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Gender Role Stereotyping and the Gendered Experiences of Trained Officers at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract: Introduction: Gender-role stereotyping remains a concern within security institutions. This study explored the lived experiences of gender-role stereotyping among paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion in. Specifically, it examined the nature of gender-role stereotyping experienced by officers, how they coped with and responded to gendered expectations, and the institutional challenges associated with these experiences. Methods: The study adopted a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design to explore officers' lived experiences within their institutional and professional contexts. Purposive sampling was used to recruit information-rich participants with relevant experiences of paramilitary training and institutional practices. The sample size was not predetermined numerically but was determined in the field through data saturation, when successive interviews ceased to generate sufficiently new information relevant to the research questions and emerging themes. Data were generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically, with attention to participants' descriptions, interpretations, similarities, and contrasting experiences. Verbatim interview quotations were retained to preserve participants' voices and ground the interpretation in their accounts. Ethical considerations included confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of participants within the hierarchical and operationally sensitive security environment. Results: The findings were organised around three overarching thematic areas: 1. Nature of Gender-Role Stereotyping: The analysis identified themes concerning *gendered constructions of operational competence and physical readiness; navigating institutional space, tactical readiness, infrastructure, and operational realities; gendered expectations and professional legitimacy; gendered power relations and workplace interactions; sexualised conduct and boundary violations; gendered treatment and institutional belonging; and the linguistic and symbolic construction of the "Other" through gendered slang and institutional humour*. 2. Coping and Responses to Gender-Role Stereotyping: This area highlighted *coping mechanisms, gendered solidarity, and the preservation of professional integrity*, including peer support, informal networks, emotional regulation, avoidance, and other individual and collective responses. It also examined *reconciling professional identity with wider societal gender expectations*, illustrating how officers negotiated institutional demands alongside broader social norms. 3. Institutional Challenges Associated with Gender-Role Stereotyping: The findings identified challenges relating *to the absence of an explicit institutional mandate addressing gender-role stereotyping, gaps in gender-related training and specialised expertise, and limitations affecting the authority of personnel responsible for gender-related matters*. Collectively, the findings demonstrated that gender-role stereotyping was expressed through professional expectations, workplace relationships, institutional arrangements, everyday language, and hierarchical power relations, while officers employed individual and collective strategies to navigate their experiences. Discussion: The findings suggest that gender-role stereotyping within paramilitary policing is shaped by the interaction between individual assumptions, professional expectations, institutional practices, and hierarchical power relations.

Although coping strategies and informal peer networks provided avenues for managing gendered experiences, individual resilience alone could not address the institutional conditions associated with these experiences. The study highlights the importance of gender-responsive professional training, clear institutional policies, accessible and confidential reporting mechanisms, and adequate expertise and authority among personnel responsible for gender-related concerns. By foregrounding the lived experiences of paramilitary-trained officers, the study contributes context-specific qualitative insights into how gender is negotiated within Zambia's paramilitary policing environment. It also underscores the importance of addressing both interpersonal conduct and institutional arrangements when promoting professional integrity, equitable participation, and gender-responsive security institutions.

Keywords: Gender-role stereotyping, paramilitary policing, lived experiences, gendered professional identity, gendered solidarity, institutional accountability, phenomenology; Zambia

INTRODUCTION: CHAPTER ONE

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter introduces the study by presenting the background to gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. It situates the study within the international, regional and Zambian contexts before establishing the research problem, objectives, questions and theoretical orientation.

Background of the Study Based on Non-Empirical Evidence

Uniformed security institutions play a central role in protecting territorial sovereignty, maintaining public order, enforcing the law, safeguarding national resources and responding to emerging security threats. Their effectiveness depends not only on operational capabilities, discipline and professional competence but also on the institutional cultures through which personnel are recruited, trained, socialised and deployed. Within these environments, assumptions about gender can influence how officers understand professional suitability, physical capability, authority, courage, leadership and occupational responsibility. Gender role stereotyping is therefore an important concern for Gender Studies because it can shape professional relationships, everyday interactions and the ways in which women and men experience security-sector institutions.

International Literature: Non-Empirical Evidence

At the international level, commitments to gender equality have emphasised the need to challenge discriminatory social norms and expand equitable opportunities in education, training, employment and public leadership. The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* identifies gender stereotypes and structural inequalities as concerns requiring sustained institutional and social transformation (United Nations, 1995). Similarly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development calls for the elimination of gender disparities in education and the empowerment of women and girls through Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 5 (United Nations, 2015). These commitments provide a normative basis for examining gender equality in traditionally male-dominated occupational environments, including

uniformed security services. However, formal commitments to equality do not, by themselves, establish how gender norms are reproduced, challenged or negotiated in particular institutional settings.

Paramilitary training is especially relevant to this discussion because it combines physical conditioning, discipline, hierarchy, teamwork, obedience, command and operational preparedness. These practices are integral to developing professional competence, but the meanings attached to them may also be shaped by socially constructed expectations about masculinity and femininity. For example, strength, endurance, aggression and command may be culturally associated with masculinity, while care, emotional sensitivity and supportive roles may be associated with femininity. Such associations should not be treated as inherent characteristics of women or men; rather, they are gendered expectations whose influence depends on the institutional and social context. Investigating officers' lived experiences can therefore illuminate how these expectations operate in practice and how personnel interpret or respond to them.

Regional Literature: Non-Empirical Evidence

At the regional level, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has established commitments to gender equality through instruments such as the Declaration on Gender and Development (SADC, 1997) and the Protocol on Gender and Development (SADC, 2008). These frameworks promote gender mainstreaming and action against discriminatory practices and gender stereotypes. Their relevance extends to institutions responsible for security and public order, where professional cultures and established organisational practices may shape the practical realisation of gender-equality commitments. Nevertheless, regional policy commitments need to be examined alongside context-specific evidence about how gender relations are experienced within individual institutions.

Zambian Literature: Non-Empirical Evidence

In Zambia, the Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015 provides a legislative framework for advancing gender equality, while the National Gender Policy of 2023 articulates national commitments to gender mainstreaming and the reduction of gender inequalities (Republic of Zambia, 2015, 2023). These frameworks provide an important policy context for examining gender relations in public institutions, including uniformed services. Their existence, however, does not necessarily reveal how gender role expectations are communicated through everyday interactions, professional practices and institutional arrangements. Understanding these processes requires attention to the accounts of officers who have experienced the relevant training and working environments.

The Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion provides the institutional setting for examining these issues among officers who have undergone paramilitary training. Training environments can serve as sites of professional socialisation in which personnel learn operational skills, discipline, institutional values and expectations concerning appropriate conduct. They may also become settings in which gendered assumptions about competence, physical performance, authority and occupational belonging are reinforced, negotiated or contested. The significance of these processes cannot be established solely through policy documents or general assumptions about uniformed institutions. It requires an examination

of how officers themselves experience and make meaning of gender role stereotyping in their institutional context.

A phenomenological approach is appropriate for investigating these experiences because it centres participants' accounts and the meanings they attach to events, interactions and institutional practices. In this study, attention to the lived experiences of both female and male paramilitary-trained officers allows gender role stereotyping to be examined as an institutional and relational phenomenon rather than as an issue affecting only one gender. This perspective also makes it possible to explore how officers understand gendered expectations, how they respond to them, and how such experiences intersect with professional identity, interpersonal relationships and institutional life.

Accordingly, this study examines gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. By situating participants' experiences within international and regional gender-equality commitments and Zambia's national policy context, the study brings attention to the relationship between formal commitments to gender equality and the everyday realities of professional socialisation in a paramilitary environment.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Zambia's commitments to gender equality through the Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015 and the National Gender Policy of 2023 (Republic of Zambia, 2015, 2023), gender role stereotyping remains an issue requiring empirical investigation within uniformed security institutions. Paramilitary training emphasises discipline, physical endurance, teamwork, obedience and command, yet social expectations about masculinity and femininity may influence how officers' capabilities, professional competence and suitability for particular duties are understood. Social Role Theory explains how socially differentiated gender roles can generate stereotypes that shape judgments about individuals' expected behaviours and occupational responsibilities (Eagly, 1987).

Within the Zambian context, the existence of national gender-equality commitments does not, in itself, establish how gender role stereotyping is experienced in the daily training and professional lives of officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. In particular, there is a need to understand how female and male officers experience and interpret gendered expectations, how they respond to and cope with such experiences, and what challenges they encounter within the institutional environment. Without context-specific evidence, institutional responses may insufficiently reflect the lived realities of officers and the ways gender stereotypes may be reproduced, negotiated or challenged in paramilitary settings.

The problem addressed by this study is therefore the limited understanding of the lived experiences of gender role stereotyping among paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The study uses a phenomenological approach to explore the nature of these experiences, officers' responses and coping strategies, and the challenges associated with gendered experiences within this specific Zambian security-sector context.

Research Objectives

General Objective

To explore the lived experiences of gender role stereotyping among paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

Specific Objectives

1. To explore the nature of gender role stereotyping experienced by paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.
2. To explore how paramilitary-trained officers experience and cope with gender role stereotyping and related gendered experiences.
3. To explore the challenges associated with gender role stereotyping and gendered experiences among paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

Research Questions

General Research Question

How do paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion experience gender role stereotyping?

Specific Research Questions

1. What is the nature of gender role stereotyping experienced by paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?
2. How do paramilitary-trained officers experience and cope with gender role stereotyping and related gendered experiences?
3. What challenges do paramilitary-trained officers experience in relation to gender role stereotyping and gendered experiences at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to Gender Studies by examining how gender role stereotyping is experienced and interpreted within a Zambian paramilitary training environment. By foregrounding the lived experiences of female and male officers, it provides context-specific insights into the ways gender expectations may shape professional identity, interpersonal relationships and perceptions of occupational competence.

The study may also inform institutional practice by identifying the experiences, coping responses and challenges reported by paramilitary-trained officers. These insights may be useful to relevant security-sector institutions in reflecting on gender-sensitive training, professional interactions and institutional approaches to equality. At the policy level, the findings may contribute to discussions on implementing Zambia's gender-equality commitments within uniformed services, while providing an empirical basis for further research on gender relations, professional socialisation and organisational culture in security institutions.

Academically, the study adds a phenomenological perspective to the examination of gender role stereotyping by focusing on how officers themselves make meaning of their experiences. Its findings may also provide a foundation for comparative studies across other uniformed services and training institutions in Zambia and the wider Southern African region.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the lived experiences of gender role stereotyping among female and male officers who underwent paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion in Zambia. Substantively, it examines the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges associated with gendered experiences within the institutional setting.

Methodologically, the study adopts a phenomenological approach to understand participants' accounts and the meanings they attach to their experiences. It does not seek to estimate the prevalence of gender role stereotyping across the Zambia Police Service or establish statistical relationships between variables. Its focus is on developing an in-depth, context-specific understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The two perspectives provide complementary lenses for examining gender role stereotyping and officers' responses to gendered experiences at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

Social Role Theory explains how gender stereotypes emerge from socially differentiated roles and expectations associated with women and men. In a paramilitary environment, this perspective sensitises the inquiry to how assumptions about physical capability, discipline, authority, leadership and occupational suitability may influence officers' experiences and professional relationships. It does not presume that all officers hold these assumptions or that gender stereotypes necessarily affect every participant in the same way.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provides a complementary perspective for exploring how officers interpret and respond to experiences they may perceive as challenging. It directs attention to participants' appraisals of their circumstances and the coping responses they describe, without assuming that every experience of gender role stereotyping is necessarily stressful or that officers respond uniformly.

Together, the theories inform the study's exploration of the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges associated with gendered institutional experiences. They serve as sensitising frameworks for interpreting participants' accounts rather than predetermined categories into which their experiences must fit. The phenomenological orientation therefore remains central, allowing meanings to emerge from participants' descriptions while using the theories to support critical interpretation.

Forward Mapping of Theory

The study employed forward mapping to link established theories to the research problem, identified knowledge gaps, research objectives and questions, and empirical inquiry. This ensured theoretical coherence while allowing participants' lived experiences to guide the interpretation of findings.

Definition of Key Terms and Their Field-Based Operationalisation

- **Gender role stereotyping:** Refers to socially constructed assumptions about the behaviours, capabilities and responsibilities considered appropriate for women and men. In the field, it was explored through participants' accounts of gendered expectations, comments, interactions and judgments concerning competence, physical ability, leadership and occupational suitability.
- **Gendered experiences:** Refers to experiences shaped by gender expectations and relationships within a particular social or institutional context. These were examined through participants' descriptions of training, workplace interactions, professional relationships, inclusion, exclusion and treatment in the paramilitary environment.
- **Paramilitary-trained officers:** Refers to female and male officers who had undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The concept was operationalised through participants' eligibility for the study and their accounts of experiences within the training and institutional environment.
- **Coping mechanisms:** Refers to the cognitive, emotional, interpersonal and behavioural responses individuals use to manage challenging experiences. These were explored through participants' descriptions of strategies such as seeking support, peer solidarity, counselling, emotional regulation, avoidance, reporting or other responses they identified.
- **Institutional challenges:** Refers to organisational conditions, practices and relationships that may complicate officers' experiences of gender role stereotyping or their responses to it. These were examined through participants' accounts of institutional support, reporting processes, confidentiality, accountability, workplace relationships and barriers to addressing gender-related concerns.

Summary

This section has presented the study's background, problem statement, objectives, research questions, significance, scope, theoretical framework, forward mapping of theory and definitions of key terms. These elements establish the conceptual and methodological direction for examining gender role stereotyping among paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

The next section reviews relevant literature to situate the study within existing scholarship and identify its contribution.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:CHAPTER TWO

Overview of the Materials and Methods

This section presents the methodological procedures used to investigate gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. It outlines the research approach and design, study site, target population, sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, researcher reflexivity, and ethical considerations. The methodological choices are aligned with the study objectives and research questions to facilitate an in-depth understanding of officers' lived experiences within the institutional context of paramilitary policing.

Research Philosophy

The philosophical foundation of this study is important because it informs how gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of officers trained at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion are understood, explored, and interpreted. Given the study's focus on participants' lived experiences, meanings, and interpretations of gender-related experiences within an institutional setting, the philosophical position must be consistent with the study's phenomenological orientation. This requires attention to how participants understand their experiences and how those experiences are interpreted within the social and organisational context of paramilitary policing.

In this study, the research philosophy should therefore be established in relation to the assumptions about reality, knowledge, and interpretation reflected in Jimmy Mhango's original dissertation. These assumptions provide the foundation for the subsequent discussion of the research approach and hermeneutic phenomenological design. The philosophical position must remain consistent with the methodological decisions documented in the dissertation rather than being retrospectively assigned solely on the basis of the study's title or subject matter.

Research Approach

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of officers trained at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study sought to understand how officers experienced, interpreted, and responded to gender role stereotyping within their institutional and professional environment. Rather than measuring the prevalence of stereotyping or testing statistical relationships between variables, the inquiry focused on participants' accounts, the meanings they attached to their experiences, and the contextual factors shaping those experiences.

Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to examine social phenomena in their natural settings and interpret the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences. This orientation is particularly relevant to gender-related experiences within disciplined organisations, where institutional expectations, professional identities, gender norms, and interpersonal relationships may influence how officers understand and respond to stereotyping. By prioritising participants' accounts, the approach provided an opportunity to explore both the manifestations of gender role stereotyping and the ways officers

experienced its consequences, negotiated institutional expectations, and developed responses to gendered situations.

The approach was also consistent with the study's three specific objectives, which focused on the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges associated with gendered experiences at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. These objectives required detailed, context-sensitive accounts rather than numerical measurement alone. The qualitative approach therefore provided the methodological foundation for investigating the complexity and subjective meanings of the phenomenon under study.

In the Zambian research context, relevant scholarship by Munshya et al (2026), Matakala (2015), Matakala et al. (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), and Matakala et al. (2021) should be considered in establishing the methodological and empirical relevance of qualitative inquiry into gendered experiences. The precise contribution of each publication must be aligned with its actual research design, methods, and findings. These studies should complement, rather than replace, established methodological literature on qualitative research and lived-experience inquiry.

Accordingly, the qualitative approach guided the generation and interpretation of participants' accounts while maintaining the connection between the research questions, the phenomenological design, and the institutional context in which gender role stereotyping was experienced.

Study Population, Sampling Procedures, Sampling Framework and Sample Size

Study Population

The study population comprised paramilitary-trained officers serving at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion whose experiences were relevant to understanding gender role stereotyping within the institution. The population was defined in relation to the research objectives, which focused on the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges associated with gendered experiences. The inquiry prioritised participants with direct experience of the institutional setting rather than statistical representation of all police officers in Zambia.

The focus on participants' experiences is situated within Zambian scholarship examining gender relations, institutional experiences and gendered vulnerabilities, including Matakala (2015), Matakala et al. (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), Matakala et al. (2021), and Matakala (2024). These works provide relevant scholarly context for investigating gender-related experiences in institutional settings, although the present study's population and eligibility criteria remain specific to Jimmy Mhango's research.

Sampling Framework and Eligibility Criteria

The sampling framework was guided by the study setting, research objectives and eligibility of officers to provide relevant accounts of the phenomenon. Participants were identified according to their relevance to the research questions and their experience of paramilitary training and service at the Battalion. The framework established the boundaries within

which potential participants were identified and selected. A formal personnel register or other documentary sampling list should only be reported if it was actually used.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria should reflect the procedures documented in the dissertation. This distinction is important because the institutional population, the framework for identifying eligible officers, and the final group of participants represent related but different methodological elements.

Sampling Strategy and Procedures

The study employed purposive sampling to select participants whose experiences could provide relevant and detailed accounts of gender role stereotyping within the Battalion. This strategy was consistent with the qualitative phenomenological orientation because selection was guided by the relevance of participants' experiences to the phenomenon under investigation rather than by statistical representativeness (Patton, 2015; Smith et al., 2009).

The discussion is also situated within the broader body of Zambian scholarship on gendered and institutional experiences, including Matakala (2015), Matakala et al. (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), Matakala et al. (2021), and Matakala (2024). Related work by Akabondo et al. (2018), Mwale-Thomas et al. (2018), and Kabango et al. (2024) may further inform the discussion where the original publications support the particular methodological or contextual point being made. Chilengi et al. (2026) and relevant work by Namakando-Phiri and Phiri should likewise be considered after their exact authorship, publication details and substantive relevance have been verified. These studies situate the present inquiry within Zambian scholarship without implying that all the cited researchers used identical sampling strategies. The specific procedures followed in Jimmy Mhango's study must remain grounded in his dissertation.

Sample Size and Adequacy

The final sample size must be reported from Jimmy Mhango's dissertation and verified participant records. Qualitative sample adequacy should be considered in relation to the research purpose, the specificity of the sample, the quality of the data and the analytical contribution of participants' accounts, rather than through a universal numerical threshold (Malterud et al., 2016). In this study, the sample-size rationale should explain how the number of participants enabled an in-depth exploration of gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. Matakala's work on gendered experiences in institutional settings may provide relevant contextual scholarship, but it should not be presented as establishing the appropriate sample size for Jimmy's study unless the particular publication directly supports that methodological claim. The sample size for the current study was 18. The 19th one was a key informant from the first intake

Data Saturation

The study explicitly used saturation to guide recruitment or determine when data collection could cease, the article should explain how this decision was reached in relation to the information generated and the study objectives.

The distinction between saturation and general sample adequacy must be maintained. Neither the number of participants nor the use of purposive sampling, on its own, demonstrates that saturation was achieved. Relevant Zambian methodological and empirical studies, including Matakala et al. (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), Matakala et al. (2021), Matakala (2024), Mwale-Thomas et al. (2018), and Kabango et al. (2024), should be incorporated here only where their actual methods or substantive discussions provide a defensible basis for the specific point being made.

Research Design: Hermeneutic Phenomenology

The study employed a phenomenological orientation to investigate gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. This design aligns with the study's central concern: understanding how officers experience, interpret and negotiate gender-related expectations within their professional and institutional environment. Rather than treating gender role stereotyping solely as an observable organisational issue, the inquiry focuses on the meanings officers attach to their experiences and how they understand these experiences within the context of paramilitary policing.

A phenomenological design is relevant when a study seeks to understand a phenomenon through the experiences of those who have encountered it. In the present study, the phenomenon under investigation is gender role stereotyping among officers who share the experience of paramilitary training but may interpret gendered expectations differently. The design therefore provides a basis for examining participants' accounts in relation to their professional roles, institutional interactions and experiences of gendered expectations. This focus is consistent with the study's three research objectives concerning the nature of stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges associated with gendered experiences.

The study's phenomenological orientation also complements the use of Social Role Theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping. Social Role Theory provides a conceptual lens for examining expectations associated with gender roles, while the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping sensitises the inquiry to how individuals interpret and respond to challenging experiences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Matakala, 2015). These perspectives inform the inquiry without requiring participants' accounts to conform to predetermined theoretical categories. The analysis must remain attentive to the meanings expressed in the data, including experiences that may confirm, extend or challenge the theoretical perspectives.

Zambian scholarship by Matakala (2015), Matakala et al. (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), Matakala et al. (2021), and Matakala (2024) should be incorporated where the respective publications substantively support the methodological discussion of gendered experiences, qualitative inquiry and the interpretation of participants' accounts. Related work by Namakando-Phiri and colleagues, Mwale-Thomas et al. (2018), Akabondo et al. (2018), Kabango et al. (2024), and Chilengi et al. (2026) may also be considered where relevant to the specific methodological or contextual argument. These citations should complement established phenomenological literature rather than be used to imply that the cited studies adopted the same design as the present investigation. The precise designation of the design

as hermeneutic phenomenology should be retained only if it is consistent with the design described in Jimmy Mhango's original dissertation. Similarly, the specific analytical procedure should be named according to the procedure actually used in the study. This distinction preserves methodological consistency and avoids introducing a design label or analytical method that changes the original research.

Study Site

The study was conducted at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion, the institutional setting within which the problem of gender role stereotyping among paramilitary-trained officers was investigated. The selection of this site was directly linked to the statement of the problem, which identified the need for a deeper understanding of how male and female officers who have undergone paramilitary training experience gender role stereotyping, interpret gendered expectations, and respond to the challenges associated with these experiences. The study therefore focused on the setting in which the participants' relevant professional and training experiences could be examined in relation to the research problem.

The problem addressed by the study was not simply whether gender stereotypes exist in professional institutions, but how such stereotypes are experienced and understood by officers within the specific context of paramilitary policing. The Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion was consequently an appropriate site for investigating the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges arising from gendered expectations. Focusing on this institutional setting enabled the study to explore participants' accounts in relation to the environment to which the research problem and objectives specifically referred.

The choice of the site was also important because the study sought to understand the experiences of officers who shared the experience of paramilitary training but might differ in how they encountered and interpreted gender-related expectations. The inquiry therefore provided an opportunity to examine similarities and differences in participants' accounts without presuming that male and female officers experienced stereotyping in identical ways. Accordingly, the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion was selected because it provided the context necessary to investigate the specific research problem. By examining participants' accounts within this setting, the study sought to contribute context-specific understanding of gender role stereotyping and its implications for the professional experiences of paramilitary-trained officers.

Data Collection Methods

The study used semi-structured, in-depth individual interviews to explore the lived experiences of gender role stereotyping among officers who had undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. This method was appropriate to the research problem because it enabled participants to describe their experiences, explain the meanings they attached to gender-related expectations, and discuss how they responded to situations encountered within their professional environment. The interviews focused on generating detailed accounts relevant to the study objectives rather than restricting participants to predetermined response categories.

The semi-structured format provided a consistent basis for exploring the research questions while allowing flexibility to pursue issues raised during individual interviews. Open-ended questions enabled participants to describe their experiences in their own words, while follow-up questions and probes provided opportunities to clarify responses and explore significant experiences in greater depth. This flexibility was particularly relevant to the phenomenological orientation of the study, which prioritised participants' accounts and the meanings they attributed to their experiences.

Individual interviews also provided an opportunity to explore sensitive experiences in a confidential interview setting. Given the study's focus on gender role stereotyping within a professional and disciplined institutional environment, confidentiality was important in creating conditions in which participants could discuss their experiences without unnecessary exposure. The researcher therefore needed to explain the purpose of the study, obtain informed consent, protect participants' identities, and handle the information collected in accordance with the approved ethical procedures.

The interview questions were aligned with the research objectives and focused on the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences of gendered expectations and their coping responses, and the challenges associated with these experiences. Follow-up questions were used, where necessary, to clarify participants' accounts and obtain fuller descriptions of the circumstances, interpretations and responses they reported. This alignment helped maintain a clear connection between the statement of the problem, the research questions, the data collected and the subsequent analysis.

The use of in-depth interviews was consistent with qualitative inquiry that seeks to understand how individuals interpret experiences within their social and institutional contexts (Patton, 2015). The interview process was also intended to support the detailed examination of participants' experiential accounts required by phenomenological inquiry. In analysing these accounts, the study remained attentive to the distinct experiences of individual participants rather than assuming that all officers understood or experienced gender role stereotyping in the same way.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was guided by the study's phenomenological orientation and its focus on understanding gender role stereotyping through the lived experiences of male and female officers who had undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The analytical process was organised into sequential stages to support systematic engagement with participants' accounts and maintain alignment between the research questions, the data collected and the interpretation of findings. The stages were as follows.

Stage One: Familiarisation with Participants' Accounts

The first stage involved becoming familiar with the data collected from participants. The researcher engaged closely with the accounts to develop an overall understanding of the experiences described and to identify information relevant to the study objectives. Particular attention was given to participants' descriptions of gender role stereotyping, their experiences of gendered expectations, their responses to such experiences, and the

challenges they encountered within the institutional setting. This initial engagement helped establish the context necessary for subsequent interpretation.

Stage Two: Identification of Significant Statements and Experiences

The second stage focused on identifying statements and descriptions that were particularly relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. These included accounts illustrating how gender role stereotyping was expressed, how officers interpreted gendered expectations, how they responded to challenging situations, and what difficulties they associated with their experiences. The purpose was to remain attentive to participants' own descriptions rather than prematurely imposing external explanations on their accounts.

Stage Three: Organisation and Coding of Relevant Data

In the third stage, relevant statements and passages were organised according to their substantive meaning and relationship to the research questions. Coding provided a means of identifying recurring issues and distinguishing experiences that differed in meaning or context. The codes were treated as analytical aids rather than findings in themselves. Their interpretation remained grounded in the participants' accounts and the specific context of paramilitary policing.

Stage Four: Comparison of Accounts and Identification of Patterns

The fourth stage involved comparing participants' accounts to identify similarities, differences and recurring patterns. The researcher considered how male and female officers described gender-related expectations and whether their experiences converged or differed. Contrasting accounts were also important because they helped prevent the analysis from assuming that all participants experienced or interpreted gender role stereotyping in the same way. This comparative process supported a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon.

Stage Five: Development and Interpretation of Themes

In the fifth stage, related codes and patterns were brought together into broader themes that captured significant dimensions of participants' experiences. The themes were examined in relation to the three research questions: the nature of gender role stereotyping; officers' experiences and coping responses; and the challenges associated with gendered expectations. The interpretation considered both the shared meanings evident across accounts and the distinctive experiences of individual participants. Themes were therefore expected to represent patterns supported by the data rather than merely repeat the wording of the research questions.

Stage Six: Interpretation in Relation to the Theoretical Framework

The sixth stage involved interpreting the developed themes in relation to Social Role Theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in

Matakala, 2015). Social Role Theory informed consideration of gendered expectations and assumptions about the roles and capabilities of officers. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping informed interpretation of how participants understood and responded to challenging experiences. The theories served as interpretive lenses while allowing participants' accounts to reveal meanings that might extend beyond or challenge the theoretical expectations.

Stage Seven: Presentation of Evidence-Grounded Findings

The final stage involved presenting the findings in a structured manner aligned with the research questions and objectives. Participants' accounts were used to substantiate the themes, and the interpretation explained what the accounts revealed about gender role stereotyping and its implications for officers' professional experiences. Verbatim quotations were to be retained exactly as participants expressed them, with interpretation presented separately from the quotations. This distinction helps preserve participants' voices while enabling the researcher to explain the significance of their accounts.

Overall, the staged analytical process was intended to maintain a transparent connection between the data, the themes and the study's conclusions. It also supported the integration of participants' experiences with the study's theoretical framework without reducing their accounts to predetermined theoretical categories. This emphasis on contextual interpretation is consistent with qualitative research that seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to their experiences (Patton, 2015). Relevant work by Matakala (2015), Matakala et al. (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), Matakala et al. (2021), and Matakala (2024) may also inform the methodological discussion where the specific publications support the claims being made.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness was considered in relation to the need to produce a credible, transparent and contextually grounded interpretation of officers' lived experiences of gender role stereotyping at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. In qualitative research, rigour depends not on statistical representativeness alone but on the credibility of interpretations, the transparency of the research process, the grounding of findings in the data, and the extent to which readers can assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts. The study was guided by the trustworthiness criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility

Credibility concerned the extent to which the findings represented a defensible interpretation of participants' accounts. The analysis was therefore expected to remain closely connected to the experiences described by the officers rather than rely on assumptions about gender relations in paramilitary policing. Participants' accounts were examined in relation to the study's three research questions: the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and coping responses, and the challenges associated with gendered experiences. Interpretations were developed from the data, with attention

to similarities, differences and contrasting experiences across participants. Where verbatim quotations were used to present findings, they served as evidence supporting the interpretation rather than as substitutes for analysis.

Dependability

Dependability concerned the consistency and transparency of the research process. It required the methodological decisions connecting data collection, coding, comparison and theme development to be presented in a clear and logical sequence. The staged approach to analysis described in Section 2.7 provided a structure for showing how participants' accounts were examined and organised into themes corresponding to the research questions. Maintaining a clear relationship between the research objectives, interview material, analytical stages and reported findings would enable readers to assess the coherence of the process. Dependability was therefore treated as a matter of methodological transparency rather than a claim that another researcher would necessarily produce identical interpretations.

Confirmability

Confirmability addressed the extent to which the findings were grounded in participants' accounts rather than being determined primarily by the researcher's personal expectations or pre-existing assumptions. This consideration was particularly important because gender role stereotyping involves socially constructed expectations concerning masculinity, femininity, professional competence and appropriate conduct within institutional settings. The analysis therefore needed to distinguish participants' reported experiences from the researcher's interpretations of those experiences. Social Role Theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping were used as interpretive lenses, while participants' accounts remained the empirical basis for developing the findings. Theoretical interpretation was consequently expected to illuminate the data without predetermining what participants' experiences meant.

Transferability

Transferability concerned the extent to which readers could assess the relevance of the findings to other institutional settings. The study focused specifically on the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion and the experiences of officers who had undergone paramilitary training. Its findings were therefore intended to provide context-specific understanding rather than statistical generalisations to all police officers or security institutions. Describing the institutional setting, participants' relevant experiences and the circumstances surrounding gender role stereotyping would help readers judge whether the findings might offer useful insights for comparable policing and paramilitary environments. Transferability was thus supported through contextual detail and a clear account of the boundaries within which the findings should be understood. Overall, trustworthiness required the study to demonstrate a transparent connection between the research problem, participants' accounts, the analytical process and the interpretations presented. The criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability provided a framework for assessing the rigour of this qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These

criteria were applied as methodological standards, and any specific procedures claimed to have been undertaken should correspond to what was actually done during the research.

Researcher Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity was important because the interpretation of gender role stereotyping involves examining socially constructed expectations, institutional relationships and participants' understandings of professional identity. Reflexivity required the researcher to remain conscious of how personal assumptions, prior understandings of gender relations and interpretations of paramilitary policing could influence the research process. Rather than treating the researcher as entirely separate from the production of qualitative knowledge, reflexivity recognised the need to examine how interpretations were developed and how the researcher's position could shape engagement with participants and their accounts.

In this study, reflexivity was particularly relevant to the examination of gendered experiences among officers who had undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. Participants could interpret similar institutional experiences differently according to their gender, professional position and individual circumstances. The researcher therefore needed to avoid assuming that female officers necessarily experienced gender role stereotyping in identical ways or that male officers held uniform views about gender expectations. Attention to differences and contradictions within participants' accounts was important for developing a balanced interpretation of the phenomenon.

Reflexivity also informed the relationship between the empirical data and the theoretical perspectives guiding the study. Social Role Theory provided a lens for examining how gendered expectations may shape assumptions about professional roles and competence, while the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping provided a perspective for interpreting how officers understood and responded to challenging experiences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Matakala, 2015). These perspectives were used to support interpretation rather than to predetermine participants' experiences or force their accounts into predetermined categories. During analysis, reflexive awareness required the researcher to distinguish participants' statements from the meanings assigned to those statements. Verbatim quotations were to be retained accurately, while explanations and theoretical interpretations were presented separately. This distinction was important for ensuring that participants' voices remained visible and that the analytical claims could be evaluated against the evidence presented.

Researcher reflexivity therefore supported a critical and transparent approach to interpreting gender role stereotyping within the institutional context of paramilitary policing. Any specific reflexive practices reported in the final article should reflect the procedures actually undertaken during the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to this study because it examined gender role stereotyping and the lived experiences of male and female officers who had undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The sensitive nature of the

subject required the researcher to protect participants' rights, dignity, privacy and professional interests throughout the research process. Particular attention was necessary because participants were serving within a hierarchical security institution and might have concerns about disclosing experiences involving gender expectations, professional relationships and institutional practices. Ethical research therefore required more than obtaining permission to conduct interviews; it required responsible engagement with participants, careful handling of their accounts and protection against avoidable harm during data collection, analysis and dissemination (Orb et al., 2001; Patton, 2015).

The ethical approach was informed by the principles of respect for persons, voluntary participation, confidentiality, beneficence and research integrity. These principles were particularly relevant to the investigation of gendered experiences because participants' accounts could involve sensitive interpersonal and institutional issues. The study's ethical responsibilities also extended to ensuring that participants' statements were represented accurately and that interpretations remained within the limits of the available evidence. Matakala (2015) and relevant Zambian scholarship on gender and institutional experiences may provide additional contextual support where their verified content directly informs the ethical and methodological issues under consideration.

Ethical Approval and Institutional Permission

Ethical approval and institutional permission were important requirements for conducting research within the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. Ethical approval concerns the review of a research project to ensure that the rights and welfare of participants are adequately protected, whereas institutional permission authorises access to the relevant research setting. Because the study involved serving officers within a hierarchical security institution, the researcher needed to respect institutional procedures while maintaining the distinction between institutional authorisation and individual participation.

Permission to conduct research at the institution did not, in itself, constitute consent from individual officers. Each participant's decision to participate needed to remain voluntary, without any suggestion that involvement was a professional obligation. The final article should identify the relevant ethics review body, institutional authority and approval reference, where applicable, using the original research documentation.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Informed consent required participants to receive sufficient information about the study's purpose, the nature of their involvement, the topics to be discussed and the intended use of the information collected. Participants needed to understand that their participation was voluntary and that they could decline to answer questions or discontinue participation in accordance with the conditions communicated to them. These requirements are consistent with established ethical guidance for qualitative research, which emphasises informed decision-making and respect for participants' autonomy (Orb et al., 2001; Patton, 2015).

Voluntary participation was particularly important because of the hierarchical relationships associated with paramilitary policing. Officers might perceive requests from persons in positions of authority as instructions rather than invitations to participate. The researcher therefore needed to ensure that participation was not presented as a compulsory

institutional activity and that refusal would not be associated with adverse professional consequences.

Confidentiality, Anonymity and Participant Identification

Confidentiality was essential because participants were discussing potentially sensitive experiences of gender role stereotyping within a specific professional environment. Disclosure of identifiable information could expose participants to embarrassment, strained workplace relationships or concerns about their professional standing. The study therefore required appropriate measures to protect participants' identities and restrict the disclosure of information that could reasonably identify them.

Where pseudonyms or participant codes were used, they needed to be applied consistently throughout the reporting of findings. Particular care was necessary when presenting combinations of rank, service history, location and distinctive experiences because these details might enable colleagues to recognise a participant even where a name had been replaced. Confidentiality also required responsible handling of interview records and other research materials. These safeguards were consistent with the broader ethical obligation to protect participants from unnecessary exposure when reporting sensitive qualitative data (Orb et al., 2001).

Protection from Harm and Minimisation of Risk

The investigation of gender role stereotyping required sensitivity to the possibility that discussing difficult experiences could cause discomfort or concern about workplace consequences. Participants might recount experiences involving gendered assumptions, exclusion, derogatory language or unequal professional expectations. The researcher therefore needed to conduct interviews respectfully, avoid pressuring participants to disclose information and allow them to decline questions they considered uncomfortable.

Protection from harm also required careful presentation of the findings. Participants' accounts needed to be reported without sensationalism, unnecessary exposure or unsupported allegations against identifiable individuals. The researcher was responsible for ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the data and that the reporting of sensitive experiences did not create avoidable risks for participants. Ethical qualitative research requires attention to the potential consequences of research participation and publication, not merely the procedures followed during data collection (Orb et al., 2001; Patton, 2015).

Privacy and Secure Management of Research Data

The study required appropriate safeguards for managing interview records and other research materials. Information collected from participants needed to be handled in ways that limited unauthorised access, disclosure or misuse. Where applicable, recordings, transcripts, field notes and consent records were to be managed in accordance with the relevant ethical and institutional requirements.

The researcher also needed to ensure that identifying information was not unnecessarily reproduced in the article. Data retention, access and disposal procedures should follow the arrangements actually established for the study. The final report must therefore describe the measures implemented during the research rather than claim that particular storage systems or security procedures were used without documentary or factual support.

Research Integrity and Accurate Representation of Participants' Accounts

Research integrity required the researcher to represent participants' experiences accurately and to distinguish their statements from the researcher's interpretations. Verbatim quotations included in the findings needed to retain their original wording, while explanatory commentary and theoretical interpretations were to be presented separately. This distinction was important for preserving participants' voices and enabling readers to evaluate how the findings were derived from the data.

The researcher also needed to avoid selective reporting, fabrication, distortion or generalisation beyond the evidence. Individual experiences could not automatically be treated as representative of all male or female officers or of the entire institution. Interpretations needed to acknowledge differences and contradictions in participants' accounts where these occurred. These responsibilities align with qualitative research principles that emphasise transparency, methodological rigour and the faithful representation of empirical material (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015).

Ethical Reporting and Dissemination of Findings

Ethical responsibilities extended to the publication and dissemination of the findings. The article needed to communicate the study's contribution to understanding gender role stereotyping while protecting participants' identities and professional interests. This required careful selection of quotations, removal or masking of identifying details where necessary, and avoidance of conclusions that exceeded the available evidence.

The study's purpose was to develop an evidence-based understanding of officers' experiences and coping responses, as well as the challenges associated with gendered expectations. Ethical reporting therefore required a balance between presenting sufficiently detailed evidence for scholarly scrutiny and protecting participants from unnecessary exposure. This balance is particularly important in qualitative research conducted within specific institutions, where detailed accounts can enrich interpretation but may also increase the possibility of deductive identification (Orb et al., 2001; Patton, 2015).

In conclusion, ethical considerations provided an essential foundation for the conduct and reporting of this study. Attention to institutional permission, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, protection from harm, data management and research integrity was necessary to safeguard participants while producing a credible account of gender role stereotyping at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The final description of ethical procedures must reflect the approvals obtained and the practices actually followed during the research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings on gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of male and female officers who had undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The findings were organised according to the study's research questions, focusing on the nature of gender role stereotyping, officers' experiences and responses to gendered expectations, and the challenges associated with these experiences. Participants' accounts provided the empirical basis for examining how gendered expectations were expressed, experienced, and interpreted within the institutional context of paramilitary policing. The findings presented in this chapter provide the basis for the subsequent discussion, in which the empirical evidence is examined in relation to the study's theoretical framework and relevant literature.

RESULTS PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION: CHAPTER THREE

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter presents, analyses and interprets the findings on gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of male and female officers who have undergone paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The presentation is organised according to the study's research questions, ensuring alignment between the research problem, study objectives and empirical evidence. The analysis draws on participants' accounts to identify patterns, similarities and differences in their experiences, while the interpretation examines the meanings attached to gendered expectations within the institutional context of paramilitary policing. Verbatim quotations are presented to preserve participants' voices and demonstrate the empirical basis of the analysis, with interpretation provided separately. The chapter focuses on three areas: the nature of gender role stereotyping experienced by paramilitary-trained officers; officers' experiences and responses to gendered expectations; and the challenges associated with these gendered experiences.

Research Question One: What Is the Nature of Gender Role Stereotyping Experienced by Paramilitary-Trained Officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?

This question examines how gender role stereotyping is experienced and expressed within the operational environment of the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion, particularly through assumptions about officers' capabilities, operational suitability and professional recognition. The analysis considers how gendered expectations may shape participation, credibility and belonging in paramilitary policing.

Gender Stereotyping: Contested Perceptions of Women's Operational Capability and Recognition

Gender stereotyping in operational settings may emerge through assumptions about who is physically capable, tactically competent and suitable for demanding assignments. Participants' accounts reveal a tension between women's demonstrated performance and continuing perceptions that question their operational suitability.

Female Officers' Experiences: Demonstrated Competence and the Burden of Recognition:

F-Constable Alpha described completing the same demanding training as male officers but continuing to encounter assumptions about women's suitability for field operations:

> *"At Sondela, there was no training for women or men, we all did one paramilitary training where we were all subjected, the long route marches, intensive military drills, strenuous physical training including mountain climbing. Nobody carried my G3 rifle for me during field exercises. But when we passed out and got posted here to Paramilitary Battalion in Lusaka, you still hear comments from colleagues like, 'Ah, women are given light duties in Lusaka when the company is moving outside Lusaka this is because women cannot handle these hard-bush ops above all they have families to take care.' It makes you feel like no matter how much sweat you leave in our Paramilitary Battle Training Area (PABTA) at Sondela, you have to keep proving yourself every single day in the platoon just to get basic respect as a capability officer."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

Her account distinguishes demonstrated competence from the recognition of that competence. Although she describes undertaking demanding training activities, she reports that women continued to be associated with lighter duties and presumed inability to manage difficult field operations. Her expression, "keep proving yourself every single day," suggests an additional burden of establishing professional credibility, even after completing the same training as male colleagues.

F-Constable Bravo described a related experience, focusing on the apparent questioning of women's presence in operational deployments:

> *"Women have been passing through Sondela and serving in this Paramilitary Battalion for many years now, but when we have operations outside Lusaka, borders, bridges, VIP operations or mere night guard duties and many others intense combat operations, some officers still act surprised when a female constable steps out in full combat gear ready for the field. You have undergone the same training, but daily you are made to feel that your presence as a female Paramilitary officer requires extra explanation to undertake such operations compared to the men."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

This account shifts attention from competence to professional belonging. The participant suggests that, despite women's training and years of service, their participation in demanding deployments may still be treated as unexpected. Her observation that female officers require "extra explanation" points to gendered assumptions that may question their legitimacy in operational spaces before their actual performance is assessed.

Male Officers' Experiences: Biological Assumptions and Recognition Through Performance:

M-Constable Alpha offered a more qualified perspective, acknowledging both presumed physical differences and female officers' operational competence:

> *"Sondela training is tough for everyone who attends training there, the natural mountainous terrain, deep-jungle and highly military tactical maneuvers demand a certain physical preparedness that men are naturally gifted with by biology. However, here at Paramilitary Battalion, I have worked alongside female constables who can shoot on target at the range and endure long range patrols just like anyone else. So while the heavy physical demands favor natural muscle, real operational discipline isn't just about raw strength; it is about stamina and tactical mindset."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The participant attributes an advantage in physically demanding activities to men's biological characteristics, reflecting a gender-differentiated understanding of physical capability. However, he also acknowledges female officers' shooting proficiency and endurance during long patrols. His account therefore contains an important tension: generalised beliefs about male physical superiority coexist with recognition of women's demonstrated operational competence. He does not entirely abandon biological assumptions, but he also recognises that operational effectiveness involves more than physical strength.

Comparative Interpretation of Quotes:

The three accounts reveal a tension between presumed and demonstrated capability. The female officers describe experiences in which their competence and presence in demanding operational assignments appear to attract additional scrutiny. The male officer acknowledges women's operational proficiency while retaining a generalised belief in men's physical advantage. These are independently expressed perspectives, but considered together they illuminate how gendered assumptions may persist alongside evidence of women's professional competence.

A further distinction emerges between formal participation and professional belonging. The female officers describe having completed demanding training and being prepared for deployment, yet they report that their suitability or presence may still be questioned. Their accounts suggest that institutional participation does not necessarily translate into unqualified professional recognition. Women may therefore experience pressure not only to perform their duties but also to repeatedly establish their legitimacy within operational spaces.

The findings also distinguish task-specific physical requirements from generalisations about gender. Physical demands are relevant to certain paramilitary duties, but assumed group differences cannot independently establish an individual officer's suitability. M-Constable Alpha's acknowledgement of female officers' proficiency and endurance illustrates

why operational capability should also be assessed through demonstrated performance, tactical discipline and the requirements of particular assignments.

Overall, the theme suggests that gender role stereotyping is experienced through the questioning of women's operational competence, the apparent surprise at their participation in demanding deployments and generalised assumptions about biological differences. It identifies a potential gap between demonstrated capability and the professional recognition afforded to female officers. These findings reflect the participants' accounts and do not establish that all officers hold such views or that every operational decision is influenced by gender.

Theme Two: Navigating Institutional Space: Tactical Readiness, Infrastructure, and Operational Realities

This theme examines how equipment, infrastructure and field conditions shape officers' experiences of operational readiness within paramilitary policing and specialised guerrilla training. The participants' accounts reveal contrasting perspectives on standardised equipment provision, practical adaptation and the accommodation of officers' operational needs.

Female Officers' Experiences: Equipment Suitability and Field Adaptation:

F-Constable Charlie described difficulties arising from the suitability of standard-issue equipment and field facilities:

> *"When we were at Sondela, the standard body armor and combat webbing were way too wide for my frame, so when you are doing rapid tactical movements, the plate carrier hits my thighs and restricts your movement. Even here at Para Battalion, we don't get female-fitted kit; you just have to adjust the straps as tight as they go and improvise. In the bush, simple things like sanitation during long deployments become a major issue especially in bridges and borders outside the cities this is because accommodation in operational areas were deliberately designed for male officers so that females may not be part of those frontline operation duties, but you see, as a woman, we suffer in silence so they don't say you are complaining or weak."*

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operational areas were deliberately designed for male officers so that females may not be part of those frontline operation duties, but you see, as a woman, we suffer in silence so they don't say you are complaining or weak."

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The account identifies a mismatch between standardised equipment and the physical requirements of an individual officer. The reported restriction of movement caused by ill-fitting body armour and combat webbing raises an operational concern because mobility is important during rapid tactical activities. Her reference to the absence of female-fitted equipment also highlights the distinction between issuing standard equipment and ensuring that it is functionally suitable for all personnel.

The participant further identifies inadequate sanitation facilities during prolonged deployments as a practical difficulty. Her observation that female officers "suffer in silence" suggests that raising concerns about equipment and facilities may be perceived as an indication of weakness. Thus, the challenge is not only material but also shaped by professional expectations that officers should demonstrate endurance without complaint.

Male Officers' Experiences: Standardisation and Operational Adaptability:

M-Constable Bravo presented a different perspective, emphasising common equipment standards and adaptation to available resources:

"The equipment and kit issued at Sondela and at the battalion are basic military standard for everyone—gear is gear. Bush operations are rough by nature, and everyone faces the same heat, rain, and heavy kit regardless of who you are. The unit gives out what is in stock, so if a uniform or vest is loose, you adjust it and press on; operational readiness means making do with what the service provides."

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The participant understands operational readiness in terms of standardised provisioning, resource availability and individual adaptability. His assertion that "gear is gear" reflects the view that officers share common equipment and environmental demands. He also points to logistical constraints, suggesting that the unit distributes what is available rather than necessarily providing equipment tailored to individual requirements.

However, his account does not directly address the specific difficulties raised by F-Constable Charlie concerning restricted movement, female-fitted equipment and sanitation. It therefore represents a different understanding of equipment provision rather than evidence that those difficulties do not exist.

Comparative Interpretation Quotes:

The two accounts reveal a tension between institutional standardisation and differentiated operational experiences. M-Constable Bravo emphasises common equipment, shared

environmental hardship and the need to adapt, whereas F-Constable Charlie describes practical difficulties arising from equipment and facilities that she considers unsuitable for her needs.

The distinction is important because equal distribution does not necessarily guarantee equivalent functionality. Providing officers with the same equipment may demonstrate administrative uniformity, but its operational suitability depends on whether personnel can use it effectively. Similarly, expectations of collective endurance may strengthen professional discipline while obscuring differences in how equipment and field conditions affect individual officers.

The findings do not establish that all female officers experience these difficulties or that all male officers share M-Constable Bravo's perspective. Rather, the accounts illustrate how resource constraints, institutional practices and gendered expectations may intersect in shaping operational readiness.

Overall, the theme demonstrates that operational readiness involves more than the availability of equipment and officers' willingness to adapt. It also requires attention to equipment suitability, adequate field infrastructure and the ability to raise legitimate operational concerns without being regarded as weak. Gender-responsive logistical planning can therefore support operational effectiveness while maintaining common professional and training standards.

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Theme Three: Command Dynamics, Mentorship, and the Paths to Career Advancement

This theme examines how command decisions, informal professional networks and perceptions of operational competence shape access to career-enhancing assignments within Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. Particular attention is given to specialised operations, tactical response teams, high-risk deployments and VIP duties, which may provide opportunities for officers to demonstrate leadership potential.

Female Officers' Experiences: Informal Networks and Gendered Gatekeeping:

F-Sgt Alpha described the difficulties female officers may encounter when seeking specialised assignments and opportunities to demonstrate their operational readiness.

F-Sgt Alpha stated:

> *"To get selected for specialized operations or tactical response teams at Para Battalion, doing well at Sondela is not enough. When high-risk deployments or VIP duties come up, ground commanders often defaults to the male constables because they assume men are naturally ready for such operations. Even if women were picked for such critical operations, they are often assigned to the kitchen to cook for their male counterparts. I remember one commander giving instructions "give these women some cabbages and let remain at the kitchen to cook." As a woman, if you speak up, you are seen*

as aggressive, but if a male constable does it, he is seen as ambitious and ready for command."

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Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

F-Sgt Alpha's account suggests that successful performance at Sondela does not necessarily translate into equal access to specialised operational assignments. Her observation that commanders assume men are "naturally ready" for demanding operations points to a perceived gendered understanding of operational suitability, in which masculinity may become an informal indicator of readiness. Her account further suggests that assigning women to kitchen duties, even when selected for critical operations, may restrict their opportunities to gain operational exposure and demonstrate their capabilities.

The participant also identifies a double standard in how professional ambition is interpreted. A female officer who speaks up risks being labelled aggressive, while similar assertiveness in a male officer is understood as ambition and readiness for command. This creates a dilemma for women: remaining silent may limit professional visibility, while seeking challenging assignments may attract negative judgements. Since specialised deployments can provide experience, visibility and opportunities to demonstrate leadership, unequal access may have implications for subsequent professional recognition and advancement. The account reflects the participant's experience and interpretation; it does not independently establish the motives behind every command decision.

Male Officers' Experiences: Peer Solidarity and Performance-Based Leadership:

M-Sgt Alpha presented a perspective that emphasised field performance, physical endurance, operational discipline and team trust in leadership and selection for specialised teams.

M-Sgt Alpha stated:

> *"Leadership in Para Battalion comes down to who can hold the line when things get dangerous. Command looks for officers who have proven their endurance in the field and who the team trusts implicitly in high-stress situations. Male officers naturally socialize together after shifts, so there is strong peer solidarity, but when it comes to formal selection for specialized teams, command usually looks at who has the physical toughness and operational discipline to lead under pressure."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

M-Sgt Alpha constructs leadership around demonstrated performance under operational pressure. Endurance, discipline and the confidence of colleagues are presented as important indicators of suitability for specialised responsibilities. These qualities are relevant to demanding paramilitary operations, although physical toughness alone may not capture the full range of leadership competencies, which can also include judgement, communication, coordination and decision-making.

His observation that male officers socialise together after shifts also draws attention to informal professional networks. Such relationships may strengthen solidarity and provide opportunities for advice, encouragement and professional visibility. The participant does not state that these networks directly determine selection; nevertheless, unequal access to informal professional relationships could potentially influence the support and information available to officers.

Comparative Interpretation Quotes:

The two accounts reveal a tension between performance-based selection and the gendered processes through which operational competence may be recognised. F-Sgt Alpha emphasises perceived gender preferences in access to specialised assignments and the unequal interpretation of professional ambition. M-Sgt Alpha, in contrast, presents selection as dependent on endurance, operational discipline and team trust. These accounts are not necessarily contradictory: performance may be valued in formal selection while officers experience differences in the opportunities available to demonstrate it.

The findings therefore draw attention to the distinction between having competence and being afforded the opportunity to make that competence visible. Specialised assignments provide more than operational experience; they can also strengthen professional credibility and leadership prospects. If access is shaped by assumptions about gender, women may face barriers to acquiring the very experience later used to assess their readiness for greater responsibility. Similarly, informal networks may contribute to professional visibility, although the available accounts do not establish their direct influence on promotion or selection decisions.

Overall, the theme suggests that equitable career advancement requires more than formally recognising operational performance. It also requires fair access to career-enhancing assignments, transparent selection criteria and consistent evaluation of professional ambition and leadership potential. The central finding is that perceptions of competence, command discretion and informal professional relationships may interact in ways that shape officers' opportunities for recognition and advancement.

F-Sgt Alpha's account suggests that successful performance at Sondela does not necessarily translate into equal access to specialised operational assignments. Her observation that commanders assume men are "naturally ready" for demanding operations points to a perceived gendered understanding of operational suitability, in which masculinity may become an informal indicator of readiness. Her account further suggests that assigning women to kitchen duties, even when selected for critical operations, may restrict their opportunities to gain operational exposure and demonstrate their capabilities.

The participant also identifies a double standard in how professional ambition is interpreted. A female officer who speaks up risks being labelled aggressive, while similar assertiveness in a male officer is understood as ambition and readiness for command. This creates a dilemma for women: remaining silent may limit professional visibility, while seeking challenging assignments may attract negative judgements. Since specialised deployments can provide experience, visibility and opportunities to demonstrate leadership, unequal access may have implications for subsequent professional recognition and advancement. The account reflects the participant's experience and interpretation; it does not independently establish the motives behind every command decision.

Male Officers' Experiences: Peer Solidarity and Performance-Based Leadership:

M-Sgt Alpha presented a perspective that emphasised field performance, physical endurance, operational discipline and team trust in leadership and selection for specialised teams.

M-Sgt Alpha stated:

> *"Leadership in Para Battalion comes down to who can hold the line when things get dangerous. Command looks for officers who have proven their endurance in the field and who the team trusts implicitly in high-stress situations. Male officers naturally socialize together after shifts, so there is strong peer solidarity, but when it comes to formal selection for specialized teams, command usually looks at who has the physical toughness and operational discipline to lead under pressure."*

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Theme Five: Paternalistic Protection vs. Operational Exclusion: The Chivalry Trap

This theme examines how protective attitudes towards female officers may restrict their participation in high-risk operations within paramilitary policing and specialised guerrilla training. It explores the tension between safeguarding personnel and ensuring equitable opportunities to demonstrate operational competence.

Female Officers' Experiences: Benevolent Sexism as Gatekeeping:

F-Inspector Bravo:

> *"When we get call-outs for high-risk operations at Para Battalion, senior officers will sometimes say, 'No, let us protect our sisters, leave them at the base to handle communications or administration.' They think they are being kind or protective, but in reality, it denies you the operational exposure you need to build a record. You didn't endure the harsh mountains and tactical drills at Sondela just to be shielded like a fragile visitor when real work starts."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

Participant Interpretation of Quotes:

The account reveals how protection, despite being presented as an expression of care, may operate as gendered gatekeeping. The expression “protect our sisters” frames the exclusion of female officers from high-risk assignments as benevolent, while their placement in communications or administrative roles potentially limits access to the operational experience required to establish professional credibility. The participant's reference to demanding training at Sondela exposes the contradiction between preparing women for operational responsibilities and subsequently shielding them from such opportunities. Her experience suggests that deployment decisions based on presumed vulnerability, rather than individual competence and mission requirements, can restrict women's professional development.

Male Officers’ Experiences: Protective Instincts and Gendered Tactical Risk Assessment:

M-Inspector Bravo:

> *“Naturally, as African men, we are raised with a culture of protecting women from danger. When you are in a volatile environment or facing armed threats in the field, your natural instinct is to put female colleagues in safer positions behind you. It is not that we doubt their Sondela training, but operational risk assessment forces you to consider that heavy combat contact is a man's burden to carry.”*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The male participant presents protection as a cultural expectation and an operational responsibility. However, his assertion that “heavy combat contact is a man's burden to carry” establishes a gendered distinction between operational roles. Although he acknowledges women's specialised training, his account suggests that assumptions about masculinity and femininity may continue to influence deployment decisions. This raises the question of whether operational risk assessments are based on individual capability and specific mission requirements or on generalised assumptions about women's vulnerability and men's suitability for dangerous assignments.

Comparative Interpretation of Quotes:

The accounts reveal contrasting understandings of protection in operational settings. While the female inspector emphasises the professional costs of exclusion, the male inspector presents protective practices as culturally grounded and operationally necessary. Their perspectives nevertheless converge around the recognition that female officers may be placed in safer or less operationally demanding roles despite having undergone specialised training.

The central issue is the distinction between legitimate operational risk management and gender-based exclusion. Risk assessments are necessary in paramilitary policing, but

their application should consider the capabilities of individual officers and the demands of particular assignments rather than presume that women are inherently less suited to dangerous operations. Where protection automatically determines women's deployment, it may deny them the operational exposure needed to demonstrate competence, build experience and strengthen their professional records.

Overall, the findings suggest that paternalistic protection can reproduce gender inequality through practices that appear supportive but restrict women's operational participation. Equitable deployment therefore requires safety decisions to be grounded in mission-specific risks and individual competence, ensuring that protection does not become a justification for limiting female officers' professional opportunities.

Theme Six: The "Presumed Weakness" Tax: Compensatory Over-Performance and Burnout

This theme examines how gendered expectations of physical weakness may influence officers' responses to injury, illness and fatigue during specialised training and operational duties. The participants' accounts reveal contrasting perspectives on how physical limitations are interpreted and whether female and male officers experience equivalent professional consequences when seeking recovery.

Female Officers' Experiences: Suppressing Physical Limits to Defy Expectations:

F-Seargent Bravo stated:

> *"At Sondela, if you get injured or feel sick, as a woman you dare not report to the medical tent, because the immediate comment will be, 'She is giving up because she is female.' Even now at the battalion, when we are on long patrols, I push myself past my physical limits and hide my pain just to prove a point. You pay a heavy physical price because you cannot afford to show a single sign of human weakness without invoking the stereotype."*

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The account reveals the pressure to demonstrate physical resilience in an environment where expressions of pain or vulnerability may be interpreted through gender stereotypes. The participant's reluctance to report injury or illness suggests that seeking medical assistance carries a perceived reputational cost. Her description of pushing beyond her physical limits and concealing pain illustrates compensatory over-performance: the perceived need to exceed ordinary expectations of endurance to establish professional credibility.

Male Officers' Experiences: Acknowledging Physical Strain as a Normal Baseline:

M-Sgt Charlie offered a contrasting account:

"At Sondela and Para Battalion, fatigue is expected. When a male constable reports an injury or needs a break after a heavy tactical run, it is accepted as a normal part of physical training. No one questions his heart or his right to be in the unit; he just rests, recovers, and rejoins the squad when he is fit."

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The participant presents fatigue and injury as normal features of demanding physical training rather than evidence of inadequate commitment or professional unsuitability. His assertion that a male officer's "heart" and "right to be in the unit" are not questioned suggests that physical strain can be accommodated without undermining professional legitimacy.

Comparative Interpretation:

Considered together, the accounts expose a possible gendered difference in how physical limitations are understood. The female officer describes concealing pain to avoid reinforcing assumptions about women's weakness, whereas the male officer presents rest and recovery as accepted aspects of maintaining operational fitness. This contrast suggests that female officers may carry an additional burden: beyond meeting the physical demands of paramilitary policing, they may feel compelled to continually demonstrate that they belong in the unit.

The concept of a "presumed weakness" tax captures this additional physical and psychological burden. Where reporting injury or illness is perceived as a threat to professional credibility, officers may delay seeking assistance, potentially worsening injuries and affecting operational readiness. The findings therefore highlight the importance of distinguishing legitimate physical and operational standards from gendered judgements about competence. Medical support, recovery arrangements and individual performance assessments should be guided by actual health and operational requirements rather than assumptions about gender.

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Theme Seven: The Linguistic and Symbolic Construction of the "Other": Gendered Slang and Institutional Humour

This theme examines how everyday language, informal humour and unit-specific expressions shape gendered belonging within paramilitary policing and specialised guerrilla training. The participants' accounts reveal contrasting interpretations of institutional humour: as an expression of collective identity and resilience, and as a possible means of symbolic exclusion.

Female Officers' Experiences: Casual Sexism and Symbolic Marginalisation:

F-Constable Charlie stated:

> *"In the duty room or during informal briefings, you constantly hear jokes like, 'Para is not for wearing lipstick' or calling female duties 'women's wing operations.' They treat it as harmless banter, but every time those comments are made, it reminds you that in their eyes, you are a female intruder in a man's domain. You learn to smile or ignore it, but it constantly signals that you don't fully belong to the core unit."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The account illustrates how informal expressions can communicate boundaries of institutional belonging. The remark "Para is not for wearing lipstick" associates paramilitary identity with a particular construction of toughness that contrasts with conventional expressions of femininity. Similarly, "women's wing operations" appears to distinguish duties performed by female officers from those regarded as central to the unit's operational identity. Such expressions may therefore reproduce the symbolic distinction between a presumed male norm and the female officer positioned as an outsider.

The participant's observation that women learn to "smile or ignore it" also reveals the strategies used to manage potentially exclusionary interactions. Although such responses may help avoid confrontation and preserve working relationships, they do not

necessarily indicate acceptance of the remarks. Rather, repeated gendered humour may communicate conditional belonging, requiring female officers to negotiate their legitimacy within the unit's informal culture.

Male Officers' Experiences: Esprit de Corps and the Defence of Unit Culture:

M-Constable Alpha offered a different interpretation:

> *"The language used at Para Battalion is rough bush language—it is part of paramilitary esprit de corps that we inherited from training at Sondela. When officers tease each other about being soft or make jokes, it is not meant to hate anyone. It is just the way guys build toughness and break tension in a high-stress environment; everyone is expected to have thick skin."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The participant understands rough language and teasing as established features of paramilitary esprit de corps, emphasising collective toughness, shared experience and stress management. From this perspective, humour reinforces group cohesion and normalises communication in demanding operational environments. His assertion that the language is not intended to express hatred highlights the distinction between the intention behind an expression and its possible effects.

However, the expectation that "everyone is expected to have thick skin" raises questions about whose experiences define acceptable unit culture. Language that strengthens solidarity among some officers may simultaneously marginalise others when it draws on gendered stereotypes or implies that women do not naturally belong in paramilitary spaces. The absence of an intention to offend does not necessarily mean that an expression has no exclusionary consequences.

Comparative Interpretation Quotes:

The accounts reveal a tension between humour as a mechanism of group solidarity and humour as a possible means of symbolic exclusion. While the male constable emphasises the collective value of rough language, the female constable highlights its implications for belonging and professional recognition. Their perspectives demonstrate that the same informal practices may carry different meanings for officers occupying different positions within the institution.

The distinction between intention and impact is central to these findings. Although teasing may be understood as an expression of esprit de corps, repeated references to lipstick, femininity and "women's wing operations" may reinforce the idea that the core paramilitary identity is inherently masculine. Female officers may consequently be expected to adapt to established linguistic norms while managing the exclusionary implications of those norms.

The findings suggest that institutional cohesion should not depend on unquestioned acceptance of cultural practices that undermine colleagues' dignity or professional

belonging. A unit can preserve appropriate humour, solidarity and resilience while challenging expressions that imply operational legitimacy is determined by gender. The central concern is whether informal communication strengthens collective professionalism or reproduces boundaries that make equal participation more difficult.

Theme Eight: Historical Foundations, UNIP State Ideology, and the Institutional Legacy of Early Female Integration

This theme examines the historical foundations of female integration into Zambia's security institutions and how early recruitment experiences may have shaped institutional attitudes towards women's operational legitimacy. It draws on an interview with a senior retired female officer enlisted in 1974, whose recollections provide a historical perspective on the relationship between state policy, international gender-equality agendas, institutional preparedness and male-dominated operational cultures.

Female Officers' Experiences: Political Symbolism, Operational Legitimacy, and Historical Institutionalisation:

F-KII RTD FEMALE 1:

> *"When we were recruited in 1974, Mr. Febian Cheela our new inspector general had just taken over in 1973…….. and it was the first time UNIP explicitly opened the doors for women to join both the Zambia Army and the Police Paramilitary. Government brought that policy straight from international meetings—the preparations for Mexico 1975 and the discussions in Addis Ababa—because UNIP wanted to show the world that Zambian women were empowered in state security. But inside the institution, the male instructors and command were completely unprepared for us. At Sondela, they treated our recruitment like a political experiment or a favor from Freedom House rather than a real military need. Instructors would tell us openly, 'You girls are only here because of Kaunda's politics, but you will never be real operational soldiers.' From day one in 1974 right up to Para Battalion, every step we took was dismissed as political tokens. That stereotype—that women in security are just political decorations rather than genuine operational capability—was planted right at the beginning, and that is the heavy shadow these young constables are still fighting today……..unknown to many is that when I graduated I was one of the first female to be deployed in 1976 on the Adamson Mushala rebellion as search party for women and girls amid stereotyping from male counterparts……and our participation at that time has been documented by people like Felistus Mangunga…….. "*

Interpretation and Analytical Discussion:

The account presents female integration as historically significant but institutionally contested. The participant distinguishes between the political authorisation of women's entry into state security and their acceptance as legitimate operational personnel. Her

recollection suggests that formal recruitment did not automatically translate into professional recognition or institutional preparedness.

Her reference to UNIP, Kenneth Kaunda and international discussions preceding the 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year in Mexico City situates her experience within a wider historical context of women's empowerment and state representation. However, she recalls that the political significance attached to female recruitment also became a basis for questioning the professional legitimacy of the women recruited. The reported statement that women were present because of Kaunda's politics rather than operational requirements illustrates how an initiative intended to demonstrate inclusion could be interpreted by some personnel as a political concession rather than recognition of women's professional capabilities.

The reference to Sondela and Para Battalion further anchors the account in the participant's recollections of training and operational service. Her assertion that women's participation continued to be dismissed as political tokenism suggests that the challenge extended beyond initial recruitment. Particularly significant is her account of deployment in 1976 during the Adamson Mushala rebellion as part of a search party for women and girls. This recollection provides a concrete example of her claimed operational participation and complicates the portrayal of early female recruits as merely symbolic additions to security institutions.

The statement that the stereotype was "planted right at the beginning" expresses the participant's interpretation of the historical origins of gendered institutional attitudes. It suggests that assumptions about women's operational legitimacy may be transmitted through institutional socialisation, training traditions and everyday professional interactions. Nevertheless, her retrospective account cannot independently establish that the same stereotype has remained unchanged since 1974 or that all contemporary officers experience it in identical ways. Its analytical value lies in providing historical institutional memory against which the accounts of serving officers can be interpreted.

The account also highlights the distinction between the political visibility of women and their substantive operational recognition. Recruitment policies may formally establish women's right to enter security institutions, but meaningful integration also depends on whether training arrangements, operational responsibilities, performance assessments and professional recognition reflect equal institutional membership. The participant's recollections suggest that early female recruits had to negotiate both the demands of specialised training and assumptions questioning why they had been recruited and whether they belonged.

Overall, this theme demonstrates the historical dimension of gender role stereotyping through the relationship between formal inclusion and operational legitimacy. The key informant's account does not prove an uninterrupted institutional trajectory from 1974 to the present; rather, it identifies a perceived historical continuity that can be considered alongside the experiences of serving officers. It therefore connects the historical origins of female integration with the continuing question of whether women are recognised not merely as members of security institutions, but as professionally legitimate participants in paramilitary policing and specialised operational work.

Summary of Findings for Research Question One

The findings reveal that gender role stereotyping at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion is expressed through assumptions about women's operational competence, equipment and infrastructure arrangements, command practices, paternalistic protection, gendered language and historically embedded institutional attitudes. Overall, the accounts demonstrate that formal inclusion does not necessarily guarantee equal professional recognition or belonging. Gender stereotyping therefore emerges as both an interpersonal and institutional experience, shaping how officers' capabilities and participation in paramilitary policing are perceived.

Research Question Two: How Do Paramilitary-Trained Officers Cope with and Respond to Gender Role Stereotyping at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?

This research question examines how paramilitary-trained officers experience, negotiate and respond to gender role stereotyping within the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. It focuses on individual coping strategies, informal support networks, professional relationships and the influence of institutional culture on officers' responses. Particular attention is given to the distinction between personal adaptation and institutional responsibility in addressing gender-related challenges.

Theme Nine: Coping Mechanisms, Gendered Solidarity, and the Preservation of Professional Integrity

Female Officers' Experiences: Strategic Endurance, Counter-Performances, and Informal Networks:

F-Constable Bravo's account illustrates how female officers navigate gendered expectations through additional preparation, emotional self-regulation, informal solidarity and strategic management of their professional identities.

> F-Constable Bravo had this to say:
>
> *"To survive at Para Battalion after Sondela, you have to develop a double shell. In front of the men, you never let them see you tire, complain, or drop your head, because the moment you show weakness, it becomes a headline about all female officers. We cope by over-preparing—if the male officers train for one hour, you train for two in secret. Amongst ourselves as women, we have created an unwritten support system. After a tough shift or a biased comment in the duty room, we gather in private to encourage one another and reset our minds. You learn that your silence in front of command is not weakness; it is a tactical choice to keep your focus on the job while letting your results do the talking."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The expression "develop a double shell" captures the protective strategies the participant considers necessary for functioning within the institution. Her account reveals that female officers manage not only the demands of paramilitary duties but also the possibility that

individual fatigue or difficulty may be generalised into assumptions about women's overall operational competence. This creates an additional burden of representation, in which female officers may feel compelled to demonstrate competence consistently to protect both their individual credibility and the standing of women in the institution.

The reference to "over-preparing" illustrates how additional effort becomes a response to anticipated gender-based scrutiny. Although intensified preparation may strengthen operational readiness, the perceived need to train twice as hard raises concerns about unequal conditions for professional recognition. Her account also identifies informal female support networks as important sources of encouragement and emotional regulation. These relationships enable officers to process difficult experiences and sustain professional confidence. However, informal solidarity cannot replace effective institutional mechanisms for addressing gender bias.

The participant's description of silence as "a tactical choice" further suggests that silence may be a deliberate form of self-management rather than passive acceptance. It allows her to preserve professional focus and manage workplace relationships. Nevertheless, the strategy also raises questions about whether officers feel sufficiently supported to express concerns openly. Her account therefore demonstrates both the agency of female officers and the additional emotional and practical work involved in maintaining professional credibility.

Male Officers' Experiences: Traditional Gender Beliefs and Performance-Based Recognition:

M-Constable Bravo's account provides a complementary perspective on the persistence of traditional beliefs about gender and operational suitability. He explains how direct exposure to female officers' performance can challenge assumptions that tactical operations and endurance are inherently masculine domains.

M-Constable Bravo had this to say:

> *"The mindset we grew up with—that tactical operations and deep-bush endurance are fundamentally a man's realm—does not just disappear because of policy. Among the guys, that traditional view still applies when we talk in abstract terms about warfare or physical power. But when you are deployed in the field and you see a female constable handle her weapon with precision, maintain tactical discipline during a night patrol, and carry her load without dragging the team down, your practical view has to change. You might still hold the belief that men are built stronger overall, but in the operational reality of the squad, respect is earned by performance. If she holds her position when things get rough, she is a fellow officer, period."*

Interpretation of Participant Quotes:

The participant's account highlights the distinction between formal policy and deeply established gender beliefs. His reference to tactical operations as "a man's realm" illustrates how occupational competence may be socially associated with masculinity. However, his observations of female officers handling weapons, maintaining tactical

discipline and carrying operational loads demonstrate how practical experience can challenge such assumptions.

Nevertheless, his continued belief that “men are built stronger overall” reveals that recognising women's operational competence does not necessarily eliminate broader assumptions about male physical superiority. His position therefore reflects a tension between inherited gender beliefs and performance-based professional recognition. Although he considers demonstrated competence an appropriate basis for respect, the account also raises the question of whether female officers must repeatedly prove their suitability while male competence is more readily presumed.

Comparative Interpretation:

The accounts reveal complementary but gender-differentiated responses to stereotyping. F-Constable Bravo emphasises additional preparation, emotional self-regulation, informal solidarity and strategic silence. M-Constable Bravo highlights the potential for practical operational experience to challenge inherited beliefs and promote recognition based on demonstrated competence.

Both accounts attach importance to professional performance, but they reveal different conditions under which credibility is established. The female participant describes the pressure of ensuring that individual difficulties are not interpreted as evidence of women's general unsuitability. The male participant, meanwhile, describes how observing female colleagues perform effectively can lead to a reassessment of traditional assumptions.

This contrast suggests a gendered asymmetry in the pursuit of professional recognition. While competence is important for all officers, female officers may experience additional pressure to demonstrate it consistently in response to gendered scrutiny. Informal solidarity and operational acceptance provide valuable coping resources, but neither necessarily removes the institutional conditions that sustain stereotyping.

Overall, Theme Nine demonstrates that coping with gender role stereotyping involves individual resilience, collective support, strategic self-presentation and the negotiation of professional credibility. These strategies preserve professional integrity, but they also reveal the limitations of placing responsibility for managing gendered pressures primarily on individual officers. Sustainable change requires fair performance standards, accessible support mechanisms and institutional commitment to recognising operational competence irrespective of gender.

Research Question Three: What Challenges Do Paramilitary-Trained Officers Experience in Relation to Gender Role Stereotyping and Gendered Experiences at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?

Theme One: The Absence of Anti-Gender-Stereotyping Mandates in the Geoffrey Mukuma (Sondela) Paramilitary Regulations

Female Officers’ Experiences: The Silence of Official Standing Orders:

F-Constable Bravo:

> *"If you read the training manual and standing orders at Geoffrey Mukuma Paramilitary Training School in Sondela, everything is about jogging from point A to B, Circuit, Long route, all aimed physical endurance, drills, weapon handling, and obedience to lawful orders. There is not a single rule or section in those regulations that defines gender stereotyping or forbids instructors from making derogatory comments about female capabilities. When male instructors tell you 'women are a weak link in tactical squads,' or sometimes you hear them tell your male colleague that "don't behave like a woman" you cannot report it as a breach of regulations because the standing orders don't recognize gender bias as a violation to standing orders. In training that is norm. The regulations pretend everyone is just a neutral constable, but in practice, that silence protects the informal stereotypes because there is no written rule to hold anyone accountable."*

Male Officers' Experiences: Strict Compliance with the Written Code and the Normalization of Unregulated Bias:

M-Inspector Alpha:

> *"In paramilitary culture, especially during basic training at Sondela, an instructor only looks at what the written standing orders mandate or prohibit. The regulations dictate adherence to standing orders and follow all school activities including physical fitness benchmarks, drill procedures, weapon safety, and insubordination. Because anti-stereotyping or gender sensitization is completely absent from the Geoffrey Mukuma Paramilitary Training School regulations, officers don't view gendered comments or doubts about female physical strength as a breach of discipline. If it is not written in black-and-white in a regulations as a punishable offense under school standing orders such is treated as normal training practice culture to recruits."*

Interpretation of Female Officer's Account:

F-Constable Bravo's account reveals a perceived gap between the formal regulation of paramilitary training and the institutional recognition of gender role stereotyping as a disciplinary concern. While the training regulations appear to emphasise physical endurance, drills, weapon handling and obedience to lawful orders, the participant expresses concern that derogatory comments about female officers' capabilities are not explicitly addressed. Her experience suggests that operational discipline is clearly regulated, while the gendered conduct accompanying training may receive insufficient institutional attention.

The statement that women are considered "a weak link in tactical squads" illustrates how gender stereotypes can be communicated through instructional authority. Rather than assessing officers according to individual competence and performance, such comments attribute operational weakness to women as a group. This can undermine female officers' professional credibility before their capabilities have been individually evaluated.

The participant's concern also centres on accountability. Her assertion that she cannot report such comments as breaches of standing orders suggests uncertainty about the formal mechanisms available to challenge gender-based conduct. The expression that the regulations "pretend everyone is just a neutral constable" captures the tension between uniform regulatory expectations and the gendered experiences that may occur in practice. The account therefore identifies perceived regulatory silence as an institutional challenge that may leave female officers with limited confidence in the available channels for reporting stereotyping.

Interpretation of Male Officer's Account:

M-Inspector Alpha's account highlights the influence of written standing orders in defining acceptable conduct within the paramilitary training environment. He describes a culture in which instructors and recruits interpret discipline primarily through explicitly stated regulatory requirements. His account suggests that when gender sensitisation and anti-stereotyping provisions are not clearly recognised within the training regulations, gendered comments may not be regarded as disciplinary concerns.

The reference to physical fitness benchmarks, drill procedures, weapon safety and insubordination demonstrates the importance attached to formal operational discipline. However, the participant's account raises a concern about the limitations of a rule-centred understanding of professional conduct. Where officers rely primarily on written prohibitions to determine unacceptable behaviour, gendered comments may be treated as ordinary training interactions rather than conduct requiring scrutiny.

The statement that such comments are treated as "normal training practice culture" is particularly significant. It suggests that repeated gendered expressions may become normalised through everyday training interactions, potentially shaping how recruits understand female colleagues' capabilities and professional suitability. The participant therefore draws attention to how institutional culture may reproduce stereotypes even when they are not formally prescribed.

His account should nevertheless be understood as his interpretation of the training regulatory environment, rather than independent confirmation that all applicable police regulations or legal provisions exclude gender-based discrimination. Its significance lies in the perceived relationship between regulatory recognition, disciplinary interpretation and the normalisation of gendered conduct.

Comparative Interpretation of Participants' Accounts:

The accounts of F-Constable Bravo and M-Inspector Alpha converge on the perceived absence of explicit regulatory recognition of gender role stereotyping within the Geoffrey Mukuma (Sondela) paramilitary training environment. However, they illuminate different dimensions of the challenge. The female officer emphasises the difficulty of reporting derogatory comments and securing accountability, while the male officer highlights how reliance on written standing orders may contribute to the treatment of gendered comments as normal training practice.

Together, their accounts reveal a tension between formal equality and substantive gender equality. Although officers may be subjected to common physical fitness, disciplinary and operational requirements, uniformity in these standards does not necessarily prevent gender-based assumptions from influencing how individual competence is perceived. The findings suggest that the absence of clearly understood standards for addressing stereotyping may leave affected officers uncertain about how to challenge such conduct.

Overall, the accounts identify perceived regulatory gaps as an institutional challenge to recognising, reporting and addressing gender role stereotyping. They demonstrate that regulating operational performance alone may not be sufficient to promote an equitable professional environment unless gender-based assumptions are also recognised and addressed within institutional standards and disciplinary practices.

Theme Three: Hierarchical Authority, Command Rank, and the Structural Powerlessness of Training Matrons

Female Officers' Experiences: Rank Asymmetry and the Need for Command-Level Authority:

F-Inspector Bravo's account identifies hierarchical authority as a structural constraint on the ability of training matrons to challenge gender stereotyping and advocate effectively for female recruits at Geoffrey Mukuma Paramilitary Training School in Sondela. The participant distinguishes between being assigned responsibility for female recruits and possessing the institutional authority necessary to influence decisions affecting their training and welfare. Her assertion that a matron's "hands are tied because of rank" conveys the perceived limitations of a position that carries welfare responsibilities without equivalent influence over senior instructors and the school's command structure.

The account highlights the significance of rank asymmetry in determining whose concerns receive institutional attention. Within paramilitary policing and specialised training, rank establishes formal authority, regulates communication and supports operational coordination. However, the participant suggests that hierarchical arrangements may also restrict the ability of subordinate personnel to question decisions made by senior officers, even when those decisions have implications for fairness, gender equality and the practical needs of female recruits. The concern is therefore not the existence of hierarchy itself, but the possibility that it limits the expression of concerns that challenge established practices.

The participant's proposed elevation of the matron to Deputy Training Officer is particularly significant because it represents a suggested structural response rather than merely a complaint about individual officers. By advocating for a senior command position, she seeks to connect responsibility for gender-related concerns with formal decision-making authority. Her reference to influencing training schedules, questioning biased instructors and addressing female recruits' operational needs indicates that she understands gender-responsive training as requiring access to the institution's central operational and administrative decisions, rather than being confined to welfare supervision.

From a gender studies perspective, this account exposes the distinction between women's representation within an institution and their capacity to exercise substantive

authority. Appointing a female officer as matron may provide recruits with a designated point of contact, but representation alone does not necessarily confer the power to challenge discriminatory conduct or influence institutional decisions. The participant's description of matrons as "powerless figureheads" expresses her perception that a position may be institutionally visible while remaining operationally constrained. Her account consequently raises questions about whether gender-related responsibilities are supported by sufficient authority, resources and access to senior decision-making structures.

Nevertheless, the proposed elevation of the matron to Deputy Training Officer should be understood as the participant's suggested institutional response, rather than as an independently established requirement or a demonstrated guarantee of gender equality. Higher rank could strengthen the matron's formal capacity to intervene, but effective gender-responsive leadership would also depend on relevant expertise, clearly defined responsibilities, institutional support and consistent application of professional standards. The central empirical finding is that F-Inspector Bravo perceives the existing distribution of authority as limiting the matron's ability to address gender-related concerns effectively.

Male Officers' Experiences: Command Hierarchy, Respect for Rank, and Operational Policy Enforcement:

M-Inspector Charlie's account reinforces the importance of formal command authority in shaping the institutional influence of training matrons. The participant describes a hierarchical environment in which compliance is primarily associated with lawful orders issued by personnel occupying recognised command positions. His observation that matrons are viewed mainly as officers responsible for female accommodation suggests a perceived separation between their welfare responsibilities and the core instructional and operational functions of the training school.

The participant's account indicates that the institutional recognition of a matron may depend not only on her assigned responsibilities but also on her position within the command structure. Although she may offer advice or identify concerns affecting female recruits, her influence could remain limited if instructors and recruits do not regard her as part of the school's authoritative training leadership. This distinction highlights how organisational status and formal authority may shape the practical recognition of gender-related responsibilities.

His support for appointing the matron as Deputy Training Officer reflects the view that gender-responsive decisions would carry greater institutional weight when exercised through an established command position. The participant reasons that personnel are more likely to comply with instructions when these are issued by someone whose authority is formally recognised within the hierarchy. His account therefore presents command rank as a possible mechanism for translating concerns about fair treatment and deployment into enforceable institutional instructions.

An important analytical dimension is the participant's emphasis on compliance rather than persuasion. By suggesting that recruits and instructors would follow instructions because they emanate from the command element, he identifies formal authority as a means of overcoming resistance to gender-responsive practices. This perspective implies that gender equality may require more than awareness or voluntary cooperation; it may also

depend on whether institutional arrangements empower designated personnel to make and enforce decisions.

However, the assumption that elevation to a senior command position would immediately transform the training environment requires qualification. Formal rank may increase institutional influence, but it does not automatically guarantee gender competence, impartial decision-making or the consistent enforcement of equitable practices. The participant himself acknowledges the importance of understanding gender dynamics, suggesting that command authority and specialised gender knowledge should operate together. His account is therefore best understood as identifying formal authority as a potentially important condition for effective intervention, rather than as sufficient evidence that rank elevation alone would eliminate gender stereotyping.

Comparative Interpretation of the Participants' Accounts:

The accounts of F-Inspector Bravo and M-Inspector Charlie converge on the perceived limitations of the matron's institutional position within the hierarchical organisation of paramilitary training at Sondela. Both participants identify a gap between the responsibilities associated with the matron's role and the authority required to influence training decisions, challenge unfair treatment and secure recognition of gender-related concerns. Their perspectives differ in emphasis: the female officer foregrounds the constraints imposed by rank asymmetry, while the male officer stresses the importance of formal command authority in securing compliance with institutional decisions.

The convergence is significant because it demonstrates that the challenge is not necessarily the absence of a designated officer responsible for female recruits, but the perceived lack of institutional power attached to that responsibility. The female officer's account highlights the difficulties a matron may encounter when challenging senior personnel, whereas the male officer explains why advice from someone outside the recognised command structure may carry limited weight. Together, the accounts suggest that welfare responsibility without corresponding decision-making authority may restrict the effectiveness of gender-responsive intervention.

The proposed appointment of the matron as Deputy Training Officer emerges as a shared institutional recommendation. Both participants associate this position with greater access to command decisions and the ability to influence instructors, training arrangements and the treatment of recruits. Their accounts consequently draw attention to the relationship between gender representation, organisational hierarchy and substantive institutional authority. They suggest that the effectiveness of gender-related responsibilities depends partly on whether those entrusted with them can participate meaningfully in decisions that shape the training environment.

Nevertheless, the findings should not be interpreted as establishing that a change in rank would, by itself, resolve gender role stereotyping. Command authority needs to be accompanied by gender expertise, clearly defined institutional responsibilities, adequate resources and accountability mechanisms. Otherwise, elevating the matron's position may alter the formal hierarchy without necessarily transforming the assumptions and practices through which gender inequalities are reproduced.

Overall, the accounts identify hierarchical authority and the perceived structural powerlessness of training matrons as an institutional challenge to addressing gender role stereotyping. They demonstrate that the capacity to respond to gender-related concerns is shaped not only by the presence of designated supervisory personnel but also by their access to command structures and decision-making authority. The theme therefore highlights the importance of aligning responsibility for gender-responsive training with the institutional power, expertise and support required to exercise that responsibility effectively.

Overall Summary of the Results

The findings demonstrate that gender role stereotyping among paramilitary-trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion is shaped by the interaction of individual attitudes, institutional practices and organisational arrangements. Under Research Question One, stereotyping emerged through assumptions about female officers' physical strength, tactical competence, operational suitability and professional identity, as well as gendered language, institutional expectations and historical influences. These experiences indicate that formal inclusion does not necessarily translate into equal professional recognition and participation.

Under Research Question Two, officers' responses included peer solidarity, informal support networks, mutual protection, emotional regulation, strategic silence and efforts to demonstrate professional competence. These coping mechanisms enabled officers, particularly women, to navigate gendered experiences while maintaining their professional identities. However, reliance on individual resilience and informal support also revealed the limitations of personal coping in addressing institutional inequalities.

Research Question Three highlighted structural challenges associated with the perceived absence of explicit anti-gender-stereotyping provisions, limited specialised gender expertise among training personnel and the restricted command authority of training matrons. These findings draw attention to the importance of institutional standards, gender-responsive training leadership and meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Overall, the findings position gender role stereotyping as both an interpersonal experience and an institutional concern within paramilitary policing and specialised training. They demonstrate that addressing it requires attention not only to individual attitudes and coping strategies but also to the organisational practices, training arrangements and authority structures through which gendered expectations are maintained or challenged. The next chapter discusses these findings in relation to the study's theoretical framework and relevant empirical literature.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: CHAPTER FOUR

Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the findings on gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of trained officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The discussion is organised around the study's three research questions, namely: the nature of gender role stereotyping experienced by paramilitary-trained officers; how officers cope with and respond to gender role stereotyping; and the institutional challenges associated

with these experiences. The findings are critically examined in relation to Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Matakala, 2015), alongside relevant international, African and Zambian empirical studies. Particular attention is given to areas of convergence and divergence between the present findings and previous research, as well as the additional insights emerging from the experiences of both female and male officers within a specialised paramilitary policing environment. The discussion also considers the extent to which the findings support, extend or challenge existing theoretical explanations of gendered occupational expectations and institutional experiences.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Question One

Areas of Similarity Between the Present Findings and Previous Studies

Global Level:

The findings of the present study converge with previous research in demonstrating that gender stereotyping within policing institutions is closely associated with masculine occupational expectations, the devaluation of women's capabilities and unequal recognition of professional contributions. In the present study, participants' accounts revealed assumptions about female officers' physical strength, tactical competence and suitability for demanding paramilitary responsibilities. This finding is consistent with Murray's (2021) study in Canada, which identified a masculine-coded image of the ideal police officer. Both studies demonstrate how policing cultures may associate professional competence with characteristics conventionally attributed to masculinity, thereby creating conditions in which female officers' capabilities are questioned or require additional demonstration.

A similar pattern emerges in Tripathi et al. (2023), whose findings showed that women's work was consistently devalued and that patriarchal sentiments influenced perceptions of female police officers. The present study also identified gendered assumptions that affected the recognition of women's operational competence and professional contributions. The convergence suggests that gender stereotyping is not confined to one national policing context but reflects wider organisational expectations concerning masculinity, femininity and occupational suitability.

The findings also correspond with Lo and Lim's (2023) study in Singapore, which identified masculine norms, gendered divisions of labour and discriminatory practices within frontline policing. In both studies, gender inequality is not understood exclusively through explicit discriminatory conduct. It may also be reproduced through everyday institutional practices and assumptions that become normalised within the occupational environment. This comparison is particularly relevant to the present findings concerning equipment and infrastructure, paternalistic protection and gendered language, which demonstrate how ordinary organisational arrangements and interactions can communicate different expectations of female and male officers.

Regional Level-Africa:

Furthermore, the present findings converge with Quartey's (2024) study in Ghana, which identified leadership orientations, career support mechanisms and the career environment

as important influences on policewomen's professional development. Quartey, Attiogbe and Yamoah (2026) similarly identified gender bias in continuous professional development, gendered power relations and workplace intimidation. These findings correspond with the present study's evidence concerning command relationships, mentorship and the recognition of professional capabilities. Collectively, the studies demonstrate that gender stereotyping in policing extends beyond physical and operational expectations to include institutional authority, professional support and opportunities for career development.

At the regional level, the findings are consistent with Yalley and Olutayo's (2020) analysis of masculinised police culture in Ghana and Nigeria. Their study established that masculine organisational expectations operate at personal, structural and operational levels. The present study similarly demonstrates that gendered expectations are expressed through interpersonal interactions as well as institutional practices and occupational understandings. Although the studies investigate different aspects of policing, both highlight the importance of examining organisational culture rather than attributing gender inequality solely to individual attitudes.

Zambian Level:

The convergence is also evident in the Zambian literature. Mangunga (2021) documented the historical concentration of women in clerical, administrative, female-related and juvenile-related police functions, alongside discrimination and barriers to professional advancement. The present study's findings concerning gendered assumptions about operational suitability and professional recognition provide contemporary evidence of related occupational expectations within a specialised paramilitary environment. Similarly, Nasilele (2020) identified women's limited participation in supervisory decision-making and the predominance of men in supervisory positions in the police stations examined. This resonates with the present findings concerning command dynamics, mentorship and the gendered recognition of authority.

Particularly significant is the convergence with Sianga et al. (2024), whose study in Monze identified cultural beliefs and assumptions about women's willingness and ability to undertake demanding police duties. The present study also found that female officers' operational capabilities could be interpreted through gendered assumptions about physical strength and suitability for demanding responsibilities. Both studies therefore draw attention to the influence of socially constructed gender expectations on women's participation in policing. Overall, the similarities between the present findings and previous studies establish that gender stereotyping, masculine occupational expectations, unequal professional recognition and gendered institutional practices remain important concerns within policing environments. The present study is consistent with this body of literature while locating these experiences within the particular context of specialised paramilitary policing at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

Areas of Dissimilarity Between the Present Findings and Previous Studies

Although the findings of the present study converge with previous research on gender inequality and masculinised policing cultures, important differences emerge in the phenomenon investigated, the research participants, the institutional setting and the

methodological approach. These differences are significant because they demonstrate the particular contribution of examining gender role stereotyping among officers who have undergone specialised paramilitary training.

First, the present study differs from several previous investigations in its inclusion of both female and male officers as participants. Murray (2021) included male and female police officers, but reported that their interpretations of workplace gender relations differed, with female officers describing sexism and male officers frequently minimising or denying gender bias. In contrast, Tripathi et al. (2023), Lo and Lim (2023), Quartey (2024), and Quartey, Attiogbe and Yamoah (2026) focused primarily or exclusively on women's experiences and perceptions. While these studies provide important insights into the challenges confronting policewomen, the present study examines how gender role stereotyping is experienced and understood by both genders within the same specialised training environment. This distinction allows the analysis to consider not only the experiences of women but also how male officers interpret gender expectations, professional competence and institutional practices.

Second, the present study differs in its specific institutional focus. Much of the reviewed literature examines general police work, frontline policing, career development, supervisory representation or responses to domestic violence. For example, Lo and Lim (2023) examined female Ground Response Force officers in Singapore, while Yalley and Olutayo (2020) investigated how masculinised police culture influenced institutional responses to domestic violence. Quartey (2024) and Quartey et al. (2026) concentrated on women's career development and continuous professional development. The present study, however, focuses specifically on officers who have undergone specialised paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. Consequently, it brings into focus the relationship between gender expectations and the distinctive occupational demands of tactical readiness, physical conditioning, operational performance and specialised training.

Third, the present study differs from previous Zambian research in the way it approaches gender inequality within policing. Mangunga (2021) adopted a historical perspective to examine women's participation in the Zambia Police Service between 1947 and 2015, while Nasilele (2020) employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate women's participation in supervisory decision-making. Sianga et al. (2024), on the other hand, used a qualitative descriptive design to examine structural violence against female police officers in Monze. Although these studies provide valuable evidence of historical exclusion, unequal representation and gender-based challenges, the present study adopts a phenomenological orientation to understand how gender role stereotyping is experienced, interpreted and negotiated by officers themselves. Its focus is therefore on the meanings attached to everyday institutional experiences rather than primarily on historical developments, representation or the prevalence of structural inequalities.

Fourth, the present findings extend beyond the general examination of discrimination to identify interconnected expressions of gender stereotyping within paramilitary policing. These include assumptions about women's operational capabilities, equipment and infrastructure arrangements, command and mentorship relationships, paternalistic protection, presumed weakness, gendered language and historical institutional attitudes. Although individual aspects of these experiences appear in previous studies, the reviewed literature does not bring them together within the specific context of specialised paramilitary training in Zambia. The present study therefore offers a more contextually

focused examination of how gender expectations may be reproduced through both interpersonal relationships and institutional arrangements.

Finally, the present study differs in its examination of the relationship between gender stereotyping and professional belonging. The findings indicate that the issue is not limited to whether women are formally admitted into paramilitary training or policing institutions. It also concerns whether they are recognised as competent professionals, trusted with demanding responsibilities and treated as legitimate members of the occupational community. This distinction adds an important dimension to previous studies that have concentrated on women's representation, promotion, career development and workplace discrimination. It shifts attention towards the everyday processes through which professional legitimacy and institutional belonging are negotiated.

These differences should not be interpreted as evidence that previous studies are inadequate or that their findings contradict the present study. Rather, they reflect differences in research objectives, populations, settings and methodological orientations. The present study addresses a more specific empirical and contextual question: how gender role stereotyping is lived and interpreted by female and male officers within a specialised paramilitary policing environment. This provides the basis for identifying the additional knowledge generated by the study.

New Knowledge and Contribution of the Present Study

The present study contributes new empirical and contextual knowledge to Gender Studies by examining gender role stereotyping among both female and male officers who have undergone specialised paramilitary training at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. Whereas much of the reviewed literature has concentrated on women's experiences of discrimination, career advancement, workplace inequalities and representation in policing, this study brings the experiences and interpretations of both genders into the analysis of gendered occupational expectations. This provides a broader understanding of how gender stereotypes are encountered, interpreted and reproduced within a shared paramilitary training environment.

A key contribution is the identification of the interconnected ways in which gender role stereotyping manifests within specialised paramilitary policing. The findings demonstrate that stereotyping is not confined to assumptions about women's physical strength or operational suitability. It also operates through equipment and infrastructure arrangements, command and mentorship relationships, paternalistic protection, presumed weakness, gendered language and historically inherited institutional attitudes. By bringing these dimensions together, the study demonstrates that gender stereotyping is multidimensional, involving both interpersonal interactions and institutional practices that shape professional recognition and belonging.

The study further contributes by drawing attention to the contradiction between formal inclusion and substantive professional recognition. The presence of female officers in paramilitary training and policing does not, in itself, establish that gender equality has been achieved. Officers may be formally included while still encountering assumptions that question their operational competence, restrict their participation or require them to demonstrate their capabilities repeatedly. This distinction advances understanding of

gender equality beyond numerical representation towards the everyday conditions under which officers are recognised as legitimate and competent members of the paramilitary occupational community.

Another contribution lies in the application of Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) to the specific institutional environment of specialised paramilitary policing. The findings illustrate how socially constructed expectations concerning masculinity and femininity can influence perceptions of tactical competence, physical readiness, command authority and occupational suitability. The study therefore demonstrates the continuing relevance of gender-role expectations in an institutional setting where professional identity is strongly associated with discipline, endurance and operational capability. At the same time, the lived experiences of participants provide an opportunity to examine how these expectations are negotiated, reproduced and, in some instances, contested.

In the Zambian context, the study extends existing research on women in policing by moving beyond historical participation, supervisory representation and general experiences of structural inequality. It provides context-specific phenomenological evidence concerning gender stereotyping within the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. This is particularly important because specialised paramilitary training presents occupational conditions that are not fully captured by studies of general police work or conventional police administration.

The study's central contribution is therefore an empirically grounded understanding of gender role stereotyping as a lived institutional experience involving professional competence, operational participation, authority and belonging. It demonstrates that achieving gender equality in specialised paramilitary policing requires attention not only to women's entry and representation but also to the institutional expectations and everyday practices through which professional legitimacy is constructed and recognised.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Question Two: How Do Paramilitary-Trained Officers Cope with and Respond to Gender Role Stereotyping at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?

Areas of Similarity Between the Present Findings and Previous Studies

Theory and convergence of research findings:

The findings of the present study converge with existing scholarship in demonstrating that individuals working within gendered institutional environments employ different strategies to negotiate workplace expectations and preserve their professional identities. At the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion, participants described coping practices that included peer solidarity, informal support networks, emotional regulation, strategic silence, avoidance, seeking assistance from trusted individuals and chaplaincy support. These responses illustrate that officers do not simply accept gender role stereotyping passively; they interpret their experiences and adopt different ways of managing and responding to them.

This finding can be understood through the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984, as cited in Matakala, 2015). The model emphasises that coping involves the appraisal of situations and the cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses individuals employ in managing demands they perceive as challenging. The participants' accounts suggest that officers respond differently depending on how they interpret particular gendered experiences, the support available to them and the

institutional circumstances in which those experiences occur. Peer solidarity, for instance, may provide emotional reassurance and practical support, while strategic silence or avoidance may represent attempts to prevent further conflict or protect professional relationships. These responses should therefore be understood within the circumstances in which officers experience and evaluate gender stereotyping.

Global Perspectives:

The findings also demonstrate similarities with Murray's (2021) study in Canada, which established that female police officers employed adaptive strategies in response to workplace sexism. The convergence lies in the recognition that female officers develop ways of navigating gendered workplace experiences while maintaining their professional participation. However, the present study provides additional insight into the importance of informal solidarity and mutual support within a specialised paramilitary training and policing environment. It shows how relationships among officers may become resources for negotiating experiences that are not always easily addressed through formal institutional channels.

The importance of institutional and interpersonal support also resonates with Quartey's (2024) study in Ghana, which identified career support mechanisms and leadership orientations as important influences on policewomen's professional development. Similarly, Quartey, Attiogbe and Yamoah (2026) identified gendered power relations and workplace intimidation as challenges affecting policewomen's professional experiences. Although these studies concentrated on career development and professional training rather than coping strategies as their primary focus, they demonstrate why supportive institutional relationships matter when women navigate gendered organisational environments. The present findings extend this concern by showing how officers may also rely on informal relationships, trusted individuals and chaplaincy support when responding to gender-related experiences.

The findings concerning the reconciliation of professional identity with wider societal gender expectations also demonstrate a point of convergence with the broader literature on gendered policing cultures. Yalley and Olutayo (2020) identified masculinised police culture as operating at personal, structural and operational levels. Such a culture provides an important context for understanding why officers may need to negotiate expectations arising from both their professional environment and wider social understandings of masculinity and femininity. In the present study, officers' accounts indicate that professional identity is not formed independently of societal gender expectations; rather, officers must navigate the relationship between occupational demands and social expectations concerning appropriate behaviour for women and men.

Furthermore, the findings concerning peer solidarity and shared professional commitment are relevant to understanding the role of collective identity in coping. Officers' accounts suggest that shared training experiences, discipline, camaraderie and professional performance can provide a basis for maintaining working relationships despite gendered expectations. This is important because coping should not be interpreted exclusively as an individual psychological response. It may also involve collective practices through which officers support one another, preserve professional relationships and sustain their sense of belonging within the institution.

Overall, the similarities between the present findings and previous studies demonstrate that coping with gendered workplace experiences involves both individual and relational responses. The findings support the relevance of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by illustrating how officers interpret and respond to gender-related demands through cognitive, emotional and behavioural strategies. They also reinforce the importance of supportive relationships and organisational environments in enabling officers to maintain professional integrity while negotiating gender role stereotyping.

Areas of Dissimilarity Between the Present Findings and Previous Studies

Tripathi et al. (2023), Lo and Lim (2023), Quartey (2024), and Quartey, Attiogbe and Yamoah (2026), focused predominantly on women's experiences of workplace discrimination, professional marginalisation and gendered institutional practices. Although these studies provide important insights into the challenges confronting policewomen, they do not offer the same focus on coping as a shared area of inquiry involving both genders. The present study therefore broadens the discussion by examining how female and male officers interpret and respond to gendered expectations within a common paramilitary environment.

A further difference concerns the range of coping responses identified. Murray (2021) reported that female police officers employed adaptive strategies in response to workplace sexism. However, the present study identifies a more varied combination of individual, interpersonal and collective responses. These include peer solidarity, informal support networks, emotional regulation, strategic silence, avoidance, seeking assistance from trusted persons and chaplaincy support. The findings suggest that coping is not necessarily a single or uniform response to gender stereotyping. Rather, officers draw on different resources depending on the nature of their experiences, their relationships with colleagues and the institutional circumstances in which they find themselves.

The present study also differs by drawing attention to strategic silence and avoidance as responses to gendered experiences within a hierarchical paramilitary institution. These responses are analytically important because they may reflect officers' attempts to manage difficult interactions, preserve professional relationships or avoid consequences associated with challenging established workplace expectations. They should not automatically be interpreted as acceptance of stereotyping or an absence of agency. Instead, they may represent context-dependent decisions through which officers negotiate their professional identities and institutional positions. The reviewed studies provide evidence of workplace discrimination, gendered power relations and institutional barriers, but the material reviewed does not establish the same detailed combination of these coping responses within a specialised paramilitary setting.

Another distinction lies in the importance attached to peer solidarity and gendered camaraderie. The present findings indicate that officers may develop informal support relationships through shared training experiences and professional responsibilities. Such relationships can provide emotional reassurance, mutual protection and a sense of belonging. This dimension adds to the existing literature by showing that coping may operate collectively rather than solely through individual adjustment. The study therefore moves beyond understanding officers as isolated individuals responding to discrimination and considers the relational resources available within their occupational community.

The study also differs through its examination of how officers reconcile professional identity with wider societal gender expectations. The findings suggest that officers must negotiate expectations associated with their gender while maintaining the discipline, competence and professional conduct demanded by paramilitary policing. This is particularly significant because the process is not limited to responding to particular discriminatory incidents; it also concerns the broader negotiation of personal identity, occupational expectations and social roles. The reviewed studies address gendered workplace experiences and institutional inequalities, but the available accounts do not examine this intersection in the same specific context of specialised paramilitary training.

The application of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Matakala, 2015) also provides a distinctive interpretive dimension. Rather than treating all gendered experiences as automatically stressful, the present study considers how officers interpret particular situations and select responses according to their perceived circumstances and available resources. This distinction is important because the same institutional experience may be interpreted differently by different officers. Consequently, coping cannot be reduced to a predetermined list of psychological reactions; it must be understood in relation to participants' own interpretations and the social and institutional conditions within which they operate.

These differences indicate that the present study offers a more context-specific understanding of coping with gender role stereotyping in paramilitary policing. Its contribution is not that previous studies failed to recognise adaptive responses or institutional support, but that it examines a wider range of coping practices among both female and male officers, including collective solidarity, strategic silence, informal support and the reconciliation of professional and societal gender expectations. This provides a basis for identifying the additional knowledge generated by the present study.

New Knowledge and Contribution of the Present Study

The present study contributes new knowledge to Gender Studies by demonstrating that coping with gender role stereotyping within specialised paramilitary policing involves a combination of individual agency, interpersonal relationships and collective responses. Rather than portraying officers solely as recipients of gendered institutional expectations, the findings show that both female and male officers actively interpret and negotiate their experiences while seeking to maintain their professional identities and responsibilities.

A central contribution is the identification of peer solidarity and informal support networks as important resources for navigating gendered experiences. The findings indicate that officers may establish informal relationships through which they offer mutual support, encouragement and protection. This demonstrates that coping is not exclusively an individual process but can also be relational and collective. In the context of paramilitary policing, where discipline, shared training experiences and professional camaraderie are important, these relationships may provide a sense of belonging and help officers manage difficult gender-related experiences.

The study also contributes by revealing the coexistence of different coping responses, including emotional regulation, strategic silence, avoidance, seeking assistance from trusted individuals and chaplaincy support. These responses demonstrate that officers

do not necessarily confront gender stereotyping through direct resistance. Depending on their circumstances, they may choose to challenge, accommodate, avoid or privately manage particular experiences. The significance of this finding lies in recognising that silence and avoidance do not automatically indicate agreement with discriminatory practices. They may reflect calculated responses to institutional relationships, professional expectations and perceived consequences of speaking out.

Another important contribution concerns the relationship between coping and professional integrity. The findings show that officers seek to preserve their professional identity despite gendered expectations and interactions. Shared commitment to discipline, competence and operational performance can provide a basis for maintaining professional credibility. This suggests that coping is not simply about reducing discomfort; it may also involve protecting one's occupational identity and sustaining participation in a demanding professional environment.

The application of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, as cited in Matakala, 2015) provides an additional contribution. The findings illustrate the importance of understanding coping through officers' interpretations of their experiences and the responses available to them. They caution against assuming that every gendered interaction is necessarily appraised as stressful or that all officers respond in the same way. Coping is therefore understood as context-dependent, shaped by individual appraisal, interpersonal support and institutional circumstances.

The study further contributes by demonstrating that coping with gender role stereotyping involves negotiating professional identity alongside wider societal expectations concerning masculinity and femininity. Officers operate within a specialised institutional environment while remaining members of a wider society in which gender expectations continue to influence social relationships and behaviour. The findings therefore show that professional identity and social gender expectations are not necessarily separate; officers may need to reconcile the demands of their occupation with expectations attached to their gender outside the workplace.

Overall, the study advances understanding of coping with gender role stereotyping by conceptualising it as an individual, relational and context-dependent process. Its contribution lies in showing how paramilitary-trained officers use informal solidarity, emotional and behavioural strategies, trusted support relationships and professional commitment to negotiate gendered experiences. This provides a context-specific understanding of coping among both female and male officers at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion and extends the discussion beyond the conventional emphasis on women's experiences of workplace discrimination alone.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Question Three :What Challenges Do Paramilitary-Trained Officers Experience in Relation to Gender Role Stereotyping and Gendered Experiences at the Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion?

Areas of Similarity Between the Present Findings and Previous Studies

The findings of the present study resonate with previous research demonstrating that gender inequality within policing institutions is sustained not only through individual attitudes but also through institutional arrangements, organisational cultures and limitations in gender-

responsive leadership. For instance, Quartey (2024) found that the career experiences of policewomen in Ghana were influenced by leadership orientations, institutional support and the broader career environment. Similarly, Quartey, Attiogbe and Yamoah (2026) identified gendered power relations, workplace intimidation and inequalities in professional development. These findings correspond with the present study, in which participants identified limited gender expertise among training personnel and constraints in the institutional support available to address gender stereotyping.

The findings also reflect those of Yalley and Olutayo (2020), who highlighted the influence of masculinised police cultures at personal, structural and operational levels and recommended gender-sensitive training. In the present study, participants similarly questioned whether training personnel possessed adequate gender-related knowledge to recognise and address stereotyping. This suggests that gender-responsive training is important not merely for promoting awareness but also for challenging institutional practices through which gender inequalities may be reproduced.

Furthermore, Sianga et al. (2024) associated structural violence against female police officers in Monze with gender inequality, cultural beliefs and assumptions about women's abilities and willingness to undertake demanding duties. This is consistent with participants' concerns in the present study about the institutional recognition and handling of gender stereotyping. Nasilele (2020) also identified women's limited participation in supervisory decision-making within the Zambia Police Service, highlighting the significance of gender representation and institutional authority. This provides a useful point of comparison with participants' concerns about the limited authority exercised by training matrons.

Overall, these similarities demonstrate that gender stereotyping in policing is connected to broader institutional questions of leadership, professional expertise, organisational culture and accountability. The present study extends this discussion to the specific experiences of officers undergoing paramilitary training at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

Areas of Dissimilarity Between the Present Findings and Previous Studies

Although the present findings share important similarities with previous studies, differences emerge in the specific institutional challenges examined. Much of the existing literature, including Quartey (2024), Quartey, Attiogbe and Yamoah (2026), and Nasilele (2020), focuses broadly on women's career development, professional advancement, supervisory participation and gendered power relations within policing institutions. The present study, however, brings these concerns into the specific environment of paramilitary training, where participants identified challenges relating to the perceived absence of explicit anti-stereotyping provisions in training regulations, limited gender expertise among training personnel and the restricted authority of training matrons.

A further difference concerns the institutional location of gender inequality. Yalley and Olutayo (2020) examined how masculinised police culture influences police responses to domestic violence, while Sianga et al. (2024) investigated structural violence against female police officers. Although these studies illuminate the wider consequences of gender inequality in policing, the present study draws attention to how gender stereotyping may

be experienced and managed within specialised training environments. It therefore shifts the discussion towards the institutional arrangements, personnel responsibilities and accountability mechanisms that shape gendered experiences during paramilitary training.

The findings also differ in their emphasis on the role of training matrons. While previous studies identify the importance of institutional leadership and gender-sensitive training, the present participants specifically questioned whether matrons possessed sufficient gender expertise and organisational authority to address gender-related concerns effectively. Their accounts suggest that appointing a matron may not, in itself, guarantee effective gender-responsive support where the position lacks adequate expertise, decision-making authority and institutional backing.

These differences do not necessarily contradict previous research. Rather, they demonstrate that gender inequality within policing is expressed through context-specific institutional processes. The present study contributes a more focused understanding of how regulatory arrangements, gender competence and authority structures intersect within paramilitary training at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion.

New Knowledge and Contribution of the Present Study

The present study contributes new contextual knowledge by demonstrating that gender role stereotyping within paramilitary training is not sustained solely through individual attitudes or interpersonal interactions. It is also shaped by institutional conditions, particularly the perceived absence of explicit anti-stereotyping provisions in training regulations, limited gender expertise among training personnel and the restricted authority of training matrons.

An important contribution is the distinction between the formal presence of gender-support structures and their practical capacity to address gender-related concerns. The participants' accounts suggest that appointing a training matron does not automatically guarantee effective institutional support. Such support also requires relevant gender expertise, sufficient authority within the command structure and organisational backing. This highlights the limitations of symbolic representation where institutional responsibilities are not accompanied by the capacity to exercise them effectively.

The study further demonstrates that addressing gender stereotyping requires more than general disciplinary regulations. Participants' accounts point to the importance of clearly articulated institutional standards that recognise and address gender-based stereotyping, alongside appropriate reporting and accountability mechanisms. This contribution is particularly relevant to specialised paramilitary training environments, where institutional discipline, command relationships and training practices shape officers' professional experiences.

Overall, the study extends existing knowledge by locating gender stereotyping within the intersection of institutional regulation, gender competence and command authority. It shows that meaningful gender responsiveness in paramilitary policing requires not only the inclusion of women but also institutional arrangements capable of recognising, preventing and addressing gender-based inequalities. These findings offer a context-specific contribution to understanding gender equality within police training institutions in Zambia.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to the three research questions, examining the nature of gender role stereotyping, the ways paramilitary-trained officers cope with and respond to such experiences, and the institutional challenges they encounter at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The discussion demonstrated that gender stereotyping extends beyond interpersonal attitudes and is reflected in operational expectations, institutional practices, gendered relationships and organisational arrangements.

The findings further revealed that officers employ different coping strategies, including peer solidarity, emotional regulation, strategic silence and informal support networks. However, these responses occur within institutional environments where participants identified limitations in gender expertise, regulatory guidance and the authority of structures expected to provide gender-responsive support.

The study's central contribution is its demonstration that gender equality in paramilitary policing cannot be understood simply through the presence of women in specialised training institutions. It must also be examined through the institutional conditions that shape their participation, recognition, professional identity and access to support. The chapter therefore establishes that meaningful gender inclusion requires attention to everyday gender relations as well as the organisational structures and power arrangements through which gender inequalities may be reproduced.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: CHAPTER FIVE

Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations arising from the study on gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of trained officers at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. It draws together the findings in relation to the three research questions, highlighting what they reveal about gender relations, professional experiences and institutional practices within paramilitary training. The chapter further identifies the study's originality and contribution to knowledge, particularly its insights into the relationship between gender stereotyping, institutional arrangements and the professional experiences of male and female officers. Finally, it advances recommendations intended to strengthen gender-responsive training, institutional accountability and meaningful gender inclusion within paramilitary policing.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions from the Findings

This study examined gender role stereotyping and the gendered experiences of trained officers at Lusaka Paramilitary Battalion. The findings demonstrate that gender stereotyping is embedded not only in interpersonal attitudes but also in operational expectations, institutional practices, command relationships and organisational culture. Although officers employed various coping strategies, including peer solidarity, informal support networks, emotional regulation and strategic silence, these responses did not necessarily address the institutional conditions underlying gender inequality.

The study further establishes that meaningful gender inclusion requires more than the formal incorporation of women into paramilitary training. It requires institutional arrangements that recognise gender-based stereotyping, strengthen gender expertise among training personnel and ensure that designated gender-support structures possess the authority and organisational backing necessary to fulfil their responsibilities.

Originality and Contribution to Knowledge

The originality of this study lies in its context-specific phenomenological examination of how gender role stereotyping is experienced, negotiated and reproduced within a specialised paramilitary policing environment in Zambia. In particular, it brings together officers' accounts of gendered professional experiences, coping practices and institutional challenges to demonstrate the relationship between everyday gender relations and organisational structures.

By foregrounding the perceived limitations of regulatory guidance, gender expertise and the authority of training matrons, the study extends existing discussions of gender inequality in policing beyond questions of representation and individual attitudes. It demonstrates that gender inclusion must also be assessed through the institutional conditions that shape professional recognition, participation, support and authority.

Implications for Institutional Practice

The findings point to the importance of strengthening gender-responsive training, clarifying institutional provisions for addressing gender stereotyping and equipping personnel responsible for gender-related support with appropriate expertise and authority. They also highlight the need for effective reporting, support and accountability mechanisms within specialised police training environments.

Ultimately, gender equality in paramilitary policing should not be measured solely by the presence of women in training institutions, but also by the extent to which institutional cultures and practices enable women and men to participate, develop professionally and exercise their responsibilities with equal dignity and recognition.

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