




# The perceived fairness and consistency of SAPS disciplinary practices: The demographic analysis

**Authors:**

Thabo A. Mabusela<sup>1</sup>   
 Thulile L. Ngonyama-Ndou<sup>2</sup>   
 Mphoreng M. Mmako<sup>3</sup> 

**Affiliations:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of People Management and Development, Faculty of Management Sciences, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of People Management and Development, Faculty of Management Sciences, Tshwane University of Technology, eMalahleni, South Africa

<sup>3</sup>Department of People Management and Development, Faculty of Management Sciences, Tshwane University of Technology, Polokwane, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Thulile Ngonyama-Ndou,  
 ngonyama-ndoutl@tut.ac.za

**Dates:**

Received: 16 Oct. 2023

Accepted: 29 Jan. 2024

Published: 10 May 2024

**How to cite this article:**

Mabusela, T.A., Ngonyama-Ndou, T.L. & Mmako, M.M., 2024, 'The perceived fairness and consistency of SAPS disciplinary practices: The demographic analysis', *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 12(1), a799. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v12i1.799>

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

**Background:** A plethora of organisations have paid heavy prices due to improper application and biased use of disciplinary policies and procedures. This results in serious conflict and disharmony in the workplace.

**Aim:** This study analysed how employees' demographical variables influence the way they perceive fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices within the South African Police Service (SAPS).

**Setting:** The study was conducted in Gauteng provincial policing precinct of Tshwane District.

**Methods:** This study adopted a quantitative research methodology. A Likert-type questionnaire with 24 items was administered to 286 respondents. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and the inferential statistics (Mann–Whitney U test and Kruskal–Wallis test).

**Results:** The study indicated no significant difference between the gender variables on the perceptions of the disciplinary practices of the SAPS. Moreover, there were no significant differences between the different generations. However, the study yielded a statistically significant result in terms of employee experience.

**Conclusion:** The study suggests that employees of SAPS perceive the disciplinary practices to be arbitrary and failing to accomplish the essential objective of fairness and consistency. This study serves as a guideline to managers on how to apply the disciplinary procedures equitably and consistently in order to treat all employees fairly.

**Contribution:** Although discipline is an important drive to employees' ethical and professional behaviour, few studies have investigated employees' reaction to disciplinary actions. This study has exceptionally provided the employees' demographical analysis in relation to the perceptions of fair and consistent discipline.

**Keywords:** fairness; consistency; demographics; gender; generation; experience.

## Introduction

At the heart of every government institution is the goal of effective and efficient service delivery to the public. The extent of such service delivery can only be realised through employees' behaviour that conforms to the behavioural and performance standards established by the organisation. It is within the same vein that every government institution must have in place disciplinary codes and procedures to cultivate ethical and professional behaviour among the public servants that will ensure effective and efficient service delivery (Factsheet 2021).

During his Budget Vote Speech on 24 July 2020, the Minister of Police, General Bheki Cele stated that 'police officers remain the number one asset of the organisation and without them, there is no policing organisation' (South African Police Service [SAPS] 2020). Police stations are critical units in the police administration system. The SAPS is considered an important government department due to the nature of the services it renders. Furthermore, it has its policies, procedures, processes and systems; however, the application of disciplinary measures has proved to be a challenging domain for the SAPS leadership. According to Kurniawan and Heryanto (2019:98), disciplinary practices have severe consequences for the employees. Therefore, they must be based on fair,

**Copyright:** © 2024. The Authors. Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

acceptable and just principles. However, disciplinary issues have been handled in a way that creates conflict and hatred in most organisations (Mokgolo & Dikotla 2021:12).

Indeed, many organisations have paid a heavy price due to unreliable and biased use of disciplinary policies and procedures (Shabangu, Kahn & Thani 2022:77). Otto and Ukpere (2020:217) articulate that the improper application and use of the disciplinary policies and procedures result in serious conflict and disharmony between the employer and employees. Therefore, to guide employees' behaviour and deliver progressive results, fair disciplinary acts and procedures must be analysed and scrutinised appropriately. This article, therefore, presents the review of the literature, the theoretical framework upon which the research question hinges. This will be followed by the research methods that were used to collect and analyse the data, and the presentation of the results. The study will therefore discuss the results and how they link to the literature, and finally present a conclusion drawn from the results and areas for further research.

## Purpose of the study

The study intended to analyse how demographical variables influence the way employees perceive fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices within the SAPS.

## Literature review

According to Okolie and Udom (2019:90), organisations consist of different individuals who interact to achieve organisational goals. These individuals bring to the organisation different attitudes, beliefs and opinions that may result in conflict between them and their colleagues and management in general. However, Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04) are of the opinion that disciplinary processes must be put in place to resolve possible conflicts that may arise between and among the employees, supervisors and management in general to avert the growth of conflicts and maintain labour peace.

A study conducted by Stephens (2019:01) revealed that disciplinary procedures adopted by the police department have resulted in a lot of frustrations on the employees as they perceive these disciplinary policies and procedures to be arbitrary and failing to accomplish the essential objective of consistency and objectivity. Therefore, the fair application of disciplinary acts and procedures in the organisation must be observed to improve employees' morale and maintain a healthy working environment.

## Fairness in discipline

According to Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04), fair discipline embodies similar principles that are reflected in progressive discipline. This type of discipline approach involves more than attitude and mindset change. It involves an application of informal mechanisms to guide and cultivate within

employees a desirable behaviour (Rodgers 2018:01). It is preventive in nature, as it cautions employees about the undesired behaviour and the consequences thereof (Shabangu et al. 2022:84). Indeed, a positive discipline is built on the basis of managers' philosophy to constructively remedy employees' behaviour without imposing any punitive sanctions (Knight 2016:51). It employs management tools such as training, rehabilitation and recognition of good performance as a means to encourage and reward a desirable behaviour (Stephens 2019:03). According to Rodgers (2018:03), this type of discipline can result in employees' positive attitude and high morale which are important factors to develop a professional organisation overwhelmed by mutual respect. Moreover, a fair discipline can help the organisation to avoid litigations, which saves them time, money, and ensure a peaceful working environment conducive for everyone. Indeed, Helfers, Reynolds and Maskály (2020:03) state that negative discipline that values a punitive approach to managing employees' behaviour can trigger in the affected employees a feeling of frustration and perceived injustice about the organisation's disciplinary procedures.

## Consistency in discipline

Line managers often adopt the practical rather than the theoretical approach to dealing with employees' discipline, with their decisions based on instinctive feelings and gut reaction rather than the established procedure (Saundry, Fisher & Kinsey 2020:4-5). Indeed, line managers in their capacity as experts in their area of speciality may not be well informed on matters involving human relations; therefore, the HR function must play a supportive role in assisting managers to effectively implement workplace discipline and deal with matters that emanate from it (Kubheka 2018:33). Moreover, a study conducted by Saundry et al. (2020:04) emphasised the need for the strategic advisory role of HR professionals and the formalisation of the HR function. This is simply based on the fact that HR practitioners have a huge influence on managers' consistency and compliance with the established legal framework when making disciplinary decisions. Saundry et al. (2020:04) also propose investigating the formal advancement of discipline through establishing remote HR services, which will ensure that HR professionals have limited information related to a particular workplace and have no emotional stake in the outcomes of disciplinary decisions. This can help to ensure consistency in the application of disciplinary procedures. Effective management of workplace discipline is a challenge in organisations and the primary source of conflict at work (Otto & Ukpere 2020:217). Notwithstanding that, disciplinary issues have been handled in a way that creates conflict and hatred in most organisations (Mokgolo & Dikotla 2021:12).

Obonyo (2019:50) attributes the police officers' ill-discipline to issues that relate to unjust labour practices by the police departments, like favouritism and corruption, which lead to poor performance and engagement in criminal activities and undermine the organisation's code of conduct.

According to Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04), modern-day discipline is applied by organisational leaders solely to further their personal agendas. This notion is based on the observation that disciplinary measures are applied in a biased manner and usually depend on the closeness of an individual to the organisation.

## The relationship between discipline and employee demographics

Section 9(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (*Act No. 108 of 1996*) states that every individual is equal before the law and shall enjoy the protection and all privileges of the law. Moreover, at the heart of Section 187(1)(f) of the *Labour Relations Act (Act No. 66 of 1995)* is that employees are protected from unfair and discriminatory dismissal on any of the grounds that relate to gender, race, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) status and religion. Meanwhile, Grogan (2020:194) argues that the onus lies with employees to prove beyond reasonable doubt that indeed they are victims of discriminatory dismissal. Therefore, only dismissal that was imposed on the grounds listed in Section 187(1)(f) of the *Labour Relations Act (Act No. 66 of 1995)* constitutes Unfair discrimination; even if advanced on economic grounds, such acts are indefensible.

### Gender punishment gap in the workplace

Employees' perception of discipline is an essential factor determining such employees' subsequent behavioural and attitude change. According to Egan, Matvos and Seru (2020), much emphasis has been directed towards workplace equality on issues related to equal pay. Meanwhile, the issue of gender discrimination has continuously been sidelined. Moreover, Egan et al. (2020) state that the consequences of misconduct for females are more severe than for males, even in the face of evidence that those males had three times more misconduct records than females. Meanwhile, Parajuli (2019) established that 20% more female employees were likely to be dismissed for misconduct than their male counterparts. Moreover, male employees were 30% more likely to find similar jobs. However, Parajuli (2019) also found that in an organisation with a minority of male employees from a particular ethnic group, these males were more likely to be subjected to harsh disciplinary steps. Indeed, Otterbach, Sousa-Poza and Zhang (2021:394) posit that in male-dominated or male-majority organisations, females are likely to experience more perceived workplace harassment and bullying than their male counterparts.

### Discriminatory discipline in the workplace

Szczepanek (2022) found that discrimination against older people and stereotype threats had a negative effect and were more strongly associated with workplace deviance behaviour. The author further established that older workers were often victims of age discrimination and targets of workplace bullying. These forms of discrimination and injustice are

likely to result in employees' engagement in workplace behaviour that is deviant due to resentment and frustration.

Stephens (2019:01) established that police officers and their representatives were not satisfied with the discriminative disciplinary processes of the Police Department that failed to honour the underlying principles of consistency and fairness. Indeed, Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04) report that the effectiveness of the disciplinary process in correcting and guiding employees' unwanted behaviour has been compromised by the discriminatory and biased behaviour of the organisation's leadership. Moreover, Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04) further argue that organisational leaders solely apply discipline to satisfy their vendettas. This is simply because the fairness of discipline depends on the individual's closeness to the organisational leaders. Indeed, it is noted that managers lack emotional intelligence, as they continuously fail to remove their personal feelings from the decision-making related to disciplinary actions.

This study notes that employees aged 55 years and above are, according to the *SAPS Act* and *PSA Act*, nearing their retirement age all SAPS employees must retire at the age of 60 years, while civilians must retire at the age of 65 years. Waal, Peters and Broekhuizen (2017:87–89) point out that these employees fall within Generation X and the Baby Boomers.

As a result, the employees approaching retirement age have developed a pragmatic mindset and started to engage in what is termed 'Quiet quitting' which is a terminology that is en vogue, meaning when an employee is physically present in the organisation, but he or she has totally disengaged from work. This generation of employees has developed a resilient attitude and now feel they are working for themselves and not the organisation. Moreover, Waal et al. (2017:87–89) argue that the differences in generational groups impact two aspects of human resources – policy and employee development.

Grogan (2020:196) reports that no cases of unfair discriminatory discipline have been brought before the court in the current constitutional dispensation. The only practical discriminatory disciplinary case brought before the law was *Atkins v. Datacentrix (Pty) Ltd*. The fundamental reason for Atkins's dismissal was his desire to undergo a sex change operation and as a result, the court found the dismissal unfair based on sex and made a judgement to reinstate Atkins.

## The Fenley model

This study draws its philosophical stance from the Fenley model. According to this model, there are three forms of discipline that can be applied to effect employee discipline in the workplace – corrective, punitive and revisionist. According to Fenley (1998:351), corrective discipline holds the view that discipline is not a punitive measure that seeks to punish employees for ill-discipline but rather a mechanism that seeks to remedy and improve individual behaviour. Moreover, Fenley (1998:351) posits that this approach to

discipline embodies the principles of natural justice, namely, fair hearing, the right to representation and appeal.

The punitive form of discipline in Fenley's model has similar principles to Henry's punitive-authoritarian form of discipline (Shilumani 2020:16). This punitive form of discipline is regarded as hard management in its approach to deter employees from engaging in activities that demonstrate ill-discipline (Fenley 1998:351). Moreover, Nduka, Okorie and Ikoro (2019:07) argue that the essence of this discipline is to impose sanctions on ill-disciplined employees and prevent the re-emergence of intolerable behaviour among other employees. Therefore, under this form of discipline, employees are expected to maintain high standards of discipline or suffer the consequences of punishment.

Meanwhile, Fenley (1998:351) posits that the revisionist form of discipline embodies corrective and punitive discipline principles. Indeed, Cooke (2006:691) states that this form of discipline is progressive – it preserves punishment through the rhetoric of corrections. Moreover, Okolie and Udom (2019:95) maintain that this form of discipline aims to nip the problem in the bud by applying adequate corrective actions to counteract the deficiencies. However, the magnitude and austerity of the disciplinary actions instituted will depend on the type of offence and the circumstances surrounding it. The punishment becomes heavier as the employee continues to engage in similar misconduct (Nduka et al. 2019:07). The Fenley model informs this study, as the study holds the view that discipline should not be used as a punitive measure that seeks to punish employees for ill-discipline but rather as a mechanism to remedy and improve individual behaviour. Thus, informal disciplinary proceedings constituting training, coaching, counselling and performance management must be effected prior to instituting harsh sanctions.

## Research objectives

Therefore, based on the above discussion, this study is set out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyse how different genders and generations perceive the disciplinary practices of SAPS.
2. To establish if there are fairness and consistency in the disciplinary practices in four police stations within the Tshwane District.

## Research methods and design

### Research approach

This study adopted a positivist approach, in which this was accomplished through a quantitative research methodology that focused on the individual conduct that could be measured or counted (Cozby & Bates 2015:118).

### Research design

The study was further conducted in a descriptive cross-sectional research design in which the data were collected only once from the four police stations based in the Tshwane District.

## Setting, population and sampling strategy

The Gauteng provincial policing precinct is divided into five districts, namely, the *Ekurhuleni*, *Sedibeng*, *Johannesburg*, *West Rand* and *Tshwane* districts. The study only targeted the police stations based in the Tshwane District SAPS. The target population of this study was a combined total number of 1186 employees from four identified police stations in the Tshwane District SAPS. The study adopted a probability sampling strategy, whereby stratified random sampling was utilised to sample a total of about 286 employees from the four police stations in the Tshwane District using the formula  $f = n/N$  (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole 2014:169) to get each stratum from four different identified police stations.

## Data collection instrument and procedure

A Likert-type questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument for the study, with 24 closed-ended questions and multiple-choice answers from which the respondents could choose their responses. The questionnaire comprised of two sections. Section A contained questions on biographical data, which assisted in describing the sample. Section B contained questions on disciplinary practices, which enabled the researcher to operationalise the perceptions of the respondents in relation to the investigated phenomenon.

## Data analysis

The study adopted the two non-parametric tests – the Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis tests – to assess the median differences between groups' categories and the perceived practice. According to Bless et al. (2014:301), the Mann–Whitney statistical test uses an ordinal scale of measurement by comparing the order or rank of data in the two groups to assess whether any differences in the ranks can be explained by chance factor alone. Meanwhile, Singh, Roy and Tripathi (2013:16) articulate that the Kruskal–Wallis test is more relevant, particularly when the assumptions of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance), it is used to examine the effect of two nonmetric independent variables on a single metric dependent variable (Sekaran & Bougie 2016:97). Moreover, where the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test indicated a significance difference, the post-estimations were adjusted using the Dunn's-Bonferroni test to indicate which variables differed significantly. Indeed, Dinno (2015:292) states that Dunn's test provides multiple comparisons following a Kruskal–Wallis test using Stata's built-in *Kwallis* command. Moreover, it uses Bonferroni adjustment to control the familywise error rate. These non-parametric tests were further applied to determine the level of significance difference between two or more independent variables. The statistically significant differences were assessed through p-values and at a 5% level where a p-value less than or equal to 0.05 suggests enough evidence to conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of study and the outcomes (Bless et al. 2014:301).

## Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained formal written permission from the Provincial Commissioner, Gauteng SAPS prior to conducting the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (FREC) of the Tshwane University of Technology prior to commencement of the study. Reference: FCRE2022/FR/03/001-MS. The respondents signed the informed consent form which reassured them as to the principles of confidentiality and voluntary participation that were incorporated in this research study.

## Results of the study

This section will provide the discussion of results pertaining to this study. The reliability relating to the research instrument and descriptive analysis of the biographical features of the sample will be thoroughly discussed in this section.

### Reliability of the questionnaire

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which is a measure used to assess the reliability or internal consistency of a set of scale or test items. Bless et al. (2014:228) suggest that relatively high values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ( $\alpha \geq 0.7$ ) measure the same factor.

The calculated Cronbach's alpha as depicted in Table 1, generated the correlation coefficient of 0.9794 which was above the thumb rule of 0.7, thus indicating high internal reliability of the research instrument.

### Analysis of the sample in terms of biographical features

The study established that 51.05% of the sample represented the female gender, while 48.95% represented the male gender. Moreover, it was evident from the study that the highest response rate was between the ages of 41 and 50 years, representing 40.91% of the sample, while the lowest response rate was between the ages of 21 and 30 years, which represented 10.49% of the sample. Furthermore, the study indicated that the majority of respondents (43.36%) had a Grade 12 qualification followed by 33.22% respondents who were in possession of a diploma. Therefore, Grade 12 as the requirement in policing and as the education category that represented the highest percentage (43.36%) proved that the four police stations based in the Tshwane District SAPS considered candidates who were qualified.

Another highest response rate comes from the employees with the rank of Sergeant that represented 32.52% of the sample. The demographic results further revealed that employees with 2 years or less experience had a low response rate of 3.15%, while the respondents who had 11–20 years of

**TABLE 1:** Reliability analysis.

Scales	Cronbach's alpha
Cronbach's alpha for questionnaire assessing the disciplinary practices within the SAPS	0.9794

SAPS, South African Police Service.

experience had the highest response rate of 47.90%. This response rate satisfied the sample inclusion criteria which required employees with experience of at least 2 years and above.

### Fairness in discipline

As shown in Table 2, the respondents had a relatively negative response to this question ( $\bar{x} = 2.92$ ,  $s = 1.51$ ) and perceived the truth of the statement at around 58%. This illustrated varying perceptions pertaining to this statement.

Moreover, 100 (34.97%) respondents held the view that the statement was false to some or other degree, while 186 (65.04%) held the view that the statement was mainly true. Therefore, from the above analysis it can be confidently argued that there were contradictory feelings pertaining to this statement.

### Consistency in discipline

The results in Table 3 show that the respondents had a relatively negative response to this question ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ,  $s = 1.44$ ) and perceived the truth of the statement at around 61%. This illustrated varying perceptions pertaining to this statement. Although 199 (69.57%) respondents agreed that there was consistency in the application of disciplinary practices in the SAPS, 87 (30.42%) respondents held a different view, which suggests that they disagreed with the statement that there was consistency in the application of disciplinary practices. Therefore, the above statistics point to erratic views pertaining to these statements.

### Statistical significance of differences in perception

As alluded above, the Mann–Whitney and Kruskal–Wallis tests for non-parametric data were used to assess the median differences between groups' categories and the perceived practice (Babbie 2016:451). The statistically significant

**TABLE 2:** Distribution of responses in relation to fairness in discipline.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Definitely false	31	10.84	10.84
Mostly false	22	7.69	18.53
More false than true	47	16.43	34.97
More true than false	63	22.03	56.99
Mostly true	85	29.72	86.71
Definitely true	38	13.29	100.00

**TABLE 3:** Distribution of responses in relation to consistency of discipline.

Response option	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
Definitely false	22	7.69	7.69
Mostly false	23	8.04	15.73
More false than true	42	14.69	30.42
More true than false	77	26.92	57.34
Mostly true	75	26.22	83.57
Definitely true	47	16.43	100.00

Source: Adapted from Mabusela, T.A., Ngonyama-Ndou, T.L. & Mmako, M.M., 2024, 'The perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices in selected police stations', *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur* 22(0), 2388. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2388>

differences were assessed through  $p$ -values and at a 5% level where a  $p$ -value less than or equal to 0.05 suggests enough evidence to conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the groups of study and the outcome (Bless et al. 2014:301).

### Gender punishment gap in the workplace

The inferential statistics of the Mann–Whitney  $U$  test were used to respond to the research objective to determine whether there were significant differences between male and female employees with regard to their perceptions of the disciplinary practices of the SAPS.

As depicted in Table 4, there was no significance difference between the gender variables on the perceptions of disciplinary practices of the SAPS ( $U = 488856.67, p > 0.05$ ). It was thus established that both males and females had similar perceptions with regard to the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS regardless of the police station they were based at.

The previous research argues that the consequences of misconduct for females are more severe than for males even in the face of evidence that males have three times more misconduct records than females (Egan et al. 2020). Yet the Mann–Whitney test results indicated that males and females within the SAPS had similar perceptions concerning the manner in which their organisation practiced discipline.

### Discriminatory discipline in the workplace

The inferential statistics of the Kruskal–Wallis test were used to respond to the research objective to determine whether there were significant differences between different generations. These differences covered *age, experience and the police stations* that formed part of the target population.

The results of the Kruskal–Wallis test as depicted in Table 5 indicated no significant differences between the different generations in terms of age analysis and perceived fairness of disciplinary practices at the SAPS ( $\chi^2 = 6.283, p > 0.05$ ). The previous research argues that discrimination against older people and stereotype threats have negative effects and are associated with workplace deviance behaviour because of resentment and frustrations (Szczepek 2022).

**TABLE 4:** Mann–Whitney  $U$  test results of the gender variables.

Gender	$N$	Row mean	$U$	$P$
Male	140	18935.5	488856.67	0.0986
Female	146	22105.5	-	-

**TABLE 5:** Results of Kruskal–Wallis test in terms of age analysis.

Age group (years)	$N$	Mean of rank	$df$	$\chi^2$	$P$
21–30	30	5087.50	3	6.283	0.0986
31–40	82	10669.50	-	-	-
41–50	117	17529.50	-	-	-
51–65	57	7754.50	-	-	-

$df$ , degree of freedom.

Moreover, according to the previous research, older workers are often the victims of age discrimination and targets of workplace bullying. However, the results depicted in Table 5 yielded a different narrative in this regard: employees of different ages had similar perceptions concerning the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS.

As demonstrated in Table 6, the Kruskal–Wallis test was performed and the results of analysis were statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 12.098, p < 0.05$ ). The results showed that the different generations in terms of employees' experience had different views with regard to the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS. However, although the results were significant, it was not clear which groups differed significantly. Therefore, Dunn's multiple comparison test was performed to bridge the gap as depicted in Table 7. Statistically significant relationships are highlighted.

The results in Table 7 show that there was a significant difference in the perceptions of fair disciplinary practices in the SAPS between the employees with experience of 2 years or below and those with 11–20 years ( $p < 0.05$ ). The pairwise comparison results revealed a significant difference between employees with experience of 2 years or below and those aged 21 years or above ( $p < 0.05$ ). These significant results indicate that employees with more experience had thoroughly scrutinised the practice of discipline by the organisation compared to those with less experience.

Employees with less experience never want to find themselves on the wrong side of the discipline policy; they abide by it and do not question it; hence, the results showed no significant differences between employees with experience of 2 years or below and those with 3–5 years or 6–10 years' experience ( $p > 0.05$ ). Indeed, Pletzer (2017:6) explains that employees with experience of 21 years or above are nearing their retirement age and have as a result

**TABLE 6:** Results of Kruskal–Wallis test in terms of employees' experience.

Employee's ex	$N$	Mean of rank	$df$	$\chi^2$	$P$
2 years or below	9	1944.50	4	12.098	0.0166
3–5 years	19	3369.00	-	-	-
6–10 years	29	4434.00	-	-	-
11–20 years	137	18594.50	-	-	-
21 years or above	92	12699.00	-	-	-

$df$ , degree of freedom.

**TABLE 7:** Results of Dunn's Pairwise Comparison test on employees' experience.

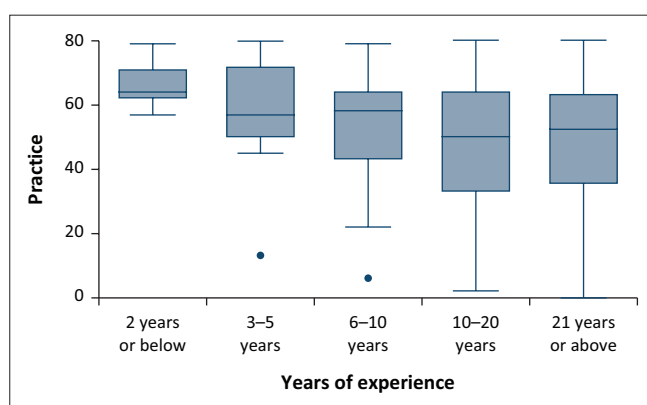
Variables →	2 years or below	3–5 years	6–10 years	11–20 years
↓				
3–5 years	1.157978	-	-	-
	1.000000	-	-	-
6–10 years	2.002111	1.000718	-	-
	0.226400	1.000000	-	-
11–20 years	2.823601	2.054863	1.016031	-
	0.023700	0.199500	1.000000	-
21 years or above	2.702098	1.885559	0.844226	0.206958
	0.034500	0.296800	1.000000	1.000000

developed a pragmatic mindset in which they perceive themselves as entrepreneurs. This generation of employees has developed a resilient attitude and now work for themselves, not the organisation.

Figure 1 is a box plot showing a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 12.098, p < 0.05$ ) regarding the Kruskal–Wallis test for differences between employees' years of experience and SAPS disciplinary practices. Whiskers depict minimum and maximum values, while the boxes visualise 25%–75% (Q1–Q3) data ranges. Meanwhile, the horizontal lines within the boxes depict the median (Q2) and the points outside the Whiskers denote the outliers. A box plot for employees with experience from 11 to 20 years and 21 years and above indicates a negative skew with lower median scores when compared to employees with experience of 2 years or below and those who have 3 years – 5 years of experience which depict a positive skew of the data set.

As depicted in Table 8, the Kruskal–Wallis test was performed and the results of analysis yielded a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 12.864, p < 0.05$ ). The results established that the employees from the four police stations had different perceptions with regard to the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS. Therefore, Dunn's multiple comparison test was performed to indicate which police stations differed significantly as depicted in Table 9. Statistically significant relationships are highlighted.

The results in Table 9 indicated a significant difference in the perceptions of fair disciplinary practice in the SAPS between the police stations of Sunnyside and Brooklyn ( $p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the pairwise comparison results revealed significant differences between the police stations of



**FIGURE 1:** Differences between employees' years of experience and South African Police Service disciplinary practices.

**TABLE 8:** Results of Kruskal–Wallis test in terms of police stations.

Police stations	N	Mean of rank	df	$\chi^2$	P
Brooklyn	54	8609.00	3	12.864	0.0049
Pretoria Central	118	16510.00	-	-	-
Pretoria West	45	7676.00	-	-	-
Sunnyside	69	8246.00	-	-	-

df, degree of freedom.

Sunnyside and Pretoria West ( $p < 0.05$ ). Moreover, the results of pairwise multiple comparison suggest that Sunnyside was the police station that tended to differ most from other police stations (Brooklyn and Pretoria West) with regard to the perception of fair disciplinary practices in the SAPS.

The box plot in Figure 2 shows a significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 12.864, p < 0.05$ ) in terms of the Kruskal–Wallis test for differences between the perceptions of different police stations with regard to the SAPS disciplinary practices. Whiskers represent minimum and maximum values, while the boxes show 25% – 75% (Q1–Q3) data ranges. The horizontal lines within the boxes depict the median (Q2) and the points outside the Whiskers denote the outliers. A box plot for the Brooklyn police station is positively skewed and the perception median score is not different from the perception median value for Pretoria Central SAPS. A box plot for Pretoria West Police station is negatively skewed. The box plot for Sunnyside police station is symmetric as it indicates no skew: the median is in the centre of the dataset and the Whiskers are of equal length (upper quartile is equal to lower quartile). The differences between Sunnyside and Pretoria West and Sunnyside and Brooklyn can be seen clearly through the box plot.

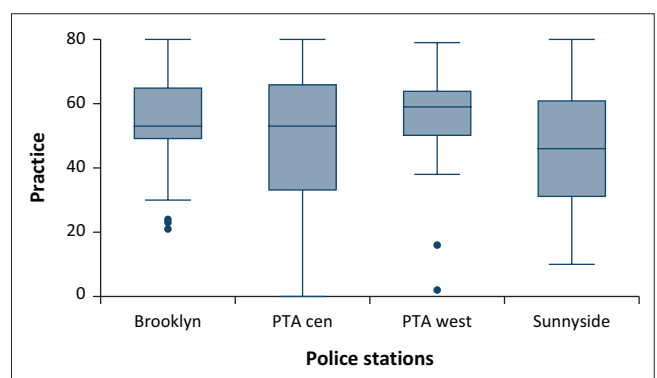
## Discussion of results

This section provides the interchanging discussion between the findings of the previous research and the results accomplished in this study.

**TABLE 9:** Results of Dunn's Pairwise Comparison test on police stations.

Police stations →	Brooklyn	Pretoria Central	Pretoria West
↓			
Pretoria Central	1.436383	-	-
	0.452700	-	-
Pretoria West	-0.668278	-2.116829	-
	1.000000	0.102800	-
Sunnyside	2.657476	1.628807	3.223837
	0.023600	0.310100	0.003800

Source: Adapted from Mabusela, T.A., Ngonyama-Ndou, T.L. & Mmako, M.M., 2024, 'The perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices in selected police stations', *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur* 22(0), 2388. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2388>



Source: Adapted from Mabusela, T.A., Ngonyama-Ndou, T.L. & Mmako, M.M., 2024, 'The perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices in selected police stations', *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur* 22(0), 2388. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2388>

PTA cen, Pretoria Central; PTA west, Pretoria West.

**FIGURE 2:** Differences in perceptions of different police stations.

## Fairness in discipline

The results of the study have established that the respondents held a negative response pertaining to the question of perceived fairness of disciplinary practices in SAPS ( $\bar{x} = 2.92$ ,  $s = 1.51$ ) and perceived the truth of the statement at around 58%. This has illustrated varying perceptions pertaining to the statement of fairness in discipline of SAPS. The above results are validated by Obonyo (2019:50), which has attributed the police officers' ill-discipline to issues that relate to unjust labour practices by the police departments, like favouritism and corruption, which lead to poor performance and engagement in criminal activities and undermining the organisation's code of conduct. These results are further congruent with the findings by Stephens (2019:01), which revealed that disciplinary procedures adopted by the police department have resulted in lot of frustrations on the employees as they perceive these disciplinary policies and procedures to be arbitrary and failing to accomplish the essential objective of fairness. However, Rodgers (2018:03) has incongruently argued that fair discipline can result in employees' positive attitude and high morale which are important factors to develop a professional organisation overwhelmed by mutual respect.

## Consistency in discipline

The findings of the study held a relatively negative response to the question of consistency in the disciplinary practices of SAPS ( $\bar{x} = 3.05$ ,  $s = 1.44$ ) and perceived the truth of the statement at around 61%. A total of 199 (69.57%) respondents agreed that there was consistency in the application of disciplinary practices in the SAPS, but 87 (30.42%) respondents held a different view, which suggests that they disagreed with the statement that there was consistency in the application of disciplinary practices. These results are parallel to the findings of previous research by Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04), which argued that modern-day discipline is applied by organisational leaders solely to further their personal agendas. Moreover, disciplinary measures are applied in a biased manner and usually depend on the closeness of an individual to the organisation leaders. Therefore, as a result of unreliable and biased use of disciplinary policies and procedures as embedded in the results of this study, findings of previous research have argued that many organisations have paid a heavy price (Shabangu et al. 2022:77). Therefore, these results are validated by previous research that has argued that modern-day discipline is applied in an inconsistent manner towards the employees.

## Gender punishment gap in the workplace

The previous research argues in terms of Egan et al. (2020) that the consequences of misconduct for females are more severe than for males, on the basis that even in the face of evidence that those males had three times more misconduct records than females. Moreover, previous research has

established that 20% more female employees were likely to be dismissed for misconduct than their male counterparts and that male employees were 30% more likely to find similar jobs after dismissal (Parajuli 2019). The results of this study accomplished through the inferential statistics of the Mann-Whitney  $U$  test indicated no significant difference between the gender variables on the perceptions of the disciplinary practices of the SAPS ( $U = 488856.67$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). This entails that the results of this study have established that both males and females had similar perceptions of the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS.

Indeed, the outcomes of the study of Parajuli (2019) also found that in an organisation with a minority of male employees from a particular ethnic group, these males were more likely to be subjected to harsh disciplinary steps. However, the findings of this study have incongruently revealed that both males and females had similar perceptions of the practice of fair and consistent discipline, which entails that regardless of their gender employees believe they are subjected to similar disciplinary processes.

## Discriminatory discipline in the workplace

The inferential statistics of the Kruskal-Wallis test were then performed to respond to the research objectives that intended to determine whether there were significant differences between different generations in terms of *age and experience* and the disciplinary practices of the SAPS.

### Age perception analysis

The discussion as cascaded from the findings of previous research found that discrimination against older people and stereotype threats had a negative effect and were more strongly associated with workplace deviance behaviour (Szczepanek 2022). Moreover, that older workers were often victims of age discrimination and targets of workplace bullying. This study's results accomplished through Kruskal-Wallis test indicated no significant differences between the different generations in terms of age and the perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices at the SAPS ( $\chi^2 = 6.283$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### Experience perception analysis

Previous research has established that older workers were often victims of age discrimination and targets of workplace bullying. Moreover, these forms of discrimination and injustice are likely to result in employees' engagement in workplace behaviour that is deviant due to resentment and frustration. The results of this study determined through the Kruskal-Wallis test have validated these presumptions as the study has yielded a statistically significant result ( $\chi^2 = 12.098$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between the different generations in terms of employee experience and perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices of SAPS.



These results showed that the different generations in terms of employee experience had different views concerning the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS. The results of Dunn's multiple comparison test showed that there were significant differences in the perception of fair disciplinary practice in the SAPS between employees with experience of 2 years or below and 11 years–20 years ( $p < 0.05$ ). The pairwise comparison results further revealed significant differences between employees with experience of 2 years or below and 21 years or above ( $p < 0.05$ ).

### Station perception analysis

The findings of previous research in terms of Stephens (2019:01) established that police officers and their representatives were not satisfied with the discriminative disciplinary processes of the Police Department that failed to honour the underlying principles of consistency and fairness. Meanwhile, Mokgolo and Dikotla (2021:04) have further reported that the effectiveness of the disciplinary process in correcting and guiding employees' unwanted behaviour has been compromised by the discriminatory and biased behaviour of the organisation's leadership.

Indeed, the results of the inferential statistical test of Kruskal–Wallis yielded a statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 12.864, p < 0.05$ ). The results established that the employees from the four police stations had different perceptions with regard to the practice of fair discipline in the SAPS. Therefore, the results of this study have validated the findings of the previous research which argues that organisational leaders solely apply discipline to satisfy their vendettas. The fairness of discipline depends on the individual's closeness to the organisation (Mokgolo & Dikotla 2021:04). Moreover, findings of previous research collaborated by the results of this study have noted that managers lack emotional intelligence, as they continuously fail to remove their personal feelings from the decision-making related to disciplinary actions.

### Practical implications of the study

The findings of this study practically imply that management must ensure that the SAPS discipline policy incorporates the principles that foster uniformity of conduct across the different working environments. The management must further ensure that such disciplinary principles are applied fairly and consistently across all the working environments. There should be a standardised form of discipline across all the divisions, provinces, districts and police stations to avoid the inconsistent application of disciplinary rules which may confuse employees about the expected conduct in the workplace.

### Contributions of the study

This study has successfully identified the significant differences in the perceptions of employees with regard to the fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices within the SAPS. Moreover, the research study has depicted a clear

picture of the organisation's disciplinary practices from the employees' perspective and their experience of the disciplinary processes. Therefore, this study was significant because of the strong possibility of the organisation losing its main purpose due to resentment and bitterness that inconsistent and unfair disciplinary practices can trigger.

### Limitations of the study

The questionnaire method failed to collect data on the feelings of employees in the SAPS. No conclusions on feelings were drawn; consequently, further qualitative or mixed research is recommended.

Another limitation of the study was that, the data were collected at a single time (cross-sectional), raising concerns on whether the findings would still be the same had the data been collected over a long period (longitudinal). Lastly, given the cross-sectional design nature of the inquiry, the study can only be generalised to the four police stations in the Tshwane District.

### Conclusion and recommendations for future research

This study has managed to provide a clear picture of employees' perceptions of discipline through the analysis of demographical profile. Given that the study can only be generalised to the four police stations in the Tshwane District, it is necessary to replicate the study to include more police stations in various regions.

### Acknowledgements

This is the second article (cf. Mabusela, Ngonyama-Ndou & Mmako 2024) which is partially based on the author's thesis entitled 'The perceived fairness of disciplinary practices within the South African Police Service' towards the degree of Master of Management Sciences in Labour Relations Management in the Department of People Management and Development, Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa on 25 October 2023, with supervisors Dr TL Ngonyama-Ndou and Dr MM Mmako. It is available here: <https://sajhrm.co.za/index.php/sajhrm/article/view/2388/3692>.

The authors thank Tshifhiwa Mildred Nkwenika from TUT Directorate of Research and Innovation for performing the statistical analysis.

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

### Authors' contributions

T.A.M. conducted the research study as part of his Master's degree. He wrote the first draft. T.L.N.-N. acted as the supervisor, and reviewed and refined the article. M.M.M. acted as a co-supervisor.

## Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

## Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, T.L.N.-N., upon reasonable request.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

## References

- Babbie, E., 2016, *The practice of social research*, 14th edn., Cengage Learning, Boston, MA.
- Bless, C., Smith, C.H. & Sithole, S.L., 2014, *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective*, 5th edn., Juta & Company Ltd, Cape Town.
- Cooke, H., 2006, 'Examining the disciplinary process in nursing: A case study approach', *Sage Journals* 20(4), 687–707. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017006069809>
- Cozby, P.C. & Bates, S.C., 2015, *Methods in behavioral research*, 12th edn., McGraw-Hill Education, New York, NY.
- Depuy, V., 2018, *Perusing, choosing, and not mis-using: Non-parametric vs. parametric tests in SAS*, pp. 1–5, Duke Clinical Research Institute, Durham.
- Dinno, A., 2015, 'Nonparametric pairwise multiple comparisons in independent groups using Dunn's test', *The Stata Journal* 15(1), 292–300.
- Egan, M., Matvos, G. & Seru, A., 2020, *When Harry fired Sally: Uncovering the gender punishment gap*, viewed 08 February 2023, from <https://www.unpri.org/pri-blog/when-harry-fired-sally-uncovering-the-gender-punishment-gap/5951.article>.
- Factsheet, 2021, *Failing to discipline in SAPS: Fostering a culture of impunity*, African Criminal Justice Reform, Cape Town.
- Fenley, A., 1998, 'Models, styles and metaphors: Understanding the management', *Employee Relations* 20(4), 349–364. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01425459810232815>
- Grogan, J., 2020, *Workplace law*, 13th edn., Juta and Company, Cape Town.
- Helfers, R.C., Reynolds, P.D. & Maskály, J., 2020, 'Prior discipline and performance among police officers: Does organizational fairness matter?', *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society* 21(3), 1–16.
- Knight, X.E., 2016, 'Consistency in the application of disciplinary measures within a state-owned entity', MPhil dissertation, University of Johannesburg.
- Kubheka, B.P., 2018, *Institutional challenges in managing misconduct in local government: Case study of Amajuba District Municipality*, University of KwaZulu-Natal, KwaZulu-Natal.
- Kurniawan, H. & Heryanto, H., 2019, 'Effect of work discipline and work environment on employee performance with work motivation as an intervening variable in Department of Tourism, Youth and Sport of Padang District', *Archives of Business Research* 7(7), 88–101.
- Mabusela, T.A., Ngonyama-Ndou, T.L. & Mmako, M.M., 2024, 'The perceived fairness and consistency of disciplinary practices in selected police stations', *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur* 22(0), 2388. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2388>
- Mokgolo, M. & Dikotla, M.A., 2021, 'The management of disciplinary cases in the South African public service post-2009 to the 2018 era', *Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review* 9(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/apsdpr.v9i1.525>
- Nduka, O.I., Okorie, R.I. & Ikoro, U., 2019, 'Workplace discipline and organisational effectiveness: Evidence from Abia State Polytechnic, Aba', *Strategic Journal of Business and Social Science* 2(2), 1–15.
- Obonyo, R.A., 2019, *Perception of factors influencing indiscipline among administration of police officers at Embakasi area*, University of Nairobi, Nairobi.
- Okolie, U.C. & Udom, I.D., 2019, 'Disciplinary actions and procedures at workplace: The role of HR managers', *Journal of Economics and Management Research* 8, 90–105. <https://doi.org/10.22364/jemr.8.06>
- Otterbach, S., Sousa-Poza, A. & Zhang, X., 2021, *Gender differences in perceived workplace harassment and gender egalitarianism: A comparative cross-national*, Institute for Health Care & Public Management, University of Hohenheim, Stuttgart.
- Otto, D.D. & Ukpere, W.I., 2020, 'The effect of staff perception of consistency or inconsistency in disciplinary decision making on workforce output at a Nigerian University', *An Interdisciplinary Journal* 57(5), 302–308.
- Parajuli, A., 2019, *The punishment gap: How workplace mistakes hurt women and minorities most*, viewed 04 April 2022, from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/06/the-punishment-gap-how-workplace-mistakes-hurt-women-and-minorities-most/>.
- Pletzer, J.L., 2017, 'A meta-analysis of the relations between personality and workplace deviance', *Journal of Vocational Behaviour* 112, 369–383.
- Rodgers, D., 2018, *Effects of positive discipline*, Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas, Murphy, TX.
- Saundry, R., Fisher, V. & Kinsey, S., 2020, 'Disconnected human resource? Proximity and the (mis)management of workplace conflict', *Human Resource Management Journal* 31(2), 476–492. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12318>
- Sekaran, U. & Bougie, R., 2016, *Research methods: A skill-building approach*, 7th edn., John Wiley, United Kingdom.
- Shabangu, K.M., Kahn, S.B. & Thani, X.C., 2022, 'Critical considerations for effective discipline management in the public sector', *Administratio Publica* 30(4), 71–95.
- Shilumani, R., 2020, *An evaluation of the implementation of disciplinary codes and procedures at Nkhensani Hospital*, Stellenbosch University, Cape Town.
- Singh, N.U., Roy, A. & Tripathi, A.K., 2013, *Non-parametric tests: Hands on SPSS*, Indian Agricultural Statistics Research Institute, Luyengo.
- Stephens, D.W., 2019, *New perspectives in policing: Police discipline: A case for change*, pp. 1–27, National Institute of Justice, Washington, DC.
- South African Police Service (SAPS), 2020, *Minister Bheki Cele: Police, IPID and Civilian Secretariat for Police Service Department*, Budget vote 2020/21, viewed 19 August 2021, from <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-bheki-cele-police-ipid-and-civilian-secretariat-police-service-dept-budgetvote>.
- Szczepanek, A., 2022, *Older people & the workplace*, 2023 Repo, viewed 08 February 2023, from <https://www.livecareer.com/resources/careers/planning/older-workers>.
- Waal, A., Peters, L. & Broekhuizen, M., 2017, 'Do different generations look differently at high performance organizations?', *Journal of Strategy and Management* 10(1), 86–101. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSMA-10-2015-0083>