This booklet presents select findings from an in-person survey with 868 South African Police Service (SAPS) officers, exploring their knowledge, attitudes and expectations related to police integrity between 2011 and 2019.

The survey asked officers to judge 14 scenarios describing hypothetical misconduct in the SAPS. It probed officer familiarity with:

- The SAPS’ rules (i.e., did the scenario represent an official violation?),
- Their expectations of discipline for such acts (i.e., how would the SAPS respond?),
- Their own and their colleagues’ willingness to report such misconduct (i.e., would they report this behaviour?)

868 SURVEYED

Knowledge of official rules
Between 15% and 30% respondents did not recognise even serious misconduct as violations of SAPS’ rules (i.e., stealing from a crime scene, misusing their firearm, accepting bribes and kickbacks, and falsifying official reports).

Expected discipline and its fairness
Most respondents believed that disciplinary measures taken against guilty SAPS officers would be fair. However, even for serious misconduct, a minority believed that guilty officers would receive no punishment or a verbal warning only.

Reporting misconduct
90% of respondents said they would report serious misconduct but between 20% and 40% thought that “most” SAPS officers would not report such behaviour. This suggests a strong code of silence within the SAPS.

For more details see “Police Integrity in South Africa” by Sanja Kutnjak Ivkovich, Adri Sauerman, Andrew Faull, Michael E. Meyer, and Gareth Newham (Routledge, 2020).
FAMILIARITY WITH OFFICIAL SAPS’ RULES

SERIOUS FORMS OF POLICE MISCONDUCT
(e.g., unlawful shooting, stealing from a crime scene, assaulting a suspect)

- 28% were not sure that shooting an unarmed stranger in the back was a violation of SAPS’ rules
- 34% were not certain whether striking a handcuffed man in the kidneys was a violation of SAPS’ rules
- 36% did not see receiving a financial reward (kickback) from a local auto-body shop as a violation of SAPS’ rules

BETWEEN 15% - 30% OF OFFICERS DID NOT LABEL VERY SERIOUS MISCONDUCT AS VIOLATIONS OF OFFICIAL RULES

LESS SERIOUS FORMS OF POLICE MISCONDUCT
(e.g., free meals and gifts, drunk driving cover-up, verbal abuse)

- 36% could not say with certainty that accepting gratuities was a violation of SAPS’ rules
- 44% did not see covering up of a colleague’s drunk driving accident as a violation of SAPS’ rules
- 54% suggested that verbally insulting a motorist was not a violation of SAPS’ rules

BETWEEN 40% - 64% OF OFFICERS RECOGNISED LESS SERIOUS MISCONDUCT AS VIOLATIONS OF SAPS’ RULES, DEPENDING ON THE SCENARIO
EXPECTED DISCIPLINE METED OUT BY THE SAPS FOR OFFICERS FOUND GUILTY OF MISCONDUCT

THE BEHAVIOR DESCRIBED IN 8 OUT OF 14 SURVEY SCENARIOS should result in dismissal for guilty officers, according to SAPS' rules.

But, when asked to predict the discipline that would be imposed on officers found guilty of such behaviour, most expected dismissal in only 1 OUT OF 8 SCENARIOS. 52% thought officers would be dismissed for accepting a bribe from a reckless driver.

OTHER SERIOUS CASES OF POLICE MISCONDUCT: THE MAJORITY OF OFFICERS EXPECTED SOME DISCIPLINE, BUT NOT DISMISSAL

49% expected dismissal for stealing from a crime scene
41% expected dismissal for an unlawful shooting
31% expected dismissal for formally submitting a false report
25% expected dismissal for accepting a kickback (cash) from an auto-body shop

Officers more frequently expected discipline to involve a verbal or written reprimand.
The overwhelming majority of officers evaluated the discipline they expected by the SAPS as fair.
The “code of silence” refers to a shared understanding among officers that they will protect each other from investigations. The survey suggests that officers were more likely to protect colleagues where they did not consider the misconduct to be serious.

33% would not report verbal abuse by a colleague.

31% would keep silent about a colleague’s drunk driving accident.

22% would protect an officer who accepted a gift or meal.

7% of respondents said they would not report a colleague who stole a valuable knife from a crime scene.

9% of respondents said that they would not report a fellow officer who unlawfully shot and killed someone.

The code is weaker for misconduct which officers judged to be more serious:

- 24% believed most other officers would not report a colleague who stole a valuable knife from a crime scene.
- 19% said that most peers would protect an officer who unlawfully shot and killed someone.
- 41% expected that fellow officers would not report verbal abuse by a police official.

Officers thought that their colleagues would be far less likely than themselves to report misconduct between 20% - 40% believing most officers would not report even the most serious misconduct.
FAILURE TO INTERVENE
While on patrol in his patrol car, a police officer notices a group of juveniles writing graffiti on the building. The police officer decides not to intervene and instead drives on.

VERBAL ABUSE
A police officer stops a motorist for reckless driving. As the officer approaches the vehicle, the driver yells, “What the hell are you stopping me for?” The officer replies, “Because today is ‘Arrest an Asshole Day.’”

FAILURE TO REPORT HATE CRIME
In responding to a stabbing, a police officer arrests a suspect under circumstances that suggest that the attack was racially motivated. The police officer fails to write on the official report that the attack was racially motivated.

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DRUNK DRIVING COVER-UP
At 2:00 A.M. a police officer, who is on duty, is driving his patrol car on a deserted road. He sees a vehicle that has been driven off the road and is stuck in a ditch. He approaches the vehicle and observes that the driver is not hurt but is obviously intoxicated. He also finds that the driver is a police officer. Instead of reporting this accident and offense, he transports the driver to his home.
**FREE MEALS AND GIFTS**

A police officer is widely liked in the community. Local merchants and restaurant owners regularly show their appreciation for his attention by giving him gifts of food, cigarettes, and other items of small value.

**KICK BACK**

A police officer has a private arrangement with a local auto body shop to refer the owners of cars damaged in accidents to the shop. In exchange for each referral, he receives a payment of 5% of the repair bill from the shop owner.

**ASSAULTING A DETAINEE**

In responding with her male partner to a fight in a bar, a young female officer receives a black eye from one of the male combatants. The man is arrested, handcuffed, and, as he is led into the cells, the male member of the team punches him very hard in the kidney area saying, “hurts, doesn’t it.”

**SUPERVISOR CORRUPTION**

A police officer is scheduled to work during coming holidays. The supervisor offers to give him these days off, if he agrees to run some personal errands for the supervisor. Evaluate the SUPERVISOR’S behaviour.

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**DISCIPLINE EXPECTED FOR SAPS OFFICER FOUND GUILTY:**

- **FREE MEALS AND GIFTS**: 64% SAPS RULES / 42% REPORT
- **KICK BACK**: 64% SAPS RULES / 34% REPORT
- **ASSAULTING A DETAINEE**: 66% SAPS RULES / 31% REPORT
- **SUPERVISOR CORRUPTION**: 66% SAPS RULES / 24% REPORT

**DISCIPLINE:**

- **FREE MEALS AND GIFTS**: 50% NONE / VERBAL WARNING / 35% WRITTEN WARNING / REASSIGNMENT / 15% DEMOTION
- **KICK BACK**: 26% NONE / VERBAL WARNING / 49% WRITTEN WARNING / REASSIGNMENT / 25% DEMOTION
- **ASSAULTING A DETAINEE**: 24% NONE / VERBAL WARNING / 62% WRITTEN WARNING / REASSIGNMENT / 15% DEMOTION
- **SUPERVISOR CORRUPTION**: 27% NONE / VERBAL WARNING / 63% WRITTEN WARNING / REASSIGNMENT / 10% DEMOTION
FALSE REPORTING
A police officer arrests two drug dealers involved in a street fight. One has a large quantity of heroin on his person. In order to charge them both with serious offenses, the officer falsely reports that the heroin was found on both men.

FAILURE TO STOP ASSAULT
A police sergeant, without intervening, watches officers under his supervision repeatedly strike and kick a man arrested for child abuse. The man has previous child abuse arrests. Evaluate the SERGEANT’S behaviour.

UNLAWFUL SHOOTING
An officer who was severely beaten by a person resisting arrest, has just returned to duty. On patrol, the officer approaches a person standing in a dimly lit alley. Suddenly, the person throws a gym bag at the officer and begins to run away. The officer fatally shoots the person, striking him in the back. It was later determined that the person was unarmed.

FAILURE TO ARREST FRIEND
A police officer is aware that there is an issued warrant of arrest for a long-time friend of his. Although he sees his friend frequently over a period of more than a week and warns his friend of its existence, he does not arrest him.
POLICE INTEGRITY IN SOUTH AFRICA: KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

**Bribe from Motorist**
A police officer stops a motorist for not obeying a red traffic light. The officer agrees to accept a personal gift for half of the amount of the fine in exchange for not issuing a citation.

**Theft from Crime Scene**
A police officer discovers a burglary of a hardware store. The display cases are smashed and many items have obviously been taken. While searching the store, he takes an expensive pocketknife and slips it into his pocket. He reports that the knife has been stolen during the burglary.
A substantial proportion of police officers in this study were uncertain whether even extreme examples of misconduct violated the SAPS’ rules. Officers should be taught the content of official rules, why they are important and why they should be upheld. Survey findings show that the more serious officers judged misconduct to be, the more likely they were to say they would report it.

When asked to predict the discipline that the SAPS would mete out for misconduct, the majority of officers expected dismissal in only 1 out of 8 scenarios that should merit dismissal. This may be because officers do not know the outcomes of prior disciplinary hearings within the organisation, or because the SAPS is not disciplining transgressors appropriately. As such, SAPS managers need to effectively communicate the consequences of such transgressions to the rank and file.

The SAPS’ code of silence was closely associated with the severity of discipline expected for different types of misconduct. Officers said they were most likely to report misconduct for which they expected severe discipline, and believed that such discipline would be fair. This does not mean that the SAPS should adopt draconian disciplinary measures. Rather, disciplinary steps should be enacted consistently through a process that is considered fair by most officers. If surveyed officers are correct that misconduct is not taken seriously by managers and that few transgressors are held accountable for their violations, then the SAPS should strengthen its capacity and willingness to enforce official rules.
Trust is key to the function and productivity of the democratic state. South Africa’s government can increase public trust by demonstrably improving police professionalism and legitimacy.

The fundamental requirement for effective, professional, legitimate policing is the willingness of the SAPS’ top leadership to enhance integrity and address police misconduct throughout the organisation.

Until each of the SAPS’ top managers is recognised as possessing high levels of integrity themselves, disciplinary and other action taken against subordinates will be viewed as hypocritical.

An independent, multi-sectoral National Police Board should therefore be established to undertake detailed integrity and performance assessments of each of those who occupy and seek to occupy the top echelons of the SAPS.

With proper funding, support, and leadership, the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations (Hawks) and the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) could address high-level corruption in the SAPS, generating short-term wins that grow public trust.

In the long run, however, major reforms are required within the SAPS to instil in its officers integrity and the respect for that which they are sworn to protect – a hard-fought-for rule of law.