EROSION OF PUBLIC TRUST IN THE POLICE: A CASE STUDY OF THE SOSHANGUVE COMMUNITY, SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: Public trust in the police is a foundational element of effective democratic governance and community safety. In Soshanguve, persistent allegations of corruption, poor service delivery, and inadequate responsiveness have raised concerns about deteriorating police–community relations. This studyinvestigates the underlying factors contributing to declining public trust in the South African Police Service (SAPS) within the Soshanguve community context.An exploratory research design, grounded in a qualitative research approach, was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of community members' lived experiences and perceptions. The study employed non-probability purposive sampling to select participants who had direct interactions with local police services and were therefore well-positioned to provide rich, relevant insights. A total of 13 participants were recruited. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility to probe emerging issues while maintaining focus on the study's objectives. Interviews explored themes such as service responsiveness, corruption, case handling, resource limitations, and the community's shift toward self-reliance for security.Data were analysed using thematic analysis, enabling the identification, coding, and interpretation of recurring patterns across participants' narratives. The findings reveal that public trust is eroded primarily by perceptions of corruption, delayed or non-existent feedback on reported cases, perceived preferential treatment, and a lack of visible accountability mechanisms. Participants further expressed feelings of marginalisation and vulnerability, indicating that ineffective police service delivery not only weakens institutional legitimacy but also undermines community cooperation in crime prevention initiatives.The study concludes that rebuilding trust requires sustained institutional reform, transparent complaint-handling systems, improved communication strategies, and strengthened community engagement structures. By situating community voices at the centre of analysis, this research contributes to broader debates on police legitimacy, public accountability, and democratic governance in South Africa. It also provides context-specific recommendations aimed at restoring confidence in policing within historically marginalised communities.

Keywords - Public Trust, Police Legitimacy, Police Service Delivery, Community-Police Relations,