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Strategies police use to identify microaggression in public in the Gauteng province, South Africa

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Abstracts: Worldwide, women experience an array of unfair discrimination such as microaggressions. The continuum of microaggression includes microinsults, microassaults and microinvalidations. The subtle nature of microaggressions makes it difficult to respond to it, to engage in self-defense or seek protection from others. Vulnerable groups must communication their experiences to solicit protection from significant others when self-defense is unlikely to ward off a threat of microaggression. South Africa is infamous for high gender crimes and most women fear walking alone in public. The purpose of the study was to explore the policing of microaggression in the Gauteng province in South Africa. The research objective was to ascertain how police identify microaggression experienced by women in Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni and Tshwane municipalities, in the Gauteng province. The study objective was to also establish police perceptions of their role in microaggression directed towards women in public. The methodology was a qualitative research, phenomenological design, with purposive sampling strategy. Twenty police officials selected from six police stations located in the three municipalities had consented to being interviewed. The three emerging themes were body Language, policing styles and criminal laws. Results showed that most participants identified microaggression through women's body language, and relied on criminal laws to identify and police microaggression. Most participants regarded themselves as protectors of communities, which represents the service policing style. Training women how to use universal SOS distress signals was recommended to enable them to adequately communicate on threats of microaggression. The research findings were ungeneralizable due to the small sample size.

Keywords: Communication, dignity, microaggressions, patrols, protection, threat.

Introduction

There are various types of microaggression used to harass and demonstrate gender discrimination. The most common type of microaggressions are microassaults and these are easy to identify as they embody overt discrimination, and the attacks are intended to harm and humiliate women and vulnerable groups [57]. Microaggressions are crimes against dignity [29]. Ideally microaggressions that threats human dignity must be communicated to the police in order to solicit protection for the victim. However, communication is complex and multiple in meaning. Therefore, it is possible that the modes of communication victims use may not always solicit protections from people and institutions with a social responsibility to protect the civilian population. To get help or rather to achieve an appropriate response, communication must not be ambiguous or multiple in meaning [45]. It is concerning that most people are not aware that the police are trained to respond to certain behavioural cues performed by people in distress [9]. Factors such as culture, distrust or fear of police, and literacy can hamper competent communication [58]. Superdiversity in multiracial countries also negatively impacts victim-police communication [5].

Statistics show that most women fail to signal for help when in distress which resulted in impairment of dignity, loss of livelihood, deterioration of mental health, and loss of chastity or bodily integrity [23, 57]. The plethora of gender

crimes against women are an indictment against the police [32]. Often, crime statistics are viewed as symbolic failure by the police rather than a crisis in police-victims communication [31, 32]. It is important to note that police patrols are not meant to prevent gender-based violence and related crimes. However, police patrols can deter microaggression and related gender crimes like street harassment when victims communicate effectively enough to solicit help [55]. However, victims must understand the notion of protection and the language of protection [47].

The study focused on microaggression directed at women and explored police experiences in identifying and managing the phenomena in public spaces across three municipalities in the Gauteng province in South Africa (RSA).

Literature Review

proactive stance against gender-based violence requires one to assume awareness of violence, and this at times demands a level of understanding of the concept of violence as well as vigilance of the phenomena in affected communities [16]. There is ongoing global discourse on the negative consequences of subtle violence termed microaggression [57]. Microaggressions are defined as:

> "The everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" [48].

The three types of microaggressions are microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidations. The element of 'intentional' makes microassaults differ from microinsults and microvalidations in that the perpetrators of such behaviour are often not consciously aware of the harm that they are causing victim(s). The three categories of microaggressions are conceptualized as follows: Firstly, Microassaults are defined as conscious and intentional actions of an aggressor and, these actions are also referred to as "overt discrimination". The following are three sub-categories of Microassaults: (a) Verbal microassaults which entail name-calling or using labels to describe a person, (b) non-verbal microassaults which manifests as behavioral discrimination: An example of being parents discouraging their children from inter-ethnic or interracial marriages, and (c) environmental microassaults entails displaying offensive signs, posters, or any other visual displays in the environment of vulnerable social groups. Evidence of this terrible behavior include media portrayals and drawings of caricatures Asians with tremendously slanted eyes, depicting indigenous African women as barefooted with uncovered breasts, or depicting Nigerian people as drug dealers. Secondly, microinsults are defined as comments and actions that communicate insensitivity or disregard for either the identity or heritage of a person. Finally, microinvalidations are comments or actions that expressly dismisses or ignore the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of the targeted person or members of vulnerable groups [51].

The multi-dimensional nature of microaggressions might, at times, make it challenging for victims to respond adequately to the perpetrator. Some sources propose defense strategies against both intentional and unintentional microaggression [56]. "The guide to responding to microaggressions" toolkit developed Dr. Nadal lists the following five questions that serve as prompts for responding to microaggression [59]: (a) If I respond, could my physical safety be in danger? (b) If I respond, will the person become defensive, and will this lead to an argument? (c) If I respond, how will this affect my relationship with this person? (e) If I respond, will I regret not saying something? and (e) If I respond, does that convey that I accept the behaviour or statements? The first question in Dr. Nadal's toolkit indicates that eminent threat is possible in cases of microaggression. Washington, Birch, and Roberts argued that it may be risky to respond immediately to microaggression. Furthermore, they outlined three types of responses to microaggression and these are as follows: (a) 'let it go' which entails choosing not to address the microaggression, (b) 'responding later' which entails a follow-up conversation after time has lapsed since the incident, and (c) 'responding immediately' which involves proactively engaging with the perpetrators, calling out the perpetrator in a bit to correct the bad behaviour. This type of response tends to be risky for victims of microaggression because perpetrators tend to be reactive defensive [56].

Microaggressions can be a precursor to a variety of threats to vulnerable groups. The term 'threat' is defined as "an expression of intention to inflict evil, injury or damage [30]. Gender discrimination against women is a form of intergroup threat. The two types of intergroup threats are as follows: (a) "realistic threats" to men's position of power, opportunities, resources or wellbeing; (b) "symbolic threat" to men's value, identity, or way of life [35]. Therefore, men tend to engage in intentional discrimination against women when they perceive realistic or symbolic threats. Studies show that advantaged groups often oppose diversity, equality, and inclusion [25]. Sexist and misogynists account for various gender crimes that necessitated policy developments in the 19th and 20th century.

South African legislative frameworks do not contain the term 'microaggressions' but the police are familiar with the concept and regard it as an unlawful act [15]. Legislative frameworks that prohibit gender crimes include the, The

Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, Domestic Violence Act (DVA), No.116 of 1998, Prevention and Combating of Hate Crimes and Hate Speech, No. 16 of 2023, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No. 4 of 2000, and others. These laws preserve human dignity [6, 39, 40, 42].

Dignity represents the moral campus of human beings. It is the essence of what it means to be human, "it legalizes the notion the essence of humanity must be recognized and respected in equal quantum". Dignity is a fundamental right and a basis for human rights [46]. Section 10 of the Constitution of the Republic South Africa of 1996, herein referred to as "the constitution", provides that "everyone had inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected". The right to dignity is further protected by section 9, which prohibits discrimination otherwise termed as the differential treatment of people [38]. Although dignity can be preserved by invoking various laws, threats to dignity must be adequately reported or communicated to solicit appropriate protection from the police [45].

Communication is an activity that involves transmitting information from a source to a destination, and the information transmitted may influence public opinion and relationships with other humans. Communication enables humans to create meaningful experiences, articulate an experience using language, and acquire some knowledge. Communication is certainly an intricate process that involves interactive factors in sociocultural spheres [13]. Four types of communication can be performed by humans, and these are visual, written, verbal, and non-verbal. Visual communication entail using drawing and photographs; written communication entail printing or typing, numbers and other symbols; verbal communication entail emitting audible sounds and spoken words of a language; non-verbal communication entail using body language, gestures, facial expressions to convey information to others. In 2022 about 0.02% of the RSA population used sign language. The disadvantages of non-verbal communication include ambiguity, silence, and blurriness [43, 52]. Although sign language is global, certain hand signals are not recognized as universal non-verbal communication.

SOS hand signals entail free-hand communication recognized as a distress signal internationally. It allows users to send quick and silent communication in noisy or unsafe environments. The hand gestures or signals are uniformly applicable to any emergency scenario. The advantages of nonverbal signs are that they can be used by literates, illiterates, and disabled people. Oral and written competency don't really hinder learning these nonverbal cues. Canada has published a manual that is readily available to victims of domestic violence [49]. At times victims of gender crimes may not be in a position to assessing the effectiveness of their communication to the police hence it is important for them to learn "emergency" communication cues known to members of the criminal justice system, a case in point is the SOS communication tool.

The term 'police' must be adequately defined to raise readers' awareness of the role of police. Police officers are protective services workers. The International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) classifies the following occupations as protective service workers: firefighters, police officers, prison guards, security guards and protective service workers not elsewhere classified. These occupations are further subcategorized under minor group 541. In minor group 541, police officers are categorized as unit group 5412. The task performance of protective service workers includes the following:

> "Preventing, fighting and extinguishing fires; rescuing people from burning buildings and accident sites and those trapped in dangerous situations; maintaining law and order, enforcing laws and regulations, patrolling public areas and arresting suspected offenders; directing traffic and assuming authority in the event of accidents; watching over and maintaining order among inmates of prisons, reformatories or penitentiaries; patrolling or monitoring premises to guard against property theft and vandalism, controlling access to establishments. Supervision of other workers may be included" [19].

The task performance of police officers in occupational unit group 5412 includes maintain law and order, patrolling public areas, enforcing laws and regulations and arresting suspected offender [19]. The duties of the SAPS are regulated by varies legislative framework some of which include the Constitution and the South African Police Service (SAPS) Act of 1995 [37]. Section 205(3) of the Constitution stipulates that [38]:

> "The objectives of the police service are to prevent, combat and investigate crime, to maintain public order, to protect and secure the inhabitants of the Republic and their property, and to uphold and enforce the law."

The Constitution gives effect to the SAPS Act and various policies that regulate SAPS directorates or programmes. The SAPS has five key programmes and these include Visibility Policing (Vispol), Administration, Detectives, Proactive and Security Services, and Crime Intelligence. The discussion will be limited to Visible Policing as it accounts for most first responders to threat and crime scenes in communities [22, 32]. The SAPS Sector Policing

Operational guidelines define increased police visibility as a method of general deterrence used to increase the risk of arrests and lowers fear of crime in communities [4]. Visible Policing is responsible for general visibility such as police patrols. The SAPS annual report indicated that 32, 112 Vispol foot patrollers are registered in RSA [10].

Police patrollers are trained to be vigilant, responsive, and to deter crime. In RSA new police recruits must complete a 24-months Basic Police Development Learning Programme (BPDLP) which offers the following courses: Orientation to the SASP and physical fitness training, Legislative frameworks, Firearm training, Crime preventions techniques and street survival, Community Service Centre (CSC) [36]. Section 199(5) of the Constitution compels security services to teach its members such that they are fit for purpose. Consequently, the SAPS tends to provide annual additional training to enhance its capacity to fulfill its constitutional mandate to protect vulnerable groups and communities. "Protection" is conceptualized as a constitutional right to safety and security in South African law. Section 12 of the Constitution protects the freedom and security of the person as follows [38]:

> "(1) Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right –
>
> (c) to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources; (e) not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.
>
> (2) Everyone has the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right –
>
> (a) to make decisions concerning reproduction; (b) to security in and control over their body; and (c) not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their informed consent."

The SAPS might be the first instance respondent in most crime scenes, but it is important to note that the constitutional obligation to protect the civilian population in RSA is shared between the police, military, legislation, and the judiciary [44]. The research on the policing of microaggression is important because it might promote public awareness of strategies used by police to identify microaggression against vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the study could also highlight behaviour or communication types that solicit police response to victims in distress, when experiencing microaggressions.

Problem statement

It can be challenging to request police assistance in cases of gender crimes. Communication is not automatically effective as it does not always elicit the desired response. The lack of communication and ineffective communication can hinder the deterrence of microaggression and other forms of gender crimes. Studies show that effective communication is a key requirement for accessing protections in unsafe environments [45]. Communication guidelines are crucial strategic approaches to preventing and responding to gender crimes and microaggression. Canada developed a communication manual on hand gestures that should be used to request for help in domestic violence situations (Thejowahyono et al., 2022, 37-44). Large numbers of police patrols are not enough to protect vulnerable groups from gender violence in public. Women in distress due to microaggressions must be proactive in soliciting protection from significant others such as friends, relatives, members of the community, and the police [14]. The subtle nature of microaggressions makes it hard to detect. However, unlike microassaults and microinvalidations, microassaults are overt forms of discrimination that can be deterred and managed (Washington, Birch & Roberts, 2020). Discrimination against women entails unfair differential treatment of women which impairs their dignity, impedes their social mobility, and undermines their fundamental right to equality [28, 38]. Statistics show that women are exposed to a plethora of gender discrimination which include street harassment [50], verbal insults and other forms of gender violence [57]. The most common hate crimes reported in RSA between 2013 and 2017 were intimidation (34%), hate speech (24%), harassment (22%), and defamation of character (11%) [54]. These are just a few of many gender crimes that members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) must combat to protect vulnerable groups and women [1]. Gender violence that manifests as microaggressions can be emotionally and psychologically devastating to victims (Lilienfeld, 2017, p.140) therefore, studies on police vigilance to this phenomenon can contribute to the development of strategies to combat microaggressions.

The study was justified by this logic: A study that creates public awareness of strategies police use to identify microaggression in public in the Gauteng province could encourage communities to adopt methods of communication that are uniformly applicable to unsafe environments in the province. Studies show that there is urgency for a uniform mode of communication across crime hotspots in RSA. Recently, Van Wyk and Nel recommended improvement in communication through the development of guidelines for responding to intentional discrimination and other hate crimes across RSA [54].

Research objectives and research questions

The study aimed to explore the policing of microaggression in RSA. The primary objective was to identify the contributions and challenges associated with sustainable developmental goals (SDGs), namely SDG5 which focuses on gender equality and human rights; and SDG 16 which focuses and addressing violence and eliminating fear in societies. The research objective was to establish police perception of their role in managing microaggression. Furthermore, to ascertain how police identify microaggressions experienced by women in the Gauteng province, in RSA. Enlisted below are three open-ended research questions used to collect information from participant:

1. What signals do SAPS officials use to identify microaggression in public spaces?
2. Do SAPS officials understand their role in policing forms of discrimination in public places?
3. What legal frameworks do SAPS officials use to police microaggression?

Research Methods

A research paradigm is a worldview that serves as a lens to how certain social problems should be investigated scientifically [20]. An interpretive paradigm was used to explore strategies police use to identify microaggressions and ascertain how they perceive their role in microaggressions encountered by women in the communities they serve. The rational for using the interpretive paradigm was that it compels one to consider culture, times, and other contextual factors that may account for the differences in participants' perceptions of a phenomenon in their social sphere. The Ontology of interpretive paradigm required the study to consider the meaning, acknowledgment, and understanding of participants. Interpretivism is grounded in the belief that participant's beliefs stem from social interactions, culture norma or values, and social context. Furthermore, the ontology interpretivism focused on reality as a social construct of participants' subjective meaning of their experiences and acknowledge. In interpretivism, meaning and the truth are subjective and not universal.

Therefore, participants perceptions, understanding of their experiences, or the meaning they attached to perceived microaggressions in public was acknowledged by the study as the truth. The epistemology of interpretivism is that reality is not universal, not singular, but multiple. People may adopt a relative knowledge of a phenomena like microaggression through socialisation, meaning that learning take place within a proximal zone of school, family or community they live in. Individual factors also determine how they are socialized and adopt behaviour and knowledge of their cultural context. The complex nature of culture enriches multiple social interactions and allows people to adopt and share perspectives which in turn permits multiple realities that exist in a community. Multiple realities are continuously shaped by multiple identities, multiculturalism, multi racialism and other forms of diversity in South Africa and worldwide. Consequently, how participants perceptions of microaggressions are informed socio-cultural norms of meaning making and must be acknowledged empathically without attaching value judgements. The study refrained from judgments of police inaction to microaggressions because participants reactions or ability to identify microaggressions was informed by their worldviews and subjective reality. These factors can make phenomenological studies ungeneralizable [3]. A phenomenological design was applied to conduct the study. Phenomenology is qualitative research that mainly focuses on understanding the meaning of people's experiences and perceptions of social phenomena [53].

The research population was the SAPS officials serving communities in the Gauteng province. The study used the term 'police officers' and 'police officials' as synonyms. At the end of the 2020/2021 financial year, the SAPS staff headcount was 182126, and this head count includes sectors in administration, crime intelligence, protective and security services, detective services, and Vispol. The study's target population was SAPS officials from the Visible Policing Section (Vispol) in three metropolitan municipalities, namely Ekurhuleni, Tshwane, and Johannesburg. The total staff head count in Vispol was 94 993 during the 2020/2021 financial year [11, 21]. The CSCs identified for sampling participants included, SAPS Dududza Police Station, Jeppe Police Station, SAPS Lyttleton Police Station, SAPS Primrose Police Station, Douglasdale Police Station, and Silverton Police Station. Sampling is the process of selecting a statistically representative sample of individuals from the population of interest [27]. Purposive sampling procedure, a non-random technique, was used because it allowed the study to select participants based on the research questions asked. This technique is not a given; it does not mean that a defined sample size can be secured always. This drawback was buffered by the absences of a universal rule that dictates what constitutes an appropriate sample size for phenomenological research [7]. The anticipated sample size was secured, as the sample had twenty (20) participants. Referrals were used, meaning that every SAPS officer was recruited through a colleague after the CSC Station Commander permitted the data collection. The participation criteria were South African, SAPS official from Community Service Centres (CSCs) located in select municipalities in the Gauteng province, willingness to partake in the study, between 18 to 65 years old. The study excluded people working as volunteers or interns in the SAPS.

The collection data resumed after ethical clearance was obtained from the university's ethics committee and the SAPS. Interview schedules were used to gather information from 20 participants during the 30 minutes of face-to-face interviews. Interviewing is a conversation purposed for data-gathering, and social scientists use to collect in-depth understanding of how people perceive certain phenomena [17].

The data collection procedures were as follows: Participants were provided sufficient information about the study to ensure informed decision-making regarding, informed of their rights to voluntary participation, to withdraw anytime, confidentiality, anonymity, and not to be labelled. They did not receive incentives for participating, and all provided written consent for participation. The procedure of mitigating internal bias involved making sure that the questions posed to the participants were non directional, meaning that they did not lead or influence the participant responses. Mitigating leading questions was a continuous process that involved self-monitoring though reflective notes during an interview. For transparency, participants were made aware that writing reflective notes was part of the interview process aim at regulating the interviewer. The purpose and nature of reflective notes was described to participants as a technique used to curb the interviewer's beliefs and experiences from influencing the way a participant's responses were transcribed. The study also mitigated against selection bias to prevent an unrepresentative sample by making sure that all participants met the research criteria. This process involved asking participants to conform if they met all the criteria, in addition to the interviewer ticking a checklist to verify participants' suitability. This does not absolve that fact that by nature, purposive sampling is characterised by bias selection otherwise regarded as convenient selection of readily available prospective participants. Emotional pitfalls were avoided by excluding participants that were sympathetic or were too agreeable to mitigate against participant bias. There was prolonged engagement with participants for establish member-checks. Following member-checks, participants that were familiar with the interviewer were also excluded to mitigate against conformity. To mitigate bias, all participants had the opportunity to verify the accuracy of their written responses. The ethical considerations and data preservation were in accordance with Section 12 of the Constitution and the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) No. 4 of 2013. POPIA regulates researchers' dissemination and use of participants' information to protect their privacy [38, 41].

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data sets and develop themes from patterns identified in the data. Thematic content analysis was conducted using Atlas.ti version 25. The data analysis procedures involved anonymizing transcripts using pseud names, cleaning, and coding identifiable patterns of information. The iterative data analysis procedures accounted for emerging themes [60]. The 1989 Guba and Lincoln qualitative measures of trustworthiness requiring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were applied to the study. The criteria credibility ensured that the study measures what is intended and participants perfections were recorded truthfully; transferability ensured transference of the findings to other similar contexts; dependability ensured availability of sufficient information to allow others to repeat the same study; and confirmability ensured comparable findings [2, 26]. Bracketing was applied to mitigate bias and this process involved taking reflective notes throughout the iterative data analysis process [24].

The Social Learning theory (SLT) postulates that behavioural responses are learnt through social interactions, information about social phenomena is acquired through observation, and memories contribute to evidence-based decision making [18]. The SLT was applied as a lens to understand how police identify microaggression in public.

Results and discussions

The twenty (20) participants from three municipalities completed the interview schedules satisfactorily. The demographic information was (10) males and (10) females, between 30-58 years old. Participants' tenure at the SAPS ranged from 1 to 35 years. The languages included Afrikaans (2), Sepedi (6), Setswana (2), Tshivenda (4), Tsonga (1) Xhosa (1), and Zulu (4). The level of education of the sample was Grade 12 (7) and tertiary education (13).

Three themes emerged from the data namely: body Language, policing styles and criminal laws. The development of the three themes is discussed below:

Question one read, what signals do SAPs officials use to identify microaggression in public spaces? The results on types of communication used showed verbal (2), non-verbal (8), and a combination of verbal and non-verbal (9). This implies that participants observed more non-verbal communication than verbal communication from victims of microaggression in the Gauteng province. Participants' responses are presented below:

P03 said: "Facial expression, tone of words in response to another person".

P05 said: "Normally a victim will call the SAPS, and we separate the people in confrontation or in a domestic incident".

P06 said: “Body language, voice, words uttered”.
P08 said: “Facial expressions tell you that the microaggression is intended or intentional”.
P11 said: “Body language - facial expression, waving arm in a panic motion to seek help”.
P18 said: “Types of words used determine that there is an incident that needs intervention”.

The emerging theme from the research question was body Language. Body language is defined as nonverbal communication in the form of mimics, gestures, and body movements performed intentionally or unintentionally. Body language tends to vary across culture and social settings. Çiğdem argued that power dynamics are inherent to cross-cultural communication. Body movement slightly differs from gestures: For example, of body movement include biting nails, rubbing eyes, stroking the chin, pocking or rubbing the nose, rubbing hands together, hanging hands over the head, placing the head in hands, or nodding [12, 52]. Hand gestures involve the flexion of different figures. Finger flexion is the basis of Sign Language across the globe. The combination of figures flexed entails “figure spelling of alphabets” [8]. The finding advance understanding of the importance sustainable development like education and empowerment of women so that they are able to effectively communicate and request for police help.
Question two read, do SAPS officials understand their role in policing forms of discrimination in public places? The results showed that participants perceived themselves as protectors (11) and others (9). Participants’ responses are presented below:

P10 said: “Protect and serve”
P11 said: “I am a public protector 24/7 regardless of being off duty”.
P13 said: “I am a protector of the community 24/7”.
P17 said: “To approach the situation and advise the victim to either open a case docket
or apply for prosecution order at Magistrate Court”.
P18 said: “As a protector. As an officer, I must guide civilians”.
P19 said: “I would not like to be involved while off duty”.

The emerging theme from the research question was “policing styles”. The three types of policing style include the “legalistic policing style” which focuses mainly on law enforcement activities. the “watchman policing style” which focuses mainly on maintaining peace by monitoring specific target such as traffic stops near schools or recreational facilities deemed as hotspots for delinquents; and the “service policing style” which focuses mainly on serving the community, addressing neighbourhood concerns, and problem solving of various social challenges [34]. The data indicates that most participants employed community policing akin to the service policing style, to manage microaggression in public.
Question three read, what legal frameworks do SAPS officials use in policing microaggression? The results showed (15) South African criminal laws and other (5) interventions. The responses were as follows:

P02 said: “We can do awareness campaigns and maintain public order”.
P03 said: “Harassment Order”.
P06 said: “Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977”.
P07 said: “Criminal procedure Act 51 of 1977 and the Constitution because it protects rights to equality”.
P012 said: “Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998”.
P014 said: “A case docket can be registered...”.

The emerging theme from the research question was “criminal laws”. These criminal laws regulate crimes and the punishment imposed on perpetrators within the geographic and political jurisdiction of RSA. The Criminal procedure Act 51 of 1977 provides guidelines for the South African law enforcement personnel and prosecutors. The DVA criminalizes domestic violence and provides guidelines for law enforcement and prosecutors enforcing the Act (South Africa, 1977, 1998). The finding advance understanding of the importance of policies in advancing sustainable development goals, namely SDG5 and SDG 16.

Interpretation of findings

The primary objective was to identify the contributions and challenges associated with SDG5 and SDG 16 which focuses and addressing violence and eliminating fear in societies. The findings showed that most participants relied on women’s body language to identify instances of microaggression in public and applied community policing style to intervene. Furthermore, all participants perceived themselves as protectors of communities which indicated that they understood their role in policing forms of discrimination in public places. In addition to that, most participants relied on criminal laws to police microaggression identified in public places in the Ekurhuleni, Johannesburg, and Tshwane municipalities. The theoretical interpretation of the findings was that police responded to non-verbal

communication common to their sociocultural spheres, which advances understanding of sustainable development goals SGD 5 and 16. The sustainable development of strategies to ensure safety and security of vulnerable group is a collective effort of the United Nations. In South Africa, the police proactively responses to microaggressions in public were aligned to the sustainable developmental goals that emphasize safety and equality. Policing aspects of discrimination such as microaggressions advances sustainable development of gender equality for all girls and women, as well as the recognition of their fundamental human rights. The challenge associated with the developmental goals SDG 5 and SDG16 was that the victims used multiple forms of communication style when encountering microaggressions. Despite the ambiguities in communication, the police were responsive and actively identified microaggressions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusion was that most police used the RSA criminal laws and the service policing style to respond to South African women who used bodily language to signal distress in public. The study mitigated internal biases to ensure crucial conclusions were drawn from the findings, and the processes were as follows: The credibility of findings was ascertained by ensuring that information drawn from the participants' coded data was a correct interpretation of the participants' original transcript. Triangulation was also applied to endure credibility. The study ensured dependability of finding by managing a detailed audit trial. The audit trail involved transparently describing steps that the researcher took throughout the study such as what was done at the start of the research project, the activities involved in the development or production stage, and activities leading to the reporting of the findings. The reflective notes. The detailed audit trial describes study ensured trustworthiness of data and established confirmability of findings. The strategy used to mintage bias and to ensure transferability involved managing a detailed description of all participants' behaviour, their experiences, and their context. The detailed description of all participants' behaviour was not labelled, but rather recorded without assigning value judgements. Participants expressions and behaviour were acknowledged with no reservations, and participants were continuously informed that their explanations of how they identified microaggressions in public were important to the study which aimed at contributing towards the sustainable development of gender equality, addressing violence and eliminating fear in societies. The above strategies used to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of conclusions drawn from the findings.

The findings contribute to growing literature social reactions to microaggressions in RSA. The finding highlighted proactive approach towards gender violence in South Africa, which is associated with sustainable development SDG 5 and 16 to promote safety and human rights of women and girls. This may contribute to innovative strategies to monitor microaggression in South Africa. The study cautioned against generalization due to the small sample size. It was recommended that the government and the police service should initiate intervention programmes to teach women SOS hand gestures to request for help as a strategy to the formalize the uniform use hand gestures and, to promote silent report or gender-based crimes in dangerous environments in RSA. The government and state funded entities like universities should produce SOS hand signal manuals to teach women how to communicate in dangerous situations. The key contribution of the study was that police are vigilant of all communication types so women should use body language ask for police help. Future research on digital technology used by police to identify microaggressions in public was recommended to foster innovative strategies to combat microaggressions and other gender crimes that require policing in South Africa.

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