself to the participants and provide them with an information sheet so that they understand what is expected of them.

A. Demographic information

1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Marital status:
4. Academic qualification:
5. Working experience:
6. Religion:

B. Contributory factors

1. What do you think are the major factors that lead police officers to have suicidal thoughts?

Leading questions

2. What do you think are the emotional experiences that can contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officers?
3. In what ways do you think financial problems can lead to suicidal ideation?
4. What are the personal or family problems that can lead to suicidal ideation?
5. Describe the factors that can cause suicidal thoughts in your work environment under the following:
 - The organizational structure
 - The availability of means to commit suicide
6. What are the health concerns that can contribute to suicidal ideation?

C. Coping strategies

1. What kind of support do you receive at your work place?
2. How does your relationship with family members and colleagues play a protective factor?
3. What do you do in your spare/free time?
4. How does religion assist in the prevention of suicidal thoughts?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

My name is **SINGO CONSTANCE**, a Masters Student at the University of Venda, registered for the Masters in Public Health (MPH) in the School of Health Sciences. I am conducting a study titled “Exploration of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among police officers in Vhembe District, South Africa”. The purpose of this study is to explore the factors that contribute towards suicidal ideation among the police officers. This study was motivated by the number of police officers who are committing suicide in South Africa.

I am inviting you to participate in this study through an interview. The interview will take between 45-60 minutes. Please note that any information you will provide will be treated as confidential and therefore will not be disclosed to anyone without your consent. The data will be used for academic purposes only and a high level of anonymity will be maintained. Note that your participation is voluntary, meaning you are free to withdraw at any time should you feel uncomfortable during the course of the interview.

Ihave read and understood the content and terms. I hereby declare that I am voluntarily participating in this research.

Participant signature.....

APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET

My name is **Singo Constance**, I am a student at the University of Venda registered for the Master of Public Health (MPH). My research focuses on the **exploration of the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa**. You are kindly requested to take part in this study. Your participation will make the difference.

About the study

The purpose of the study is to explore the factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers.

The researcher will collect data through one on one interview. To participate in the study is voluntary. If the participants choose not to participate they will not be effected in anyway.

The researcher will ensure that no physical, psychological or emotional harm is inflicted on the participants during the course of the study. The researcher will be of guard of the risk that may arise during the course of study. If there are any harm the researcher will refer the participants to relevant health professionals. There is no payment or salary for participating in the research, the information provided by the participants will be confidential and it can be shared with the research supervisors. When it comes to answering questions, there is no right or wrong answers. The positive respond of the participants will help to draw conclusion from the findings and will be helpful in understanding the factors that contribute to suicidal ideation among the police officer

APPENDIX D: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

- University of Venda
- P/Bag x5050
- Thohoyandou
- 0950
- 14/ 11/ 2017

The Station Commander
Vhembe District (SAPS)
South Africa

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE EXPLORATION OF FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG POLICE OFFICERS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT, SOUTH AFRICA

I Singo Constance, student no: 11602063, a registered student of Masters in Public Health at the University of Venda, would like to conduct this study at Vhembe District in six police stations using a sample of 12 police officers. The study is entitled “Exploration of factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, South Africa”.

The study will involve the following: Identifying the participants, giving of information to them about the aim of the study. All information gathered in this study will be kept strictly confidential and the information will be used solely for purposes other than those that it is intended for. A respondent’s decision to participate in this research will be voluntary. Anonymity will be assured through the use of pseudo names.

I hereby request permission from SAPS to complete the study. This study could improve the life of the police officers, their work environment, family and leisure times. This study will not disturb their work routine. Your assistance and immediate response in facilitating the research will be highly appreciated.

Yours Sincerely

Singo Constance

Cell: 079 1050112, Email: singoelwimj@gmail.com.

APPENDIX E: TRANSCRIBED DATA

Participants 07

1. What do you think are the major factors that led police officers to have suicidal thoughts?

Family Problem

“People are going through a lot in the household, domestic violence, where the husband is abusing the wife and the wife decide to file for protection order and failure to abide by the rules of protection order through continuation of physically abuse towards the wife, this might lead to arrest. Fear of ruining reputation some people decide to kill themselves when they see that they might be arrested and cannot deal with the embarrassment”.

Financial problems

“We have debts, but we cannot pay the money back. When you fail to pay them back you develop negative thoughts. When a person thinks of taking his life it is not because he has the intention of killing himself, but it is because he is failing to find a solution of resolving his own financial problems. It is mainly because he doesn't want to talk about his financial problems with others”.

Lack of social support

“Every individual needs social support in order to adequately deal with the problem effectively. The reason people develop suicidal ideation is that they don't have a support system. They don't have anyone to share their problems with but they resort in making an irrational decision without getting an opportunity to share what is actually bothering them with significant others, due to the fact that they feel isolated and does not see the importance of sharing their problems”.

Health

“Being diagnosed with chronic sickness is a difficult situation that an individual needs to take in and live with that in their daily life. Even though we are advised not to end our life, it's not an easy situation to accept. Such as being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and you start to be sick and going through the denial process where a person start to take medication in the car. Having a fear of telling the family members, some people end up committing suicide”.

Working environment

“The work that we do is difficult and needs all our attention and concertation. There is so much for a person to handle and sometimes we make mistakes. During inspection you fear that they will ask questions and you decide not to go to work. Especially when you know that you have done a mistake somewhere in those files and a person might develop suicidal ideation, fearing losing the job and being exposed to the public”.

Working with guns

“I can say that working with guns can be a cause of suicidal ideation, but previously we were trained to use guns in such a manner that it was prohibited for the police officer to kill anyone with the guns. This problem of police using guns to commit suicide started around 2000. During our time we were trained, were taught to respect our community, our firearms... see I think the standard of training is contributing to the police using guns to commit suicide”.

Coping strategy

What kind of support do you receive at your work place?

“I have my own book in which I have number phones of those who counsel me when I have problems or when I feel something is wrong or I need to talk to someone. Yes! When I am not feeling well” (P 07).

How does your relationship with family members and colleagues play a protective factor?

“Now that I don` t have a wife, I stay with my nephew, so he helps me with minor work. I play with him and feel relieved and healthy again. The person who supports me is also my colleague. The one who had just phoned me now. He helps me a lot because even if I phone him when I am at home he can come to my home. Many people do not want me, they say I am disabled. When my wife passed away it was difficult but I got support from my family members and my colleagues”.

What do you do on your spare/free time?

Substance as a coping strategy

“When you are having difficulties to cope with daily life stressors such as domestic violence or any problem in the family, some of us we tend to abuse substance such as alcohol and smoking in order to cope with the problems”. After taking alcohol you forget about all the problems you are encountering and it also reduces the emotional pain.

Spare time

“I am a farmer, I plough spring onions, which also helps me in exercise. When I arrive home I don't sit and relax, but spend most of the time in my farm”.

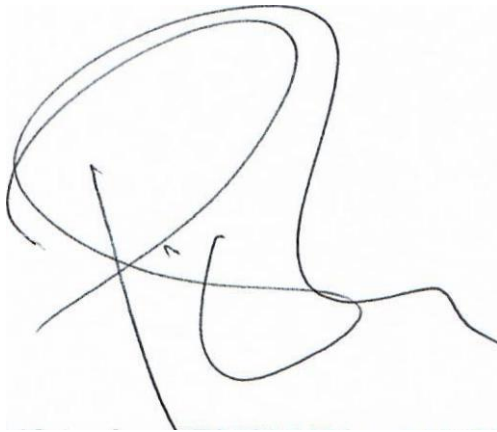
How does religion assist in the prevention of suicidal thoughts?

“Those people from the church, who came and prayed after the death of my wife, they are the ones who reduced my stress, because they were supportive of me and also prayed for me. If I don't feel well, I read the bible if I need any assistance, I phone the pastor to help me. I can see that being a Christians helped me a lot”. I was not going to cope with all the problems I have been through by myself without prayers.

APPENDIX F: EDITOR'S REPORT

13 March 2019

This is to certify that I, **Dr P Kaburise**, of the English Department, University of Venda, have proofread the research report entitled - **EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG POLICE OFFICERS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA** - by Singo Constance (**student number 11602063**). I have indicated some amendments which the student has undertaken to effect, before the final report is submitted.



Dr P Kaburise (0794927451)

Dr P Kaburise: BA (Hons) University of Ghana (Legon, Ghana); MEd University of East Anglia (Cambridge/East Anglia, United Kingdom); Cert. English Second Language Teaching, (Wellington, New Zealand); PhD University of Pretoria (South Africa)

APPENDIX G: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Ms C Singo

Student No:

11602063

PROJECT TITLE: **Exploration of factors contributing to suicidal ideation among the police officers in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa.**

PROJECT NO: SHS/17/PH/15/0809

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Prof NH Shilubane	University of Venda	Promoter
Mrs AG Mudau	University of Venda	Co- Promoter
Ms C Singo	University of Venda	Investigator - Student

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: September 2017

Decision by Ethical Clearance Committee Granted

Signature of Chairperson of the Committee:

Name of the Chairperson of the Committee: Prof. G.E. Ekosse



UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

2017 -09- 11

Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950



University of Venda

PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8504/8313 FAX (015) 962 9060

"A quality driven financially sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"

APPENDIX H: APPROVAL LETTER FROM SAPS

South African Police Service



Suid-Afrikaanse Polisiediens

Privaatsak
Private Bag X94

Pretoria
0001

Faks No.
Fax No. (012) 393 2128

Your reference/U verwysing:

My reference/My verwysing: **3/34/2**

THE DIVISIONAL COMMISSIONER: RESEARCH
SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE
PRETORIA
0001

Enquiries/Navrae:

**Lt Col Joubert
AC Thenga**

Tel:
Email:

**(012) 393 3118
JoubertG@saps.gov.za**

Ms C Singo
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SAPS: EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG THE POLICE OFFICERS IN DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA: MASTERS DEGREE: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA: RESEARCHER: C SINGO

The above subject matter refers.

You are hereby granted approval for your research study on the above mentioned topic in terms of National Instruction 1 of 2006.

Further arrangements regarding the research study may be made with the following office:

The Provincial Commissioner: Limpopo:

- **Contact Person:** Brig M Ngoveni
- **Contact Details:** (015) 290 6206/6090

DIV ON C

Kindly adhere to paragraph 6 of our Attached letter signed on the **2018-03-01** with the same above reference number

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL
ISIBALOMMISSIONER: RESEARCH
RBM ZULU**

DATE:

2018-03/19

SUID-AFRIKAANSE POLISIEDIENS



SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE

Private Bag x 9428

Verwysing Reference 2/1/2/1 (20/2017)
Navrae Enquiries Brigadier Mphahlele Ngoveni
Lt Col Montjane
Telefoon Telephone 015 290 6206/6097
Faksnommer Fax number 015 230 1023

**ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
& STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT
SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE
SERVICE
POLOKWANE
LIMPOPO**

- A. Miss C Singo
University of Venda
Private Bag X 5050
Thohoyandou
0950
- B. The Cluster Commander (Maj Gen Mulaudzi)
Thohoyandou Cluster
South African Police Service
Limpopo Province
- C. The Station Commanders
Thohoyandou
Siloam
Tshaulu
Mutale
Vuwani
Muswodi
South African Police Service
Limpopo Province

AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SAPS: EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG POLICE OFFICERS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE: MASTERS DEGREE: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA: RESEARCHER: C SINGO.

- A.1. Your authority to conduct research as indicated above is herewith granted.
2. The researcher should take care of the following:
- The research will be done at your own cost.
 - The research will be conducted without any disruption of the duties of personnel.
 - The information will at all times be treated strictly confidential.
 - Participation in the interviews must be on a voluntary basis.

AUTHORITY TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN SAPS: EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUICIDAL IDEATION AMONG POLICE OFFICERS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE: MASTERS DEGREE: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA: RESEARCHER: C SINGO.

- You are expected to donate an annotated copy of the research work to the service.
 - B. Copy for your information.
 - C. The researcher has been granted the authority to conduct research on the abovementioned topic at the listed Stations. It will be appreciated if your Stations can assist the researcher were it is possible.
3. Hoping you will find everything in order

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL
PROVINCIAL COMMISSIONER
LIMPOPO PROVINCE
NJ LEDWABA**

Date *2018-03-06*

LIEUTENANT GENERAL
PROVINCIAL COMMISSIONER
LIMPOPO PROVINCE
NJ LEDWABA