

The Effects of Investigators Resignations on Officers Performance at Wanaheda Police Station

Kennedy Kaumba Mabuku¹, Epifania Ndaliloshiwa Nandjebo²

^{1,2}Police Researcher, Namibian Police Force

Abstract

This research addresses a critical gap in the study of police investigator resignations at Wanaheda Police Station, highlighting its substantial impact on service delivery. The qualitative approach, with purposive sampling, was used to gather data through interviews with key personnel, including senior officers and investigators. Thematic analysis was employed for data evaluation. The study focused on two primary objectives: identifying the causes of high investigator resignation rates and assessing their impact at Wanaheda Police Station. Findings showed that unattractive remuneration, unfair promotion practices, and insufficient recognition and leadership support were the key drivers of investigator resignations. Conversely, the repercussions of investigators' resignations included an increased workload, a shortage of skilled investigators, and customer dissatisfaction due to subpar service delivery.

Consequently, the study advocates for implementing a retention policy and enhancing remuneration for police investigators as imperative steps in addressing the concerning trend of investigator turnover within the organisation. Based on the findings, this study asserts that investigator resignations have a significant impact not only on the police organisation but also on the members of the public who rely on police services. Therefore, it further argues that as long as the factors leading to resignations remain unaddressed, expecting the police to deliver high-quality investigative services that subsequently result in convictions in a court of law will remain a distant and challenging reality.

Keywords: Investigation, investigators, police, retention, leadership, resignation and service delivery.

1. Introduction

The police globally face numerous challenges, including a significant problem: a high rate of investigator resignations. In an African context, Smit, Alemika, Botha, Ngantweni, and van Mollendorf (2022) argue that the success of a police organisation hinges largely on the number of qualified officers entrusted with case investigations. Effective policing relies on well-trained investigators responsible for handling alleged offences, particularly within the criminal investigations division (Saborido & de Tejada, 2021). Resignations among seasoned investigators continue to impede service delivery worldwide, with Africa experiencing challenges due to constant recruitment and the lure of better remuneration in the private sector (Kamau & Omondi, 2020; Mukwevho & Bussin, 2021). This issue is not exclusive to the Namibian Police Force, which struggles to compete with well-paying organisations, such as commercial banks and government agencies (Namweya, 2017). Wanaheda Police Station, classified as an 'A' class station, boasts significant human resources and jurisdiction. However, it operates with a shortfall of investigators, with

only 26 of the required 57 investigators available (Namibian Police Force, 2021). This shortage is attributed to a lack of motivation and recognition, leading officers to seek transfers or resignations (Namibian Police Force, 2021). Despite public expectations for effective investigations, there's a considerable backlog of unresolved cases due to slow investigations (Namibian Police Force, 2021). During the 2020/2021 financial year, Wanaheda Police Station registered 12,624 cases, but only 425 underwent complete police investigation, leaving 96.6% pending due to ongoing investigations, among other reasons. This statistic highlights systemic issues in the crime investigation process, which links investigation delays to prolonged court proceedings. The primary reason for this slow investigative process in the Namibian Police Force and Wanaheda Police Station is the strained human resources of investigators (Namweya, 2017). Thus, there is a pressing need to investigate the impact of the departure of approximately 18 investigators from 2017 to 2021 on service delivery at the Wanaheda Police Station.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The factors that lead to investigators deciding to resign

Stainton and Ewin (2022) assert that the absence of danger allowances for investigators has, to some degree, contributed to detectives leaving their positions as they explore alternative career paths both within and outside law enforcement. Furthermore, in terms of compensation, private investigators receive more lucrative salaries than their counterparts in the police force. As a result, police investigators acquire skills within the police organisation, making them more employable outside of it (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). This financial disparity has emerged as a significant driver behind the high rate of detective resignations. Sheather and Slattery (2021) echo this sentiment, suggesting that as long as the private sector offers competitive pay and benefits, well-trained police investigators will occasionally be lured away. These findings underline that the lack of competitive salaries and recognition, which people naturally seek in their careers, is a key motivator for investigators to consider better job opportunities.

Inconsiderate leadership and an unfavourable working environment may also contribute to investigators' decisions to resign (Charman & Bennett, 2022). The authors contend that inadequate leadership that dismisses the input and concerns of subordinates can lead detectives to part ways with the police force. Consequently, any communication issues can erode trust and morale, potentially leading investigators to leave the police department or explore other employment options. Conversely, the failure of police leadership to cultivate a fair and competitive workplace is another plausible factor encouraging investigators to seek alternative job opportunities (Milloff, 2023). Considering that investigators spend a significant amount of time at work, the need for support, motivation, and a nurturing work environment is paramount (Charman & Tyson, 2023). Consequently, anything negatively impacting their workplace can lead to demotivation and a desire to find employment elsewhere.

Additionally, the absence of training and discriminatory training practices also play a role in the high attrition rate among police investigators (Shukla et al., 2022). When certain individuals are consistently favoured for training opportunities while others are left behind due to nepotism and discrimination based on factors like gender, race, tribe, or social status, it fosters disunity and contributes to investigators resigning. These findings emphasise the importance of providing equal opportunities for advanced training based on merit, as failing to do so may lead investigators to seek employment elsewhere.

2.2 The departure of investigators impact on service delivery

As crime rates surge due to various factors like technological advancements, internet usage, unfair labour practices, increased inequality, and the public's demand for essential services, the shortage of investigators can hinder the timely resolution of cases (Adams et al., 2023). Consequently, a high rate of investigator resignations may impede the police's duty to investigate crimes, potentially straining the relationship between law enforcement and the public, to whom they are responsible for delivering effective services (Shaw, 2023). In such instances, the public may be less inclined to cooperate with the police, as effective investigators often establish strong rapport with community members. Stainton and Ewin (2022) highlight another significant consequence of investigator resignations: the substantial cost associated with retraining new investigators. When faced with significant personnel gaps, police organisations must invest resources in training replacements. This, in turn, diverts resources that could otherwise enhance overall police service delivery (Tawana, 2022). A closer examination reveals that substantial funding is allocated to training investigators, particularly in basic investigation skills and advanced techniques. This strains police resources, ultimately neglecting other essential service provisions and adversely affecting overall police service delivery.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The researcher opted for an exploratory research design among the available options, including case study, descriptive, and explanatory research (Fouché et al., 2021). This exploratory design facilitated an in-depth exploration of the investigation topic, specifically within the context of Wanaheda Police Station, focusing on individuals experienced in the subject matter (Saunders et al., 2019). This design also allowed for direct engagement with investigators to grasp the reasons behind resignations and gather their insights on addressing this trend.

3.2 Research Approach

Research approaches typically fall into three categories: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Fouché et al., 2021). Qualitative research delves into first-hand perspectives from participants with direct experience, while quantitative research emphasises numerical data presentation through tables, graphs, or charts (Fouché et al., 2021, p.147). This study selected a qualitative approach due to the limited literature available on the topic. This approach enabled collecting of more in-depth information from investigators experienced with the issue, a task that quantitative methods would find challenging (Saunders et al., 2016).

3.3 Research Population and Sampling

The units of analysis in this study comprised current active investigators, all impacted by a high resignation rate and sharing the same investigation training (Saunders et al., 2019). The study's population consisted of all Wanaheda Police Station members (188 members), as resignations affect overall service delivery.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection, allowing for in-depth interactions between the researcher and participants (Saunders et al., 2019). Thematic analysis was employed to examine interview responses, identify common themes, and uncover patterns and insights.

4. Results

The section presents the results from the study thematically as follows:

Influential factors leading to investigator resignations

This question aimed to identify the key factors contributing to investigator resignations at the Wanaheda Police Station, shedding light on the underlying causes. The findings are summarised under the following themes:

Theme 1: Low Remuneration

Participants unanimously cited unattractive salaries as a major driving force behind investigators opting to leave the police force. Many investigators expressed dissatisfaction with the wage gap between police and other organisations, pushing them towards better-paying opportunities outside the force.

Theme 2: Unfair Promotion Practices

Participants highlighted a perception of unfair promotion practices as a significant factor contributing to investigator resignations. The prevailing sentiment was that promotions often seemed to depend more on personal relationships with supervisors than individual merit, leading to frustration among investigators.

Another participant also highlighted:

There is a scenario where you meet the qualifications stipulated in the promotional policy and have fulfilled the necessary years of promotion service. Nonetheless, you will find yourself not being considered for promotion. When this situation arises, the only viable choice is to seek opportunities outside of the police force. It is a recurring issue, particularly concerning investigators whose contributions have been overlooked and neglected for an extended period. Despite considerable effort, those who enjoy favourable relationships with their supervisors receive more consideration.

Theme 3: Lack of Recognition

Several participants indicated that a lack of recognition within the police force was a demoralising factor prompting investigators to seek employment elsewhere.

"Despite completing extensive training, some investigators felt underappreciated and overlooked for promotion," noted one participant.

One participant provided a more detailed insight, expressing the following:

I am quite baffled by the situation wherein they send us to undergo both basic and advanced criminal investigation courses, yet they do not promote us to higher ranks. [Essentially], participating in these courses enhances my effectiveness in performing my duties, but sadly, it goes unnoticed without any recognition. As a result, I am actively exploring opportunities outside the police force, and when a favourable offer arises, I will not hesitate to leave the organisation.

Theme 4: Lack of Leadership Support

A prevalent concern among respondents was the inadequate support from leadership, which contributed to investigators leaving the police force. Many felt that leadership focused more on results than on

addressing challenges faced during investigations, such as resource limitations or support for personal well-being.

A different participant offered a more comprehensive perspective:

We often find ourselves working independently, without any support or assistance when handling cases. Some case files sit for extended periods without thorough investigation due to a shortage of resources, such as vehicles for investigations. What is particularly disheartening is that our performance as investigators is evaluated based on the number of cases we successfully conclude within a quarter. Consequently, a lack of support from our leadership leads to us being labelled as underachievers.

Consequences of Investigator Resignations

The consequences stemming from investigator resignations were significant, and they have wide-reaching implications for police service delivery:

Theme 1: Increased Workload

All participants highlighted that the departure of investigators led to an increased workload for those who remained.

One clarified that *overburdened investigators struggled to manage their caseload, resulting in delayed investigations effectively and reduced overall efficiency.*

In the meantime, a different participant described:

There is a scenario where a single investigator is burdened with an overwhelming caseload of 60-70 case files that require thorough investigation. Although it may seem implausible, this is the actual situation at Wanaheda Police Station. It becomes exceedingly challenging for investigators to effectively conduct thorough investigations when they are swamped with excessive cases. Regrettably, those in leadership positions have not taken substantial measures to address this issue.

Theme 2: Shortage of Skilled Investigators

The number of participants indicated that the shortage of skilled investigators resulting from resignations negatively affected service delivery.

One explained clearly **that** *minor errors in case dockets, caused by inexperienced investigators, had an adverse impact on case outcomes.*

Theme 3: Continuous Retraining

The high turnover of investigators forced the Wanaheda Police Station to continually invest in training new personnel. This drained financial resources and diverted attention from other crucial police functions, such as crime prevention.

Theme 4: Customer Dissatisfaction

The study revealed a significant level of public dissatisfaction due to the slow pace of investigations, particularly in cases where victims expected prompt updates on their cases. This customer dissatisfaction was attributed to overburdened investigators needing help managing their caseloads effectively.

Another participant delved further into the emerging issue, explaining:

I can recall numerous instances when public members approached me, questioning why they were not regularly updated on the status of their cases by the investigators. The underlying cause of this oversight is that investigators often require an extended period to address these cases, prioritising the initial cases that were opened. This delay in providing updates stems from the heavy workload experienced within the investigation unit at the station.

5 Discussions

The study conducted at Wanaheda Police Station delved into the multifaceted issue of investigator resignations, aiming to uncover the underlying factors behind this concerning trend. One of the most prominent issues identified was inadequate remuneration, which emerged as a primary driver for investigators deciding to leave their positions. This discovery is in line with the findings of Mukweho and Bussin (2021), who stressed the critical role of competitive compensation in retaining employees. In a scenario where the salaries of police investigators were unattractive compared to opportunities outside the force, many felt compelled to seek better-paying options elsewhere. Furthermore, unfair promotional practices within the police force substantially contributed to the high resignation rate observed at the station. It was evident that these practices often prioritised personal relationships over individual merit, leaving investigators with a sense of being undervalued and overlooked. The perceived unfairness in promotions created dissatisfaction and further encouraged investigators to consider resigning. The study also highlighted a need for more recognition within the organisation, particularly concerning commanding positions. Holding a commanding position was seen as a mark of recognition, signifying the appreciation of an individual's efforts and typically accompanying improved remuneration. Recognition was identified as a pivotal factor in retaining employees in a study by Liu-Lastres, Wen, and Huang (2023). The absence of such recognition within the police force could prompt investigators to explore opportunities that provide them with the acknowledgement they seek.

Insufficient leadership support was another primary cause of investigator resignations. Many investigators felt that they needed more support in their investigatory duties, leading to frustration and a desire to explore alternative opportunities. The study emphasised the importance of leadership support in terms of resources, the well-being of investigators, and their growth. This kind of support could improve morale and motivation among investigators, thereby increasing their commitment to the organisation and enhancing service delivery. The study highlighted two significant implications in examining the consequences of investigator resignations. First, an increased workload was observed, as investigators left behind had to handle a higher caseload. With each investigator managing an overwhelming number of case dockets, this increased workload could lead to investigator burnout and exhaustion, which, in turn, would adversely affect the quality and efficiency of investigations. Such burnout and decreased efficiency could further impact the relationship between the police and the community, potentially straining their interactions. Moreover, the study found that resignations led to a need for more skilled investigators. As well-trained and experienced investigators left the police force, the organisation was compelled to retrain new personnel continually. This not only strained the financial resources allocated for training but also led to a shortage of skilled investigators. Namweya (2017) also noted this effect, emphasising that investigator resignations contributed to the department's shortage of skilled investigators.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The study examining the impact of investigator resignations at Wanaheda Police Station has highlighted the significant ramifications of such departures on the organisation. The findings revealed critical insights into investigators' indispensable role in maintaining effective service delivery within the police station. Their expertise, skills, and institutional knowledge are paramount for conducting thorough investigations, solving cases, and upholding justice. These revelations underscore the urgency of taking proactive measures to mitigate the repercussions of investigator resignations at Wanaheda Police Station. Such measures may encompass strategies to bolster leadership support, including avenues for career advancement, enhanced training, and the allocation of necessary resources. Additionally, the establishment of effective communication channels and processes can cultivate a supportive and engaging environment that fosters investigator retention within the organisation. By implementing these recommendations, the police station can work toward improving retention rates, ensuring a pool of skilled investigators, and ultimately elevating service delivery to the community. The study's findings unequivocally affirm that the departure of police investigators exerts a tangible strain on police service delivery, primarily due to reduced staffing. Evidently, all the study's objectives were successfully attained.

Acknowledgement

Author Contributions: Substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work, K.K.M and E.F.M. methodology, K.K.M and E.F.M. validation, K.K.M. and E.F.M. formal analysis, K.K.M. and E.F.M. investigation, K.K.M. and E.F.M.; resources, K.K.M and E.F.M. writing—original draft preparation, K.K.M and E.F.M.; writing—review and editing, K.K.M.; interpretation of data for the work, K.K.M; funding acquisition, K.K.M and E.F.M. The authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript. **Funding:** Not publicly funded. **Informed Consent Statement:** “Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study. **Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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