

# Thinking about risk, police and policing?

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# Greetings from India



# Current Research on risk

- Literature review for comparative understanding
- In-depth participant observation at a police station in CT
- Docket analysis of police homicides in Western Cape underway
- Attendance of police funerals to explore rituals and discourse
- Participation in provincial debates – questionnaire completed by 140 police officials who attended Provincial Crime Combatting Questionnaire in 2015

# Some introductory comments

- Police occupational risk is a **critical issue** which deserves to be debated and subjected to substantive research
- **Under researched** area – data sketchy; information incomplete which means comparative analysis not possible. Only a handful of studies in SA.
- The issue of risk **is under-conceptualised**: should we interpret the concept of ‘risk’ narrowly or broadly? Advantages and disadvantages?
- Tendency to focus on **sensational of dramatic forms of risk** i.e. homicide. This means that other forms of risk are neglected ex. Suicide.
- We need to examine the **inter-linkages** between different types of risk (physical, social, psychological)
- We need to acknowledge in our studies of risk and policing the critical importance of both **internal** and **external** factors and the interplay between inside and outside factors.
- The study of risk needs to explore the relevance of **occupational (cultural)** issues (i.e. of morale and integrity as perceived, experienced and enacted by the police)

# Risk and its diversity

See J.S. Parsons (2004) *Occupational Health and Safety Issues of Police Officers in Canada, the United States and Europe: A Review Essay*

<b>Physical hazards</b>	<b>Homicide Assault Cardiovascular disease Fatigue</b>
Chemical hazards	From pollution etc Cancer
Biological hazards	Communicable diseases Hepatitis, HIV/AIDs
Ergonomic hazards	Ex. Back problems
Psychosocial hazards	Stress (Internal and External)

Observations concerning risk from questionnaires completed by police officials who attended Provincial  
*Crime Combating Forum 2015*

Interpret the results with caution give size of sample and geographic locality:

- 55% of respondents indicated safety has gotten 'much worse' over the past years
- What about morale? 48% said morale **very** low within the police organisation
- 38% of respondents said they had 'colleagues' killed over past 5 years

# According to police respondents risk is a function of the following key factors:

- Lack of resources and proper equipment
- Corruption within the police
- The sophistication of organised crime
- Insufficient training
- Community issues: hostility towards police and lack of trust
- Dysfunctionalities within the criminal justice system

## According to police respondents possible interventions could be:

- More/better training
- Vetting, security clearance and ongoing integrity testing of police
- Restoring trust in police
- Improving police community relations
- Strengthening of criminal justice system
- Some thought harsher punishment of perpetrators of violence against police

When asked to describe their feelings in the aftermath of police murder or serious injuries they use the following words:

**I feel SAD**

**I feel SORROWFUL**

**I feel FURIOUS**

**I feel so MAD**

**I feel so BAD**

**I feel DEVASTATED**

**I feel HELPLESS**

**I feel TRAUMATISED AND DISHEARTENED**

**I feel full of HATE**

**I feel Revengeful**

# Conclusion

- Issues relating to risk and safety of police officials require thorough research, good analysis, critical debate and pragmatic policies
- This is an issue to which a range of actors/constituencies can contribute
- Our goal should be a nuanced and critical engagement with issues of risk in all its complexity so as to address contributing factors and mitigate impact on police members

Thank you.