Police’s behaviour in response to handling of protestations in South Africa

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A B S T R A C T

The use of force by members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) has been widely reported. Unfortunately, the situation does not seem to be improving. However, it is not yet reported whether the members of the SAPS instinctively display aggressive or nonaggressive behaviour in response to the handling of violent and non-violent protestations in South Africa. Therefore, this article aims to assess whether police’s behaviour in the handling of protestations is instinctively aggressive or nonaggressive. Secondly, the article reflects on the possible factors that may contribute to the police’s aggressive behaviour towards protestations in South Africa. This article makes use of videography, which is a qualitative method of inquiry and interpretive in nature. Videography involves analysing video data as a focused hermeneutical and ethnographic exercise. In this regard, video recordings that are publicly accessible online which show South African police’s responses and conduct when handling protestations were analysed. Such videos were purposefully selected as they were deemed fit and useful for the object of this paper. Another method that was applied is a critical review of literature on police brutality in South Africa. Based on the analysis of evidence flowing from video analysis, it is clear that members of the SAPS tend to display aggressive behaviour when responding to violent protestations. At the same time, some members of the SAPS seem to lose their temper due to provocations by protesting individuals. The article reveals that the handling of protestations requires a thorough assessment of risks that may be incurred when applying various strategies for crowd management. This may need the state to invest in training and skilling the members of the SAPS in handling of violent and non-violent protestations. The article provides the basis for crowd management specialists within the SAPS to develop strategies suitable for ensuring professional and nonaggressive behaviour by the police in handling both violent and non-violent protestations.

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Introduction

The use of force by members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) has been widely reported (Pillay 2022; Bruce, 2020; Zondi & Ukpeere, 2014) as a matter of concern in South Africa, especially when police respond to violent and non-violent protestations. Bruce (2020) mentions that police’s aggressive behaviour is clearly a manifestation of less transformed policing in post-apartheid South Africa. Newham (2017) highlights that approximately 80% of protestations in South Africa cannot be classified as violent but the unfortunate situation is that media frequently report on protest actions where acts of violence have occurred. Following this view, the extent and levels of police brutality in handling on protestation by police officials is disturbing. In 2017, during a dialogue on public order policing in South Africa, Advocate Pansy Tlakula, pointed out that the use of aggressive force by police officials should not be tolerated unless there are compelling circumstances to use lethal force to protect life (Tlakula, 2017).

According to Pillay (2022), the use of excessive force by members of the South African Police service (SAPS) has not subsided even in the new democratic dispensation. However, it is not yet reported whether the members of the SAPS instinctively display aggressive or nonaggressive behaviour in handling of violent and non-violent protestations in South Africa.
The aim of this paper is to critically assess whether police’s behaviour in handling of protestations is instinctively aggressive or nonaggressive. Secondly, the paper reflects on the possible factors that may contribute towards police’s aggressive behaviour towards protestations in South Africa.

For the purpose of this article a social learning theory (SLT) was chosen to explicate police aggression as it remains the key focus for this research. Koutroubas and Galanakis (2022) mention that social learning theory (SLT) has been used frequently in the field of human resource development to improve adult learning especially in the workplaces. The SLT sets forth the following propositions: firstly, the theory argues that individuals have the potential to learn multiple new behaviours by observing other people. Secondly, individuals tend to make efforts to adjust their own behaviours on the basis of reinforcement, consequences and punishment received by other people under specific settings. Thirdly, individuals are inclined to emulate people who are appear similar to themselves, especially those who are superior to themselves, whose observed conduct remained unpunished or reinforced (Huitt & Monetti, 2008). In line with the above-mentioned propositions Manik, Sembiring, Pandang and Manurung (2022) argue, on the one hand, that it not uncommon that individuals will learn from other people as they interact with one another while on the other hand, it is also possible to for individuals to learn from observations in which case people try to emulate observed behaviours.

Albert Bandura introduced the SLT in the 1960s after conducting the Bobo Doll experiment, in which case a group of children observed mistreatment of the doll while another group of young children observed non-aggressive treatment of the doll. The experiment results revealed that children who observed aggressive treatment or mistreatment of the doll were also aggressive towards the doll while those who did not observe aggression towards the doll did not mistreat the doll (Huitt & Monetti, 2008). This clearly explains that indeed aggression is a learned behaviour. In the context of this study, the SLT shows that young policemen and women may tend to emulate inappropriate aggressive behaviour observed from senior police officials. In this sense, new police recruits who join the law enforcement agencies such as the South Africa Police Service or the Metropolitan Police Departments, are more likely to assimilate what they have observed from experienced police officials during field work.

SLT postulates that individuals are able to learn aggressive behaviours in the same manner they learn non-aggressive behaviours (Brauer and Tittle, 2012). Interestingly, there is a specific process through which individuals learn aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour as per social learning theory. In 1977, Bandura highlighted a four-step process through which individuals learn to observe referent others (Huitt & Monetti, 2008). The process in question involves attention (a person observes something in the immediate environment), retention (a person recalls what was observed), reproduction (a person replicates what was observed in the environment), and motivation (punishment and reinforcement serve as key determinants of whether the observed action will be reproduced by the observer) (Health Communication Capacity Collaborative, 2014). Manik et al. (2022) point out learning result in a change of behavioural characteristics such as attitudes, thinking capacity as well as the increased levels of knowledge, understanding and skills. Based on the arguments above, it is evident that policemen and women have the potential to learn aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour depending on the extent of exposure to aggressive or non-aggressive environment. In this way, the police officials will tend to assimilate and reproduce these aggressive behaviours observed in the field from referent other or senior police officials. Further, SLT shows that it is possible that police officials who display aggressive behaviour or non-aggressive behaviour may have learned these behaviours through observing their predecessors in the field.

Methods

Qualitative research methods were applied to achieve the aim of this article. Specifically, videography or video analysis was undertaken as a data collection technique. Antimirova and Milner-Bolotin (2009) note that video analysis is a valuable technique that can be used successfully to gather important information from digitally recorded images. In addition, another data collection technique that was used is the review of scholarly and non-scholarly documents such as peer reviewed journal articles, media reports, and commission of inquiry reports on police’s conduct, especially those that are accessible to the public. Although the number of videos that show police officials responding to violent and non-violent protestations are indeterminate, approximately 15 videos that are accessible to the public online were purposively selected. These types of videos which have been captured by other individuals or institutions other than researchers are considered as ‘native video data’ (Knoblauch, Tuma & Schnettler, 2014).

Videos that were analysed involved violent and non-violent protest actions to which police officials responded from 2015 until 2023 with a view of establishing whether police’s conduct was aggressive or non-aggressive. The number of videos analysed was informed by the research aim, questions, availability of resources and time constraints.

A content analysis was used to analyse videos in which case police’s behaviour was the main aspect of analysis while handling protestations in South Africa. As part of analysis process, some fragments of videos were subsumed under prefixed categories such as aggressive and non-aggressive behaviour. This process was undertaken to draw distinct line of demarcation in terms of how police officials responded to protestations, particularly at the scene of violent and non-violent protests.

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Findings

Aggressive and Non aggressive Police Behaviour

The findings below emanate from video analysis and supported with literature regarding aggressive and non-aggressive behaviours displayed by police officials in handling of protestations.

Random firing of rubber bullets

Video analysis revealed that in some instances police officials displayed aggressive behaviour towards protesters. Video 1 (Aljazeera English, 2016) shows police officials firing rubber bullets at protesting university students despite the fact that they were not posing any threat to police officials. In consonant with video 1, video 13 (Voice of America, 2021) presents police officials firing rubber bullets at protesters who were retreating. What is concerning is that the two police officials in the video footage were firing rubber bullets directly at the protesters from a close range. Firing rubber bullets at a target from close range can result in fatal wounds. Contrary to what is displayed in video 1 and 13, video 4 (Global News, 2021) presents police officials responding to a protestation by firing rubber bullets. This response followed shortly after sporadic incidents of violence where businesses were looted during protestations. Regardless of police presence, protesters were still adamant about looting in which case police officials had to take decisive action to stop theft and damage to property as some protesters had resorted to burning property in the surrounding areas of Pietermaritzburg.

In line with the revelations of video 4, video 5 (Times Live, 2021) also confirms that police officials fired rubber bullets at protester who had reportedly burnt property. In the same video, a policeman could be seen without a rubber bullet rifle (pump action gun) but instead a 9mm pistol could be easily identified in policeman’s hands. This implies that a threat of any magnitude to the policeman in the video, he would fire a live round ammunition which could be fatal. Notably, although police officials used stun grenades and rubber bullets at the scene of protestation, some protesters were seen continuing to loot from business premises. Equally important, the police officials displayed a great degree of composure as they arrested several protesters and looters for public violence. The two videos mentioned above revealed that some protesters did not show any respect for police officials.

A study entitled ‘Lethal in Disguise: The Health Consequences of Crowd-Control Weapons’ has found that kinetic impact projectiles (KIPs) as known as rubber bullets can inflict fatal injuries, disabilities and death (Gwanyanya, 2017). Moreover, the study revealed that approximately 1952 individuals sustained injuries caused by rubber bullets while 53 suffered death due to rubber bullets injuries and 294 people became physically impaired permanently (Gwanyanya, 2017). Tlakula (2017) noted that police officials should be able to differentiate between violent and nonviolent protestations. Additionally, members of the law enforcement agencies dealing with riots should constantly be allocated the necessary personal protective equipment to deal with protestations. Furthermore, police officials should receive the necessary training with regard to the use of force as well as crowd management. Essentially, the “use of force and firearms must be regulated under national laws in conformity with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) General Comment No. 3 on Article 4 of the African Charter (the right to life), and other relevant regional and international human rights standards” (Tlakula, 2017). Based on the extend of physical injuries and death caused by rubber bullets fired by police officials when dealing with protestations, Gwanyanya (2017) suggests that the kinetic impact projectiles that release multiple pellets once fired as well as the rubber coated metal bullets should be banned. In fact, they should not be discharged when the potential target is within a range of 9 to 14 meters away and special care should be taken to avoid aiming at vital organs, especially the upper part of the body.

Use of water cannons and stun grenades

Video analysis has revealed that another method that was employed by police officials in dealing with protestations is the usage of water cannons. This is a less aggressive way of dispersing protesters as the devices are able to shoot high-velocity stream of water from a distance. In this regard, video 9 (News24, 2020) displays police officials using a water cannon to disperse protecters in Cape Town. Although the usage of water cannons and stun grenades is commendable in dispersing rioters or protesters, different or unique circumstances will dictate the usage of water cannons. According to Gwanyanya (2017), stun grenades should not be thrown directly into protesting crowds since explosion s that occur next to human beings may result in serious injuries and possibly death. This argument is based on the previous report findings that revealed that about 50 incidents of death and injuries were attributable to the use of stun grenades.

At another protestation scene, video 11 (SABC News, 2018) shows protesters who had blockaded the roads in Cape Town when police officials responded by firing rubber bullets and used stun grenades. However, the situation appeared more stable as police officials allowed protesters to continue chanting peacefully. Additionally, water cannon could be seen in the video footage later to disperse protesters. Some of the protesters who refused to vacate the roads were subsequently arrested without any usage of aggressive force. In this sense, the amount of force use was equal to the level of resistance as some of the protesters were pushed into a police vehicle. Although water cannons may be considered less aggressive response strategies used by law enforcement agencies in response to protestations, Gwanyanya (2017) argues that the deployment of water cannons in dealing with crowds during protestation could lead to panic and unprecedented stampedes. In that regard, Gwanyanya (2017) holds a view that when water cannons to spray highly compressed and coloured dyed water could be construed as punishment towards protesters or an abuse of weapons.
Open engagements

Police officials engaged in open discussions with community leaders who were at the forefront of protestations. These types of engagement confirm that police officials could identify with the struggles that faced by protesting communities although they had to make sure that law and order was maintained. Creating platforms where community leaders can engage with law enforcement agencies is one of the most important ways of promoting mutual understanding and cooperation. This helps ensure that protestations do not become uncontrollable or erupt into violence. As a matter of fact, video 7 (SABC News, 2019) shows protesters in the Western Cape, Cape Town, where police officials came through to control protesters. Police officials are seen in the video footage engaging in discussions with protesters to avoid violence as well as police aggression. As mentioned earlier, using this approach could be helpful as injuries and damages to property can be easily prevented.

In a separate protestation within the Western Cape Province, video 8 (SABC News, 2021) police officials could be seen responding to a service delivery protestation in Cape Town where road were blockaded with burning tyres in Khayelitsha township. Despite the violent actions by protesters in the area, police official remained calm as no rubber bullets were fired. At the same time, police officials were shown standing by to monitor the situation and maintain peace in the vicinity of the protestation. Analysis based on video 15 (eNCA, 2023), police official acted in non-aggressive manner when they responded to a protestation in Diepsloot Township in the South-Western part of Pretoria. For instance, police officials escorted protesters who were marching from one section of the township to another. There was seemingly high levels of cooperation between protecters and police officials when a protestation commenced. Unfortunately, some of the protesters were arrested by police officials without any usage of excessive force. Ultimately, the police official gave open instructions to all protesters in the area to disperse and most of the protesters responded positively.

Nissen (2017) states that the South African Police Service (SAPS) should cultivate a culture of establishing platforms for open communication with communities, particularly in areas that have high risk of protestations. Importantly, Mkhwanazi (2017) states that the government will strive to reduce disruption to public order that are caused by protestations through engagements with key stakeholders and members of the community to influence protesting groups and identify viable resolutions to issues that led to protestations.

Use of loudhailers

Video 10 (News24, 2020) presents police officials using loud hailers, water cannons and stun grenades to disperse protesters. Interestingly, video footage does not show anybody who was injured because of police action. No rubber bullets were fired at protesters. A video analysis shows that most of the protesters at the scene of protestations were white people. However, it is not yet clear whether the fact that majority of protesters were white people as per video footage has had effect in terms of how police officials, who are predominantly black, responded to such a protestation thereby using less aggressive strategy. Consistent with the view expresses above, Bruce (2020) states that police aggression in South Africa tends to be directed at black citizens especially those who are living in townships as well as informal settlements. In fact, the “SAPS struggle to transition from an authoritarian antiblack ‘police force’ towards an egalitarian antiracist ‘police service’” (Pillay, 2022). According to Cuncie (2023), when police officials are more inclined to presume that black people are extremely aggressive when the confronted (racial profiling), hence their response to protestations in black led protestations portrays aggression. This shows that the SAPS as well as the Metro police departments in South Africa have a mammoth task to find balanced strategies of policing assemblies led by white people and those protestations led or organised by black people in townships.

Physical assaults

Video analysis has revealed that there were instances where policemen displayed aggression thereby physically assaulting protesters when responding to both violent and non-violent protestations. For example, video 12 (Eyewitness News, 2021) presents protestation scenes where protesters sustained major physical injuries after being shot at with rubber bullets from a close range. At the same time, the video footage shows a person lying dead after being shot by police officials when rubber bullets were fired at protesting student in Braamfontein, Johannesburg. Video 3 (Eyewitness News, 2019) displays police officials dispersing protesters while also conducting searches without aggression. In other words, nobody was physically assaulted even though some of the protesters were found in possession of dangerous weapons such as firearms, knives and machetes. Pillay (2022) reports that during 2018/2019 financial year, approximately 3835 cases of assault were lodged against police officials in South Africa. Furthermore, Pillay (2022) argues that anti-black policing approach in South Africa is concerning because 80% of police officials are black people yet the SAPS uses aggressive force against black communities. This implies that the apartheid style of policing in which black people were indiscriminately harassed, beaten, incarcerated and tortured for unobvious reasons still continue unabated.

Factors That Contribute Towards Police’s Aggressive Behaviour

This section presents a critical reflect on the various factors that tend to contribute to police aggressive behaviours when handling protestations in South Africa. Worth noting, the factors outlined below are not exhaustive but the factors that are of interest for the purpose of this article are discussed.
Provocation

An analysis of video 1 (Aljazeera English, 2016) shows some of the protesters pelting stones and other objects towards police vehicle. This could be easily interpreted as provocation of violence which could lead to unprecedented police response ensuing in casualties. At the same time, this could be interpreted as a strategy by protesters to chase police officials away from the scene of protestation. Nevertheless, video footage shows police officials withdrawing from the scene in a police vehicle to avoid further escalation of confrontation between protesters and police officials.

Bruce (2017) asserts that when protesters start throwing stones and other objects at police officials who have responded to the scene of protestation, the levels of anxiety and fear may rise prompting policemen and women to use rubber bullets. In support of this view, Nissen (2017) emphasises that “police may use force for crowd control where there are apparent intentions to kill or to seriously injure persons or to seriously damage or destroy property. However, such use of force must be moderate and proportionate to the circumstances.”

At another scene of protestation as per video 2 (Eyewitness News, 2016), a resident had reportedly died in police custody. In the same video police officials were seen striving to maintain calmness and peace as some of the protesting members of the community could clearly be seen pushing and jostling police officials. In this instance, police official did not respond with aggression towards the protesters. Further analysis of the video in question reveals that shortly after what could be interpreted as peaceful encounter and engagements between police officials and protesting members of the community, some members of the community started casting stones at police vehicles. Consequently, police officials fired rubber bullets at protesters to disperse them from the scene. The police’s response can be seen as been equal to the magnitude of violent actions by protesters. While the issue of provocation may be sustained as justifiable ground for using force to repel any threat directed at police officials during protestations, Bruce (2020) accentuates that there is a need to strengthen accountability for the use of aggression thereby ensuring the police officials are required to present complete information pertaining to situation in which they used aggression against members of the public.

Avoiding reasonable instructions

Video analysis has revealed that some protesters tend to ignore police reasonable police instructions when they engage in protestations. For example, video 6 (SABC News, 2015) shows protesters in King Williams Town who had deliberately blocked the main road and were not willing to open the road to allow traffic flow. In this instance rubber bullets were fired before the protesters dispersed. In the same video, police officials could be seen dealing with protect action in Zebetiela in Limpopo Province without aggression towards protesters despite the fact that the road was blockaded with burning tyres by protesters. A similar tactic of blockading the roads with stones was used in Mafikeng when protesters staged a protest action to demand houses. This type of behaviour elicited aggressive police response to disperse protesters so that road users could drive vehicles unhindered. A footage of video 14 (CBS News, 2021) shows police officials firing rubber bullets to disperse protesters who resorted to looting. The two videos mentioned above have clearly indicated how protesters can easily ignore the call by police officials to refrain from engaging in illicit conduct during protestations. Such inappropriate conduct by protesters has resulted in aggressive police response to protestations. To prove that police officials issued reasonable instructions which were defied by protesters, it will be necessary to make use of cameras. However, concerning the use of camera at the scene of protestations, Bruce (2017) postulates that individuals responsible for operating police cameras focus their cameras primarily on protesters rather than police officials ostensibly due social pressure not to capture the actions of police officials.

Inadequate training methods

Lack of adequate training for police officials dealing with protestations may result in poor management of volatile and less threatening situations. Venter (nd.) states that new police recruits are not given sufficient practical training that can enable them to deal with volatile situations peacefully. Yesufu (2022) argues that outdated and ineffective training models for dealing with protesters should be replaced with enhanced training strategies for crowd management to curb excessive usage of force. Training of new police recruits is essential for changing inappropriate aggressive behaviour and attitudes, but this may need to be complemented with supervision and positive reinforcement to drive out the culture of aggression (McDowall, Quinton, Brown, Carr, Glorney, Russell, Bharj, Nash & Coyle, 2015). Equally important, Cuncic (2023) accentuates that police officials should receive implicit bias training to prevent racial stereotypes which lead to aggression when only dealing with black protesters.

Mental health problems

In their study entitled ‘The association between abusive policing and PTSD symptoms among U.S. police officers,’ DeVylder, Lalane and Fedina (2019) found that police officials who present posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) tend to be more aggressive in the performance of their duties. Although the study was conducted in the United States of America, the findings of the study are transferrable to the South African context as police officials suffering from PTSD in South Africa may tend to be aggressive. Additionally, “it is possible that officers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from job-related stressors and trauma may have an increased startle response, a tendency toward suspicion, and problems with aggression. These traits can make it more likely that they will overreact and use deadly force when not necessary. However, it is also possible that engaging in excessive force results in a sense of profound guilt and moral injury that in turn lead to PTSD symptoms” (Cuncic, 2023). Based on the argument presented by Cuncic (2023), it is clear that police officials presenting symptoms of PTSD are not only a threat to the communities they serve
but also a menace to their own lives and well-being as they may harm themselves. According to Falkenbach, Balash, Lilienfeld, Tsoukalas, and Stephanie Stern (2018), the antisocial personality disorder (APD) is another condition that is common among police officials. Apart from this condition, police officials may also develop unreasonable levels of ‘fearless dominance’ which prompts them to engage in aggressive behaviour or violate set rules. This explains that such police officials present a high risk to communities during protestations as they may take actions aggressively against protesters.

**Violent working environment**

South Africa is rated among the most violent countries globally because for every 100 000 people, approximately 34.1 murders are recorded per annum (Yesufu, 2022). Given this statistical information, this explains to some extent as to why police officials may go out to quell protestations while they are already in a state of apprehension. At the same time, policemen and women in South Africa are working in extremely hostile environment where are victims of violent crimes while on duty. For example, between January and June 2023, approximately 13 police official have been shot dead in South Africa (Isaacs, 2023). Further, Nkosi (2021) reveals that in 2021, a police official was shot dead while busy dispersing protesters who were looting from Sam Ntuli Mall in Katlehong. At a separate scene of protestation which turned violent in Alexandra, on the Northern part of Johannesburg in 2021, three police officials sustained injuries after being attacked by a group of approximately 800 protesters (Hyman, 2021). The fact that some protesters tend to be violent towards police officials who respond to scenes of protestations may prompt police officials to respond with commensurate degree of aggression to protest actions.

**Absence of accountability for excessive use of force**

Bruce (2020) states that the SAPS has done less to enhance the levels of accountability among police officials. In support of this notion, Venter (n.d) also points out that police officials in South Africa are seldom held accountable for use of excessive which is compounded by absence of supervision and management of police’s behaviour. Moreover, Buce (2020) postulates that accountability requires the SAPS should adhere to legal prescripts and professional standards pertaining to usage of force or aggression thereby ensuring that incidents where force was used are recorded and reported transparently. Indeed, lapses in terms of accountability within the police departments in South Africa has impact in terms of how police officials carry out their duties and how they use weapons when confronted with major or minor threats. Accountability and transparency can be enhanced when police are not involved in the process of probing their own misdemeanour (McDowallet et al., 2015). In this sense, accountability for use of force should be coupled with transparency without which accountability would be meaningless.

**Absence of consequence management**

The escalation of police brutality in South Africa is attributable to lack of punishment or consequence management (Venter, n.d). In support of this view, Zondi and Ukpeere (2014) state that some of cases reported to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID) against police officials are not adequately investigated. For instance, “SAPS officers killed 538 people in the 2017-2018 reporting year, and 440 people in the 2018-2019 reporting year” (Stuurman, 2020), however, it is not yet clear what happened with some of the cases that were reported to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID). According to Muntingh and Dereymaeker (2013), impunity can be measured by considering the number of cases reported where prosecutions are instituted against police officials while the other method would involve checking the number of disciplinary proceedings brought against police officials. Essentially, a culture of impunity is promoted by an institution if it fails to probe, prosecute, and penalise offenders for cases reported against them. Consequent management would require that an institution takes reasonable measures to ensure that inappropriate actions are not repeated (Muntingh & Dereymaeker, 2013). Regarding consequence management, Cuncic (2023) holds a view that supervision measures as well as enhanced disciplinary processes are required to deter ill-discipline in the police departments. In other words when there are effective supervision measures accompanied by faster, bias free and transparent disciplinary processes in the police departments, ill-discipline can be reduced drastically.

**Conclusions**

The above discussion has found that there were instances where police officials unreasonably and instinctively used aggression against protesters during protestations in South Africa. More often, this was evidenced by random firing of rubber bullets at a close range from the targets. At the same time, there were circumstances where reasonable amount of force equal to resistance was used by police officials to overcome obstacles. For instance, the usage of water cannons can be regarded as less aggressive method although some researchers would have a different view. The use of water cannons and stun grenades is less aggressive in comparison to rubber bullets. Given the reckless use of force in dealing with protestations, it is essential for police departments in South Africa to work steadily on enhancing training interventions pertaining to usage of rubber bullets as well as crowd management in general. Since engagement with communities and usage of loudhailers were used successfully by police officials in response to some protestations, it is worth pointing out that there is a need for improved relations between police officials and members of the communities. Engagements with between police officials and members of the communities should not be an occasional act but rather a permanent practice to allay tensions between the police and the communities they serve. The physical casualties suffered by protesters as a result of police actions bears testimony that indeed excessive aggression is used by police officials unfortunately against black disadvantaged communities.
Concerning the use of aggression by police officials in dealing with protestation various factors that contribute to police aggression were highlighted. Police officials are constantly faced with communities that are defiant during protestations such that some deliberately provoke police to use aggression while also avoiding reasonable instructions to desist from performing certain actions. Such circumstance prompt police officials to respond aggressively. Police officials in South Africa operate in a highly volatile environment where their safety is not guaranteed each time they respond to a protestation. When policemen and women are polite in dealing with protesters they are suddenly attacked and subjected to abuse. The issue of lack of accountability for use of aggression against protesters and lack of consequence management needs to be corrected. The use body cameras should be considered to assist with evidence when dealing with incidents involving police officials. Even if police officials are correct in the usage of aggression, they should be able to explain and justify their chosen actions in handing of protestations. Equally crucial, corrective measures should be taken to assist those police officials who fail to use aggression within the confines of legal prescripts and institutional policies. Moreover, police departments need to consider introducing ethics programmes as part of training police officials to be ethical in interactions with members of the communities and when responding to protestation. Basically, handling of protestations requires objective assessment of risk that may arise during a response to quell some of the protest especially the ones that are regarded as violent.

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