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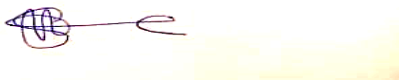
INVESTIGATING THE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GENDER DISPARITY IN OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENTS WITHIN THE ZRP: A CASE OF CHIKURUBI URBAN SUPPORT UNIT.

BY

SUNGANO MACHEMEDZE B231340B

APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify to that they have read the dissertation and have approved the submission and acceptance of the dissertation entitled "**Investigating the factors contributing to gender disparity in operational deployments within the ZRP: a case of Chikurubi Urban Support Unit",** submitted by Sungano Machemedze B231340B in partial fulfilment of the Bachelor of Business Administration (Honors) in Police and security Studies



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Student Date



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Supervisor Date



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Chairperson Date

DECLARATION

I, the individual signing below, affirm that the work I have presented is solely my own creation and have never been submitted to any institution for grades or appraisal. Additionally, I confirm that all external sources used in my research have been appropriately cited and referenced as required.



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Student Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my cherished family, whose constant love, support and encouragement have been the foundation of my academic endeavours.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The successful completion of this dissertation has been made possible through the generous support, guidance, and encouragement of many individuals, to whom I owe a profound debt of gratitude.

First and foremost, I extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisor at Bindura University of Science Education, whose expert academic guidance, critical intellectual engagement, and unwavering commitment to scholarly rigour shaped the development of this study from its earliest conceptual stages through to its final submission. Your patience, constructive feedback, and dedication to excellence have been an inspiration throughout this process.

I am deeply grateful to the Zimbabwe Republic Police and, in particular, to the leadership and members of the Support Unit at Chikurubi Urban, Harare. I acknowledge with sincere appreciation the institutional support extended by the commanding officers who authorised this research, and I am profoundly grateful to every officer—male and female, operational and administrative—who agreed to participate in the study. Your candid and courageous responses constitute the empirical foundation of this work, and it is your professional reality that this dissertation ultimately seeks to serve.

I also wish to express gratitude to the Faculty of Commerce, Department of Intelligence and Security Studies at Bindura University of Science Education, for providing an enabling academic environment and for the intellectual resources that supported this research.

To my family, whose unwavering love, sacrificial support, and steadfast belief in my ability sustained me through the long hours, difficult moments, and occasional uncertainties that are the hallmark of undergraduate academic study—I owe more than words can adequately express. This dissertation is as much yours as it is mine.

Finally, I acknowledge the growing community of scholars, practitioners, and gender advocates whose published work and lived commitments provided the intellectual

scaffolding upon which this study was built. Their dedication to advancing gender equity in law enforcement and security sector institutions around the world continues to inspire.

Abstract

Gender disparity in operational deployments within the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) persists at the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban, Harare, where female officers are largely confined to administrative roles despite Section 56 of the 2013 Constitution, CEDAW, and UNSCR 1325. This study aimed to investigate the contributing factors and propose strategies for promoting gender equity in operational policing.

The study drew on four theoretical frameworks: Gender Role Theory (Eagly), Existentialist Feminist Theory (de Beauvoir), Glass Ceiling Theory, and Organisational Culture Theory (Schein), which collectively explain how institutional norms, stereotypes, and structural barriers marginalise women in law enforcement organisations.

A convergent parallel mixed-methods case study design, underpinned by a pragmatist philosophy, was adopted. The study population comprised officers at the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban. Using stratified random sampling, 50 questionnaires were distributed and 25 usable responses obtained. Twelve interview participants were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were processed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

Five principal barriers to female operational deployment were identified: a pervasive masculine organisational culture; inadequate gender-appropriate infrastructure at deployment sites; gender stereotyping in commanders' deployment decisions; unequal access to specialised operational training; and opaque deployment policies that vest excessive discretion in individual commanders. Female officers rated all barriers more severely than their male counterparts. Gender disparity was further found to negatively affect female officers' morale, career aspirations, and the unit's overall policing effectiveness and community trust.

The study recommends formalisation of merit-based deployment criteria, investment in gender-appropriate infrastructure, equitable access to operational training, visible leadership commitment to gender equity, and a structured mentorship programme for aspiring female operational officers.

In conclusion, gender disparity at the Support Unit is driven by embedded structural, cultural, and institutional barriers that demand deliberate and sustained policy intervention to address.

Keywords: Gender disparity, operational deployment, Zimbabwe Republic Police, organisational culture, gender stereotyping, policing effectiveness, gender equity.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BBA	Bachelor of Business Administration
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
HMICFRS	His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAPS	South African Police Service
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
ZGC	Zimbabwe Gender Commission
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

1.0 Introduction

Research shows that gender discrimination, also within policing institutions, is a barrier to good policing. In the Support Unit of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) Chikurubi Urban District, for instance, female police officers were assigned to administrative offices or desks, with no operational work assignments, as subordinates to male officers. The gender imbalance has implications not only on the effectiveness of police but also on community police relations and compliance with international treaties that promote gender equality that Zimbabwe is party to. The purpose of the study is to investigate the reasons for the gender imbalance in police operational deployment in the ZRP's Chikurubi Urban Support Unit and propose gender parity strategies. (UN Women, 2021; Smith, 2020).

1.1 Background to the Study

The lack of women in frontline policing, is not unique to Zimbabwe. The under representation of women frontline police officers is a global phenomenon, faced by both developed and developing nations. This section will locate the phenomenon, firstly at the international level, before narrowing the focus to the national level, and finally the Zimbabwe Republic Police's Chikurubi Urban Support Unit. This is to be reflected in a funnel structure from global to regional and then to national level in the following sections to show how the Chikurubi Urban police station female policemen are just part of the more general structural and cultural barriers.

Global Context

Despite the increasing number of policies and laws around the world that aim to promote gender equality in policing, women are still under represented in operational policing. In the UK, in 2022, 30% of police officers were women in England and Wales, but women were

under represented in specialist roles. In 2021, the Metropolitan Police Service reported that women only made up 14 percent of Specialist Firearms Command officers. This structural barrier existed in one of the world's most progressive police services. In a UK police services study, Dick and Jankowicz (2001) found that despite formal equality policies, masculine occupational cultures, informal exclusionary networks and supervisor level bias were strong barriers to women's access to operational roles.

Women represent about 13 percent of sworn police in the United States. Although the federal government has pursued various initiatives to increase workplace diversity, the percentage of women hired into a police department has not changed greatly in the past twenty years (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2020; Lonsway et al., 2003). According to the National Center for Women and Policing, women in policing in the United States have expressed concerns about biased physical fitness standards, an unfriendly organizational culture and unequal distribution of opportunity to work in specialized units. Concerning these issues, Garcia (2003) reported in the largest US study of its kind, that hundreds of female officers serving in a large urban department were informally (but consistently) told by their supervisors not to apply for high visibility operational assignments. They also received qualitative data that police supervisors used criteria such as "cultural fit" to exclude (known) female police officers from tactical teams. Informal barriers to the inclusion of women in operations suggest that the barriers to inclusion are cultural rather than structural.

Both the United Kingdom and the United States have enacted institutional changes to address these issues, with varied success. In the United Kingdom, the National Police Chiefs' Council enacted a Women in Policing Strategy which set targets for female representation in specialist operational departments and called for review of physical fitness testing for occupational relevance. However later inspection reports by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS, 2022) found that police culture in specialist firearms units became an obstacle to the institutional reform. The United States Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services promoted gender responsive recruitment and retention strategies from the early 2000s. The Bureau of Justice Statistics (2020) reported that the national proportion of sworn law enforcement officers who

are female has stagnated at 13 percent for over 20 years. Drawing on international evidence, policy change at the national level alone is insufficient to address the persistence of gender inequality within operational policing.

Regional Context: Africa and Southern Africa

The case is replicated elsewhere on the African continent. In South Africa, despite formal commitments under the Employment Equity Act and the SAPS Employment Equity Plan, women in the SAPS still experience obstacles to being deployed in operational roles within the service. A 2019 report by the ISS Africa organization found that there was a common and secured belief amongst Public Order Police members in South Africa that women were not physically capable of performing Public Order Police duties, effectively resulting in female exclusion from riot control and crowd control tasks. For context, the Public Order Police in South Africa perform a task that is very close to what the ZRP Support Unit performs.

Olusegun (2018) found that despite the Nigerian Police Force' operational deployment, the factors that constituted the institutional discrimination inhibiting female police officers included: Lack of gender-responsive ablution and rest rooms in policing stations; A male-centric attitude among police supervisors preferring to use male officers in policing operations related to public order and a patriarchal policing culture wherein policing was a male occupation even if female officers were qualified and physically fit for it. This could be generalized to the challenge of regional gender disparity in policing in Africa, and the need for regional and institutional solutions.

National Context: Zimbabwe and the ZRP

Zimbabwe has constitutional and legal instruments on gender equality, including Section 56 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) and the National Gender Policy (2013). The national gender policy commits all government departments and institutions to gender mainstreaming. Zimbabwe has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on

Women, Peace and Security, which encourages member states to increase the number of women in policing and security sectors.

In spite of these commitments, women in the ZRP face several institutional barriers to deployment. According to Machingura and Mlambo (2020), discriminatory deployment practices, lack of welfare facilities and an organizational culture that rewards hypermasculinity over gender-egalitarianism are secured systemic barriers to the integration of women in Zimbabwe's security sector. It is in the ZRP Support Unit immediately outside Chikurubi Urban where the problem is most acute. This paramilitary police unit, responsible for crowd control, riot control and tactical policing, has a critical mass of women in administrative roles, proving that the barriers to entry are not simply at the personal or individual level but also organizational and cultural.

1.2 Problem Statement

Notwithstanding that the constitution of Zimbabwe guarantees equality between women and men, and notwithstanding Zimbabwe's obligations towards CEDAW and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the Zimbabwe Republic Police deployments are gender imbalanced, as evidenced by the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban 2025 Tactical Deployment Plan, where there is a clear and measurable imbalance between men and women deployment in the Support Unit Chikurubi Urban. The unit consists of 800 officers, including 500 male and 300 female officers. Of the 500 male officers, 450 (90%) are deployed to the troops in the field while 50 (10%) are employed in administrative units. In contrast, of the 300 women officers in the ZRP only 80 (26.7%) are deployed operationally while 220 (73.3%) are deployed in administrative roles across different sections as of 2025 (ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban, 2025). The disparity is more obvious when one considers operational and administrative roles. Female officers account for 15.1% of the 530 officers deployed in operational duties and account for 81.5% of the 270 officers who are deployed in administrative duties respectively. This clearly shows that operational deployment at the Chikurubi Urban center is a male preserve whereas the majority of female officers are systematically relegated to administrative duties and reserve roles regardless of the unit to which they are deployed.

This exclusion has been noted internationally. For example, in its 2022 Annual Report, the Zimbabwe Gender Commission reported that there continued to be gender disparities in the composition of Zimbabwe's uniformed security services (i.e. its armed and police forces) with women clustering in administrative and support role and not occupying operational roles as provided for in Section 56 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Gender Commission, 2022). The present study therefore locates the patterns observed at Chikurubi Urban in the wider national trend therefore showing that the disparity under investigation is not an institutional anomaly but rather a macro level issue of gender inequality existing in Zimbabwe's security sector.

In the literature, similar systemic barriers to gender equality in policing have been identified across comparator policing agencies in Africa and elsewhere. They include: organizational culture, gender stereotyping, discriminatory posting practices, lack of supportive infrastructure, and lack of access to specialist operational training (Brown and Heidensohn, 2000; ISS Africa, 2019; Garcia, 2003). Despite the large international evidence base, there is a dearth of empirical evidence showing the drivers of the gender disparities in the operational deployment of paramilitary police officers in Zimbabwe and particularly at the Support Unit at the Chikurubi Urban Police Station, which makes it difficult for the ZRP leadership to have the evidence base to implement interventions that are appropriate for the specific contexts. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring opportunities and barriers of women's operational participation at Chikurubi Urban with a view to developing evidence-based interventions to promote gender equality within the operations unit.

1.3 Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following objectives:

i. To identify the barriers to operational deployment for female officers at the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban, Harare, Zimbabwe.

ii. To assess the impact of gender disparity on policing effectiveness and community trust at the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban.

iii. To propose evidence-based strategies to enhance gender equity in operational roles at the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban, Harare, Zimbabwe.

1.4 Research Questions

The study is directed by the following research questions:

i. What are the perceived barriers preventing the participation of female officers in operational deployments within the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban?

ii. How does gender disparity in operational deployments affect policing effectiveness and community trust within the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban?

iii. What evidence-based strategies can be implemented to promote gender equity in operational roles within the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban?

1.5 Significance of the Study

For the Zimbabwe Republic Police

The findings offered ZRP command explanations on female police officers' under-deployment in Chikurubi Urban, and the underlying reasons pertaining to this low percentage. Additionally, the findings act as a background to implementing appropriate initiatives to promote equality in the organization, ultimately improving female police officers' operational capacity and improving the overall service delivery of police operations.

For Female Officers

This study could be a tool for collecting and increasing the voices of policewomen on their lived experiences and perceptions of the Support Unit, which are often ignored in the paramilitarized culture of the ZRP. Its findings could be used to improve working conditions, increase operational opportunities for policewomen, and foster a more equitable and inclusive working environment.

For Policymakers

These findings may help with gender-mainstreaming policy formulation and implementation for the Ministry of Home Affairs and the ZRP, and with the achievement of international obligations for gender equality, such as those under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325.

For the Community

Internationally, it has been found that greater gender diversity in operational deployments improves relations between police and communities and increases public confidence and trust that policing services are more likely to respond to the needs of all its constituents, including women and children. These groups are more comfortable reporting particular types of crime to policewomen (Cordner and Cordner, 2011). The findings of this study impact the quality of police-community relationships in areas served by the Chikurubi Urban Support Unit.

For Academia

The findings discussed here contribute to the limited evidence base on gender and paramilitary policing institutions in Africa, and more recently, the growing evidence base on gender and policing in Zimbabwe specifically. The study also provides a foundation for future comparative or longitudinal research on gender and policing.

1.6 Delimitations and Scope of the Study

Geographically, the study was confined to the Support Unit Chikurubi Urban of the Zimbabwe Republic Police. The study's findings are not generalized to the other units and stations of the Zimbabwe Republic Police but are subject to further study. The study was limited by its organizational focus on operational deployments in the Support Unit. Its focus on the Support Unit excluded departments and other units within the ZRP. The study was also limited in its focus to organizational, cultural, structural, and individual-level variables

affecting gender within operational deployments. The study did not examine gender differences in promotion, pay and other aspects of career development. The study period went up to and included April 2026. The data collection occurred in April 2026. The study population consisted of male and female officers who are currently or formerly employed as part of the Support Unit. It also included senior officers and commanders involved in deployment decisions. Due to the study's convergent parallel mixed-methods case study design, structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were the only data collection instruments used in the research. It should be noted that observation and document analysis were limited to the Tactical Deployment Plan and its appendices only, whereby only self-reported perceptions and experiences of officers in the study were used to derive the findings.

1.7 Study Limitations

The study was also limited in that, as the ZRP is hierarchical and carries out a disciplined approach to its work, some respondents may have been hesitant to answer honestly regarding organizational practice where they perceived that it could lead to retaliation. This risk was countered by guarantees of anonymity and voluntary participation, and by the use of self administered questionnaires that reduced the social desirability bias.

Second, permission to undertake research within a security institution, which could include questions of access to the institution and also information which might be classified or otherwise restricted, would be requested in writing and in good time from ZRP authorities. Permission was granted. Third, it relied on a purposive and stratified random sample from one unit. Therefore, these results were only representative of one ZRP police unit and police force - the Chikurubi Urban Support Unit. Therefore, these results are only representative of the performance of the Unit (Chikurubi Urban Support Unit). Also, as a researcher, gender issues may influence the bias of the researcher during data collection and data interpretation. To overcome these limitations, triangulation was undertaken using multiple data collection instruments in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. To address these, reflexivity, peer debriefing and member checking processes were employed. The data collection methods were further constrained by time and resources, with the research design

developed and implemented to be effective within those parameters, resulting in sufficient depth and breadth.

1.8 Assumptions

The study was based on the following assumptions: that respondents gave accurate and honest replies to each question, to the best of their knowledge and experience; that the ZRP provided the institutional access and permissions needed to conduct the research; that the research instruments used in the study were sufficiently clear and culturally appropriate to elicit valid responses from the target population; and that the sample was representative of the general population of Support Unit members.

1.9 Key Terms

Gender Disparity: The systematic and unequal treatment of individuals based on gender within an organisational setting, resulting in differential outcomes in deployment, career progression, or access to opportunities.

Operational Deployment: The assignment of police officers to active, frontline policing functions including crowd control, riot management, tactical operations, and other field-based duties within the ZRP Support Unit's mandate.

Policing Effectiveness: The capacity of a law enforcement unit to achieve desired outcomes in crime prevention, public order maintenance, and community safety, including the quality of police-community relations and public trust.

Organisational Culture: The shared values, beliefs, norms, and assumptions that shape behaviour and decision-making within the ZRP Support Unit, including informal practices related to deployment decision-making.

Gender Mainstreaming: The systematic integration of gender perspectives into all organisational policies, procedures, and practices in order to promote equitable outcomes for male and female officers.

1.10 Chapter Summary

In this chapter a theoretical and contextual framework for this study has been laid out using a funnel approach that moves down from the global and regional level, to a national level, Zimbabwe. This chapter has shown that the gender gap in operational policing is a universal and empirical phenomenon. It has been suggested that interventions to the UK and USA have resulted in limited effect, unless they included active redesign of organizational culture. The problem statement is based on institutional statistics from ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban 2025 Tactical Deployment Plan, as well as the Zimbabwe Gender Commission (2022). The ZGC affirmed that the story is in line with the national picture. The aim, research questions, importance, delimitations, limitations, assumptions, and key terms of the research study will now be set out clearly in order to form the framework of the remaining chapters of the dissertation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

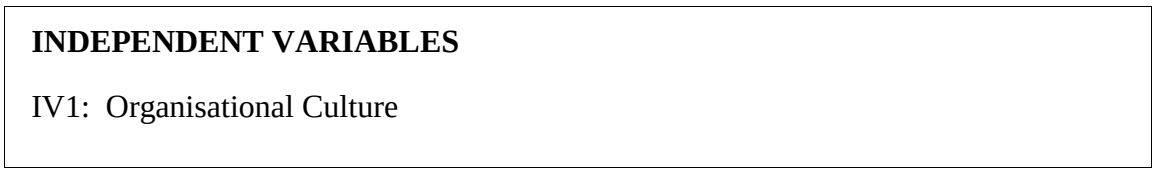
2.0 Introduction

The chapter reviews conceptual and empirical literature relevant to the study. It is organized into four sections examining: the conceptual framework which focuses on the independent and dependent variables of the study, the theoretical framework which examines the theoretical lenses through which the study problem is viewed, the empirical literature organized along the three research objectives of the study, and the research gap which highlights the need for the current study.

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is presented in this section. In the framework, the independent variables which were perceived to influence and cause the gender disparity in the operational deployment of personnel in Chikurubi Urban Support Unit are demonstrated. The dependent variable is shown in the model below and the framework is illustrated in Figure 1 below. Further discussion of each variable is provided below.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Study



IV2: Gender Stereotyping and Bias IV3: Institutional Deployment Policies IV4: Supportive Infrastructure IV5: Training and Development Opportunities
↓
DEPENDENT VARIABLE **Extent of Gender Disparity in Operational Deployments at the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban** *(Measured as the proportion of female officers assigned to operational roles relative to male officers)*
↑
MODERATING VARIABLES MV1: Leadership Commitment to Gender Equity MV2: Seniority and Length of Service of Female Officers

Source: Adapted from study variables informed by Brown and Heidensohn (2000); Garcia (2003); ISS Africa (2019); Prenzler (2002)

Independent Variables

Organizational Culture: These are the unwritten rules, attitudes and norms that exist within the ZRP Support Unit. As the unit has a paramilitary structure, it has a strongly masculine culture. These conditions can also create a situation where female officers are not viewed as suitable for operational work, as the unit culture is largely that men are assumed to be better suited.

Another issue is gender stereotyping and bias; commanders and other officers may hold stereotypes about what they think women can or cannot do. They may, for example, believe women do not have the necessary physical strength or mental fitness to carry out street

policing, a belief that may be held explicitly or implicit, and used in selection to front line operational roles.

Institutional Deployment Policies: These are the rules and procedures used to decide who is deployed and may be an undocumented or non-uniform process across different officers within a given institution. When it is the commanders' prerogative to deploy, the absence of gender-integration policies means that even when not explicitly discriminatory, women officers are often passed over for deployment.

Supportive Infrastructure: This refers to ablution facilities, changing facilities, and rest facilities found at operational deployment posts. In many policing environments in Africa, ablution, change and rest facilities are usually designed for use by men and not available for women. As a result, women police officers do not have access to basic amenities, which makes it impossible for them to work in deployments.

Training and Development Opportunities: This examines whether female officers are given the same opportunities as their male colleagues to undertake training to enable them to work in specialist operational roles. If women are routinely not taken on specialist training, they will not be qualified for deployment in frontline roles, meaning that the disparity in deployments is perpetuated and secured in the system regardless of ability.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was the extent of the gender gap in the operational deployment in the Support Unit Chikurubi Urban, which was measured in this study by the proportion of female and male officers deployed to crowd control, riot control, crowd dispersal and any other tactical operations. Each of the five independent variables is expected to affect the outcome both directly and indirectly.

Moderating Variables

Another two factors that may moderate the influence of independent variables on dependent variables are the commitment of unit leadership to gender equality and the presence of indirect barriers, such as stereotyping and biased policies. Second, for more senior female

officers who may possess more experience and be more likely to enter operational roles than junior females, years of service are added as a moderating variable.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the unequal deployment of female officers to operational duties at Chikurubi Urban is not the result of a single factor but a complex set of interrelated factors: organizational culture, gender stereotyping, deployment policies, lack of facilities, and unequal access to training opportunities. This framework guides the development of the research instruments used and is used in the interpretation of the study's findings.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theory itself is based on four theoretical approaches, which explain how gender inequality is introduced and reproduced in operational policing, and which in turn have been related to the research problem and the evidence developed during Chapter One.

2.2.1 Gender Role Theory

Gender Role Theory, proposed and formulated by Alice Eagly and Wendy Wood (Eagly, 1987; Eagly and Wood, 1999), theorizes that social role theory explains how and why the behaviors and characteristics of men and women differ as a result of the roles assigned by society to each gender. Descriptive gender norms describe how men and women behave typically, and prescriptive gender norms describe how men and women should behave. Building on Social Role Theory, Eagly argues that this division of labor results in gender-differentiated communal and agentic traits, with women being expected to be high on communal dimensions (nurturing, empathetic and oriented to relationships) and men being expected to be high on agentic dimensions (dominant, assertive, and oriented to tasks).

Operational police activities such as riot control, tactical policing and crowd control, are culturally constructed as agentic, physically powerful and masculine (Brown and Heidensohn, 2000). This may lead to women being considered unsuitable for operational policing due to a "role incongruity" between agentic, physically powerful masculine characteristics and gender stereotype-congruent female characteristics (Eagly and Karau, 2002). Role incongruity, defined as prejudice against women wanting to be operationally

deployed because they violate prescriptive gender norms, can be cited as an explanation for the ZRP Support Unit's gendered assignment of women officers to administrative roles reflecting communal gender norms, even in the absence of formal discriminatory policies.

This is empirically obvious when considering the case of Chikurubi Urban. Firstly, 73.3 percent of Support Unit's female personnel are confined to administrative duties. This situation is perfectly consistent with the role incongruity mechanism proffered by Eagly and Karau (2002), where prescriptive gender role expectations equate operational deployment with masculinity, a site from which females are implicitly excluded. This is in spite of the constitutional ban on gender discrimination in Zimbabwe (Zimbabwe Police, 2004).

2.2.2 Existentialist Feminist Theory: Simone de Beauvoir

The theoretical basis for the analysis in the essay is borrowed from Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminist philosophy, as expressed in her book, The Second Sex (1949). At the center of her theory is the idea that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman", which is one of the most momentous statements in the history of feminist theory. In making this argument, de Beauvoir was denying biological determinism, and held that femininity was not a natural, essential state, but rather something which is conferred depending upon the culture's values and institutions: femininity is produced and reproduced by cultural norms, institutions, and relations.

For the purposes of this research, de Beauvoir's analysis reveals how the category of female Support Unit officers in Chikurubi Urban are constructed as unsuitable for operational policing. In paramilitary culture, being feminine is implicitly understood as the opposite of being (male) operationally active and women cannot combine their femininity with being operationally active. The female officer is made, a biological woman made into an administrative worker, when a female officer is given a desk job because of unit culture, gender-sensitive operations infrastructure is lacking, and women are excluded from training for physical skills and the command of equipment normally given to their male peers. Each of these institutional factors is a means of maintaining an understanding of a female officer as administrative and always non-operational, regardless of actual skills or aspirations.

De Beauvoir's theory bears a close relation to both the Gender Role Theory of Eagly and Wood (1999) and the Organizational Culture Theory of Edgar Schein (2004), but adds a feminist perspective. Where Eagly goes on to identify qualitative social roles, de Beauvoir reveals how this ontological process is internalized as part of the individual's own self. If gender equity is to be sustained, de Beauvoir writes, it presupposes the reconstruction of the institutional conditions through which womanhood in the ZRP Support Unit is socially produced.

2.2.3 Glass Ceiling Theory

The term glass ceiling was first coined by Morrison, White and Van Velsor (1987) to refer to the seemingly invisible barriers that keep women from rising to the highest ranks and to specialist positions in organizations, regardless of their qualifications and achievements. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia and Vanneman (2001) attempted a rigorous definition: the glass ceiling (1) is a gender-based inequality, (2) is more pronounced higher up the organization, (3) is not simply a proxy for other inequalities, and (4) is an inequality of advancement opportunities, not just of levels of hierarchy.

Glass Ceiling Theory can explain the continued disenfranchisement of women officers in Chikurubi Urban's operational deployments as women are excluded through informal barriers (e.g. networks of exclusion and bias), supervisory discretion, and institutional inertia which are not captured by formal policy during deployment selection. Written data, collected on female operational deployments in Chikurubi Urban, provides a quantitative analysis into this paramilitary policing glass ceiling. Despite constitutional and policy imperatives that secure equality, only 15.1 percent of all operationally deployed SU officers (i.e. those who spend the majority of their time on operational duties) were female. The women of the Support Unit made up 37.5 percent of the unit's complement of 800 officers. Their exclusion from operationally deployed positions is precisely the pattern that Cotter et al. (2001) present as a distinctive signature of the glass ceiling: an inequality that persists not because women are ineligible for a role but because of the invisible barriers of organizational practice.

2.2.4 Organizational Culture Theory

The Organizational Culture Theory of Edgar Schein (Schein, 1985; 2004) also conceptualizes how espoused values and deeply embedded values, beliefs and assumptions shape organizations, including their rituals and resistance to change. He defines three levels of organizational culture: the level of artifacts, consisting of visible structures, rituals and symbols; the level of espoused values, consisting of formal policies and declared principles; and the level of basic underlying assumptions, consisting of unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs.

In paramilitary police organisations like the ZRP Support Unit, masculine culture is embedded at the level of underlying assumptions. Policing capability is unconsciously equated with strength and masculinity. According to Schein (2004), changing organizational culture is most difficult at the level of underlying assumptions and this explains why gender equity policies adopted at the artifact and espoused value levels may have little impact on the deployment of female officers. This theoretical understanding directly informs the study's third objective, for it suggests that sustainable reform at Chikurubi Urban requires reforming not only the prison's structure and policies but also the prison's underlying cultural assumptions.

2.3 Empirical Literature According to Research Objectives

Objective 1: Overcoming Barriers to Deploying Female Officers

Prenzler & Sinclair's (2013) systematic review of the status of women police officers across Australia found that physical fitness test standards used in the selection of officers for tactical and operational units were applied in a manner that systematically discriminated against female police officers. Commonly applied standards for operational policing in Australia were not occupationally valid as they measure physical characteristics that are not required for performance of operational policing tasks, in effect institutionalized gender barriers not justified according to operational policing standards.

These findings have been replicated in a comparative analysis of women police in Britain and the USA, by Brown and Heidensohn (2000). They also identified: physical culture and fitness ideology equating operational competency with masculine physicality; sexual

harassment and gender bullying in police organizations; systematic exclusion from informal advice, coaching, mentoring and social networks; and glass ceiling practices that precluded access to specialist operations as key factors limiting advancement of women police. Such barriers have now been documented in two of the world's largest policing jurisdictions, and the barriers identified in the present research at Chikurubi Urban accord with the international literature.

In a study of a large U.S. urban police department, Garcia (2003) found that the cultural norms of "doing gender" (informed by West and Zimmerman's (1987) interactional theory of gender) construct policing as an institution that marginalizes women from high visibility operational assignments. Garcia found that, even when women officers performed work comparable to their male counterparts, supervisory assessments of women's performance were systematically biased against women as less qualified for operational assignments.

ISS Africa (2019) of the South African Police Service noted that the bias of women being unfit for riot control duties common amongst the Public Order Police, which the ZRP Support Unit is somewhat structurally similar to, was operationalised through informal deployment decisions that resulted in female officers being systematically assigned to administrative and logistical tasks in such units. Olusegun (2018) reported that the lack of welfare and ablution facilities for women in operational environments was used as an exclusionary mechanism in the Nigeria Police Force that made field detachment unfeasible for female officers irrespective of their choice or qualifications.

Objective 2: Impact of Gender Disparity on Policing Effectiveness and Community Trust

Reviewing the substantial available empirical evidence from the United States, Cordner and Cordner (2011) concluded that police departments with higher proportions of women officers are measurably better at some aspects of community policing such as domestic violence or sexual assault call response. They also found that women officers are instinctively more likely to de-escalate, engage with, and humanize the people they deal with on a given day, which is strongly correlated with community trust scores in departmental assessments.

International experience suggests the effects on policing effectiveness and community trust would be similar at the Chikurubi Urban Support Unit.

Rabe-Hemp (2008) utilized national survey data to test whether male and female officers differ in the style of policing. Rabe-Hemp found statistically important differences between male and female officers. Female officers are statistically considerably more likely than male officers to utilize a community or de-escalatory style of policing. Rabe-Hemp concluded that a diverse operational unit expands the toolset available to a department and thus its ability to adapt to complex public order situations.

Sun (2007) studied survey data from several police departments in the United States of America. He found that the presence of female officers in patrol and operational divisions had a considerably positive effect on the quality of police-community interactions. Sun concluded that the presence of female officers in patrol and operational divisions positively impacted the quality of communication, increasing public trust. The findings of this study when extrapolated to the Zimbabwean context indicate that the non-deployment of female officers in operations such as has been the case in Chikurubi Urban could be inhibiting the unit's effectiveness and legitimacy in the communities it serves.

Objective 3: Strategies to Increase Gender Equity in Operations

Prenzler (2002) reviewed the evidence base on gender equality interventions in Australian police services. Three interventions were found to have been trialed with an important increase in the proportion of police women promoted. These were: setting physical fitness testing standards that are occupationally valid and gender-neutral; introducing formal mentorship programs to link women police officers to senior officers in operational areas; and the use of supervisor performance assessments to incentivize organizational improvement in relation to gender equality. Prenzler found that the latter two (which together address institution-wide structural impediments to gender equity and supervisor level bias) were considerably more effective.

In the course of research with UK police forces, Silvestri (2017) highlighted that achieving sustainable gender equality in policing could not be accomplished through structural gender equality reforms alone, but needed to be accompanied by cultural changes to leadership. Gender equality initiatives that combined structural reforms with pro-active cultural changes at the leadership level, such as modeling inclusive leadership behaviors and championing the involvement of women at the operational level, were found to be more sustainable.

For example, UN Women (2020) reports that several African countries have achieved gender mainstreaming on security sector level. The Rwanda National Police is now a case-study model for near gender parity in terms of operational deployment by combining a gender-sensitive training academy curriculum with strong and visible leadership commitment to gender equality, and accountability of the police to local communities. The Rwandan model shows that African countries can achieve gender equality within operational policing, if there is institutional will to implement policies and procedures that support it.

At sub-regional Southern Africa level, the Botswana Police Service gender-sensitive reform initiatives across its operational departments have included the introduction of gender-neutral physical fitness tests and a formalized women's empowerment network. The Botswana Ministry of Defence, Justice and Security (2019) review of policy implementation and impact found increases in the proportion of women police officers in operational posts within two years of the policy being put in place. The similarities in the cultural, institutional and resource contexts of the two countries' police services make the Botswana experience especially informative for our understanding of the ZRP.

2.4 Research Gap

International, regional and national literature gives a fairly well-documented picture of the nature, causes and consequences of gender imbalances in policing and of evidence-based mechanisms to close the gender gap. However, with some exceptions, it has largely focused on the global north and on other African countries, mainly South Africa and Nigeria. So far, not much scholarly work has been done on the causes of the gender imbalance in operational deployments in paramilitary police units including the Zimbabwe Republic Police Support

Unit at Chikurubi Urban. A study by Machingura and Mlambo (2020) on the challenges of gender in the Zimbabwean security sector did not focus on operational deployments in paramilitary police units. We aim to address this empirical gap by providing context-sensitive evidence-based insights into the barriers, impacts, and solutions for the Chikurubi Urban Support Unit (CUSU).

2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter a review of the conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature related to the research focus was conducted. The conceptual framework was developed to identify the five independent variables: organizational culture, gender stereotyping and bias, institutional deployment policies, supportive infrastructure, and training and development opportunities that may impact upon the extent to which gender disparity may exist in operational deployments. Theories used included Gender Role Theory, Existentialist Feminist Theory, Glass Ceiling Theory, and Organizational Culture Theory. The results of the empirical review, organized according to the research objective, suggested that the barriers, impacts and interventions identified in international literature are applicable to the Zimbabwean and Chikurubi Urban context. The final section of the chapter identified the research gap that this study fills.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

Research methodology, which Creswell and Creswell (2018) define as the theoretical framework of methods, procedures, and tools used to collect, analyze, and interpret data in a research study, offers the necessary procedures to conduct research in a transparent, defensible, and scientifically credible manner and helps ensure the evidence produced is sufficient to answer the research questions posed. This chapter discusses the research methodology, the reasons given for employing this particular methodology, from the philosophical underpinnings of the approach to the adoption of particular data analysis

procedures, as the most appropriate for the objectives of this study, and the context in which the research on the factors contributing to the gender disparity in operational deployment in the Zimbabwe Republic Police Support Unit Chikurubi Urban was conducted. The chapter discussed the research philosophy and design, study population, sampling methods, research instruments, method of data presentation and analysis, measures of reliability and validity, and ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Philosophy

The philosophical worldview that guided this research is pragmatism. Pragmatism is the philosophical position outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) and initially proposed by Dewey (1908) and James (1907) which opposes the philosophical dichotomy of positivism (the notion that there is one single objective reality that can be measured) and interpretivism (the idea that reality is socially constructed and can only be understood through subjective meaning-making). Pragmatism, by contrast, takes a pluralist approach, locating research questions as prior to philosophical doctrine, and taking as a criterion the appropriateness of research methodologies.

Two interrelated reasons suggest that this study should be located within a pragmatist epistemology. In answering the research questions, quantitative measurement of the extent and pattern of gender disparity in operational deployments was required, in combination with qualitative exploration of the experiences of women police officers and the processes through which gender disparity is constructed and maintained. The pragmatist commitment to base knowledge on action suited the applied purposes of this study, which were not just to understand gender disparity at Chikurubi Urban, but to generate knowledge that could provide the evidence for institutional change. Delimited by the above, no single philosophical tradition would do.

3.2 Research Design and Justification

This study used a convergent parallel mixed-methods case study design. Each element of this design will be justified.

The case study was considered the best design for the current study as the study seeks to investigate a contemporary organizational phenomenon gender disparity in operational deployments in its specific real-life context, the Support Unit at Chikurubi Urban, and to understand the complex interplay of factors driving this phenomenon in depth rather than across a wide sample of settings. Yin (2018) argues that the case study is the most appropriate research design where the researcher seeks to answer "how" and "why" questions about complex contemporary phenomena within bounded real-life contexts. Support Unit Chikurubi Urban was a bounded case a unit with a clear boundary both in terms of its number of inhabitants and its institutional setting, making it possible to study gender inequality as something embedded in the context.

A mixed methods design was used in response to the complexity of the research question. It was considered that a quantitative survey using structured questionnaires could best explore the scale and profile of gender disparity in operational deployments, producing numerical measures of deployment ratios, barriers to deployment, and organizational culture scores, from a representative sample of officers. Understanding the lived experience of women officers, as well as the construction of the gender gap by commanders and the unit's cultural identity as a paramilitary organization, required a qualitative approach. I employed a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark 2018), where quantitative and qualitative data were collected in parallel; this enabled me to construct a layered understanding of the research problem. I based this methodology on practical considerations, as the qualitative element would be analyzed alongside the quantitative within the available time frame.

3.3 Study Population

The population of the study comprised all officers working at the Zimbabwe Republic Police Support Unit Chikurubi Urban. The researchers only found officers at that station relevant to the study questions. They were further divided into three subsets. Respondents were separated into female operational and administrative officers of the unit as primary implements of gender disparity in operational deployments and the audience best equipped to describe barriers to female entry and retention based on lived experience and male officers (both operational and administrative) whose conceptions of the role of gender disparity and

organizational culture were the object of study in an institutional context. The third sub-group consisted of senior commanders and personnel administrators who are directly involved in deciding on deployments, and whose decision-making practices and attitudes are central to understanding how gender disparity is reproduced at the operational level.

According to the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban 2025 Tactical Deployment Plan, the total number of officers in the unit was 800, with 500 (62.5%) being males and 300 (37.5%) being females. 530 officers were deployed with operational troops, while 270 were attached to different sections for administrative duties. Of the female officers, 80 (26.7%) were deployed operationally and 220 (73.3%) were deployed administratively. Of the 500 male officers surveyed, 450 (90%) were in operational deployment, while 50 (10%) were in administrative deployment. The study also surveyed a small, sub-sample of the study population, which consisted of an estimated 20 to 30 senior officers, commanders and personnel administrators, involved in the unit deployment decision-making process.

Given the various mixed methods design of this study, two distinct and complementary sampling approaches were employed , specifically, stratified random sampling for the quantitative component and purposive sampling for the qualitative component. The rationale for each of the items is as follows.

For the quantitative component, stratified random sampling was utilized. It was used to select participants for the structured questionnaire. Stratified random sampling represents a probability sampling technique in which researchers first divide the population into mutually exclusive subgroups (strata) based on characteristics relevant to the research, while the team then randomly selects participants from each stratum (Bryman, 2016). In this study, researchers stratified the population by two criteria: gender (male and female) and role category (operational vs. administrative). Stratification ensured proportional representation of key subgroups in the quantitative sample, which was essential for valid comparison of the perceptions and experiences of male and female officers and of those in operational versus in administrative roles. Considering the total population of 800 officers at Chikurubi Urban, researchers applied a sampling fraction of 12.5 percent. This application yielded a stratified random sample target of 100 officers. This revised fraction , which reduced an initial

projection of 30 percent , the unit adopted in recognition of its operational deployment cycle. This cycle routinely rendered a substantial proportion of officers inaccessible to non-embedded researchers during data collection. The team prepared one hundred questionnaires. They allocated these proportionally across the four strata for distribution to accessible officers. However, during data collection, the available sample shrank further. Of the total 100 questionnaires that were prepared, only 50 could actually be distributed: the remaining 50 targeted officers had been deployed on strictly defined operational duties and were at the time of data collection then physically inaccessible to the researcher, having been scattered across various operational locations that were beyond the researcher's reach. Of the 50 questionnaires that were distributed to accessible officers, 25 were returned in a usable condition, yielding an effective response rate of 50.0 percent as calculated on distributed questionnaires. The study thus advanced through three stages: from an initial target sample of 100, to a distributed sample of 50, to a usable achieved sample of 25. This reduction was completely attributable to the actual institutional operational reality of the unit and not to any deficiency present in the research design. Despite this reduction, researchers achieved a sample of 25. This sample remained a representative subset of the target population. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) affirm that smaller samples are epistemologically defensible in organizational research settings. This is true where operational constraints restrict access, provided representativeness is demonstrated. As confirmed by the demographic profile in Section 4.2, the sample achieved closely mirrored the unit's actual gender, rank, and deployment composition. Furthermore, the quantitative findings were fully triangulated through 12 semi-structured interviews. These interviews independently corroborated every major finding while strengthening the credibility of conclusions drawn from the quantitative data.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select approximately 12 participants for the semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling is a non-probability technique in which participants are deliberately selected based on their ability to provide information-rich, relevant data on the research topic for the study (Patton, 2015). This approach works well for qualitative inquiry because the goal does not seek statistical representativeness but generates deep, subtle insights from participants who possess direct

and relevant experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Eight female officers underwent purposive selection from both the operational as well as the administrative strata. Four senior officers emerged from those who made deployment decisions.

3.4 Sampling Techniques

Table 1: Summary of Sampling Techniques, Sample Sizes and Research Instruments by Stratum

Stratum	**Category / Sub-Group**	**Population (N)**	**Sampling Technique**	**Sample Size**	**Research Instrument**
1	Female Officers – Operational	80	Stratified Random Sampling	3 (3.8%)	Structured Questionnaire
2	Female Officers – Administrative	220	Stratified Random Sampling	7 (3.2%)	Structured Questionnaire
3	Male Officers – Operational	450	Stratified Random Sampling	14 (3.1%)	Structured Questionnaire
4	Male Officers Administrative	50	Stratified Random Sampling	1 (2.0%)	Structured Questionnaire
	QUANTITATIVE TOTAL	**800**		**25**	
5	Female Officers Operational & Administrative (Purposive)	300	Purposive Sampling	8	Semi-Structured Interview Guide

6	Senior Officers / Commanders / Personnel Administrators	20–30	Purposive Sampling	4	Semi-Structured Interview Guide
	QUALITATIVE TOTAL			**12**	

Source: ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban 2025 Tactical Deployment Plan; Author's own construction.

3.5 Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide were used to collect data, the rationale behind each instrument is described below.

3.5.1 Structured Questionnaire

The questionnaire was used as a data collection tool to find quantitative data from the stratified random sample of officers. The structured questionnaire was a particularly appropriate tool for the quantitative component of this study because it enabled the standardized and efficient collection of data from a relatively large number of respondents within a limited timeframe which is essential given the operational schedules and institutional constraints of ZRP officers (Bryman, 2016). This minimized interviewer bias, while allowing for answers to be both comparable and more reliable, as respondents were answering the same questions in the same formats.

The questionnaire was divided onto four sections: background information including gender, rank, length of service and whether currently deployed to an operational theatre or an administrative posting. Section B included five Likert scale items (1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree) to elicit participant views on the five independent variables in the conceptual framework (organizational culture, gender stereotyping, institutional deployment policies, support infrastructure, and access to operational training). Section C included closed-ended questions on the perceived influence of gender imbalance on operational performance and

public trust. Section D included open-ended questions about barriers to gender equity and recommendations for promoting gender equity. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a small group of officers not included in the main sample. Changes were made to the questionnaire following the pilot test to improve its clarity and validity.

3.5.2 Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Qualitative data were collected from the purposively selected sample using a semi-structured interview guide (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015). The semi-structured interview was chosen as it is the most appropriate qualitative instrument for this study because it combines the structural consistency of pre-determined open-ended questions, meaning that all key thematic areas are covered with each participant, with the flexibility to allow for elaboration and exploration of unanticipated themes and enable participants to articulate their accounts in their own words.

The informed interview guide for the qualitative data collection included the interviewee's experiences of the deployment decision-making processes at Chikurubi Urban, the interviewee's views of the unit's organizational culture and its impact on staff deployment decisions, the obstacles to operational female officers' participation and barriers observed by interviewees, the influence of gender inequality on the overall operational performance and cohesion of the assigned group, and recommendations on strategies that could improve gender equality within the unit. The researcher carried out the interviews in a private, confidential setting at the Support Unit to avoid being overheard or recognized. With the participants' consent, written notes were taken during each interview to ensure the qualitative data collected were accurate and complete.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures are the steps undertaken by the researcher before and while collecting the data. In this section we describe the steps that were taken in order to collect data in a systematic, ethical and rigorous way.

- Formal consent was sought and an official letter from Bindura University of Science Education was obtained to collect data.

- Agreements were made with the relevant department and Support Unit to allow data collection and access to Chikurubi Urban.

- Participants were told the purpose of the research, that it was voluntary, and that their confidentiality and their right to withdraw were respected.

- Questionnaires were distributed and returned to all accessible officers in the four strata. It was assured that anonymity was preserved by using sealed envelopes. Out of the 100 questionnaires that the researcher had prepared, only 50 were administered to the officers that could be accessed. The remaining 50 questionnaires could not be administered as the officers were on elevated operational deployment.

- The semi-structured interviews with the purposively selected sample of 12 study participants were conducted in a private and confidential environment, with notes of key responses and themes taken.

3.7 Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures

3.7.1 Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires was subjected to coding and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). SPSS is widely used in social science research and is a strong statistical package for the social sciences. These include computing frequencies, percentages, means, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients, and several inferential statistical tests (Bryman, 2016). A unique code number was assigned to each completed questionnaire before analysis. They were screened for missing, incomplete, and erroneous responses prior to analysis. Questionnaires with more than 20 percent of their items missing were discarded in order to maintain data quality.

Descriptive statistics were calculated for each variable using SPSS, and frequencies and percentages were shown for each response option. Means were computed for each item of the Likert scale and by construct. Cross-tabulations were performed on the responses of male and female officers and those in operational versus administrative positions. These comparisons reveal whether the attitudes of male and female officers or operational and administrative officers differ systematically on any of the independent variables.

The data are presented in frequency tables and bar charts, and the SPSS program was used to create pie charts in order to indicate the proportions of information (relative percentages of female and male officers in operational and administrative positions, and relative proportions of respondents in their demographic categories). For the presentation of data: bar charts were used to illustrate the mean Likert-scale scores of the five independent variables as broken down by gender and by deployment category; frequency tables were used to illustrate the breakdown of the sample demographics and for the item-by-item breakdown of the closed-ended responses to each item within Section C of the questionnaire.

3.7.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews were hand-coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. As a specialist software program was not used, the data were analyzed using printouts of the transcripts, a pen, a highlighter, and a printout of a paper and pen-based thematic codebook to organize the data. This is explicitly stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), who consider thematic analysis to be a theoretical and analytical endeavor that does not rely on any specific software program.

Phase 1 (Familiarization with the Data): All notes from the interviews were transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were read through at least twice in their entirety, and notes were added in the margins to mark early thoughts and ideas that stood out. In **Phase 2 (Generating Initial Codes),** the researcher went through the printed transcripts, highlighting with a felt-tip pen everything pertaining to the research questions, and noting descriptive codes in the margin. In **Phase 3 (Searching for Themes),** the researcher collated codes into candidate themes. **Phase 4 (Reviewing Themes):** In this phase, the researcher went back to the transcripts and reread all of the data that have been coded to each candidate theme and considered the plausibility of the themes in relation to the data. Phase 5 (Defining and Naming Themes): Once all themes have been produced, this phase entails giving each theme a final name and definition, whereby each theme is described and its unique essence is distinguished from other themes. Phase 6 (Producing the Report): The final phase of the thematic analysis involved interpreting and writing the themes to produce a thick, rich

description in this chapter, and supporting the themes from participants' quotes. Participants are only identified by pseudonym or role-based identifier, to protect their anonymity.

3.7.3 Data Integration

In accordance with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the analysis of quantitative and qualitative results was brought together in the interpretation phase (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Here, the researcher examined convergence (i.e., when quantitative and qualitative results lead to the same conclusion) and divergence (i.e., when quantitative and qualitative results describe different but complementary results) in the results of both methods. Both the convergence and divergence approaches are employed to develop an understanding of the reasons for the operational deployment gender divide at Chikurubi Urban.

3.8 Reliability and Validity

Pilot testing was done with five to ten officers, all drawn from an equivalent ZRP unit that was not sampled in this study, to identify and rephrase any unclear, non-neutral, non-familiar or otherwise culturally insensitive questions prior to the instrument being used in the main study.

Cronbach's Alpha: The reliability of the suggested Likert scale items for each construct was calculated using Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of the constructs, as suggested by Nunnally (1978) whose recommended cut-off value for reliability is greater than 0.70.

Triangulation: Data triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources, such as the questionnaire and the interview, and from multiple participants, such as female officers, male officers, and commanders. Triangulation establishes credibility and confirmability, showing the study's conclusions are based on more than one source of evidence (Patton, 2015).

Member checking: To ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the qualitative results (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the key themes and interpretations from the interviews were presented to a sub-sample of interviewees. The interviewees were then invited to confirm, reject, or provide further detail on the researcher's interpretations once the data were transcribed and thematic analysis was undertaken.

Reflexivity: The researcher maintained a reflexive journal during the data collection and analysis phases in which potential sources of bias, assumptions, and interpretive decisions were recorded. Reflexivity increases the dependability and confirmability of qualitative analysis by making the researcher role in the knowledge production process transparent.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was sought and granted from the relevant authorities in the Zimbabwe Republic Police as well as the Bindura University of Science Education Research Ethics Committee following the ethical guidelines for conducting social science research in Zimbabwe. Data collection only commenced after ethical clearance had been sought and granted by both authorities.

Participation was entirely voluntary. No officer was subject to coercion by virtue of their position or by their supervisor to engage in this study. All officers were provided with an information sheet detailing the purpose of the study, what participation involved, how confidentiality and anonymity would be protected, and that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or adverse consequence.

Data were treated as confidential. Questionnaire responses were anonymous, and no identifying information was documented on the questionnaire forms. To protect participants' confidentiality, transcripts and notes will be saved to a password-protected drive accessible only to the researcher. Transcripts and notes will be deleted at the end of the study. In any published outputs, participants will be referred to using pseudonyms or allocated occupational identifiers. The results of the study are reported collectively and do not include any information that identifies a study participant.

As a result of the ZRP's militaristic and hierarchical culture, every effort was made to ensure that no participant was negatively impacted at work due to their participation, or otherwise. Candidates could not be interviewed within earshot or line of sight from their commanders. Every effort was made to protect participants from professional repercussions for their participation.

3.10 Chapter Summary

In summary, the methodological strategies and procedures that were adopted in seeking to answer the research questions regarding gender disparity in operational deployment at the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban have been described and justified. The pragmatist philosophy, the convergent parallel mixed-methods case study, stratified random and purposive sampling, structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, and the data analysis and validity procedures adopted have yielded credible, useful and ethical evidence. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, which provides all the relevant descriptive statistical functions required for the present study. All qualitative data were manually analyzed using a six-phase thematic analysis. Printed transcripts of the interviews and a handwritten codebook were used to ease the analysis. Descriptive statistics were represented graphically by pie charts to show proportions, bar graphs to compare gender and deployed versus non-deployed groups, and frequency tables for demographic characteristics.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyzes and discusses data from the 25 useable questionnaires and the 12 semi-structured interviews that were administered with members of the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban. The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26.0. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations and inferential statistics including Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients and independent samples t-tests. Qualitative data from the twelve semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework for thematic analysis. Each table or figure is then followed by an explanation and contextualization of the findings within the theory and literature discussed in Chapter Two.

4.1 Response Rate

Table 4.1: Questionnaire Response Rate

Category	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**	**Remark**
Questionnaires Printed	100	—	Total prepared for distribution
Not Distributed — Strict Deployment Operational Deployment	50	50.0% of printed	Officers on deployment; inaccessible to researcher
Questionnaires Distributed to Accessible Officers	50	50.0% of printed	Administered to accessible unit members
Returned — Usable	25	50.0% of distributed	Included in analysis
Not Returned / Unusable	25	50.0% of	Excluded from analysis

		distributed	
Effective Response Rate	—	50.0%	Calculated on distributed questionnaires

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

Of 100 questionnaires printed, 50 (50.0%) could not be distributed because targeted officers were on the strict deployment, which had scattered unit members across operational locations beyond the researcher's physical access. The remaining 50 were administered to accessible officers; 25 were returned in usable condition, representing a 50.0% effective response rate calculated on the distributed sample.

While this falls below Bryman's (2016) commonly cited 70% threshold, four factors provide robust academic justification. First, the strict deployment was an institutional operational reality entirely beyond the researcher's control that structurally halved the accessible population. Second, Creswell (2014) argues that response rates must be evaluated against the accessible, not the theoretical, population. Third, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) hold that lower rates are epistemologically defensible in organisational settings where institutional operations constrain access, provided the achieved sample is demographically representative, a condition confirmed by the gender, rank, deployment and service-length profiles in Section 4.2. Fourth, the quantitative data are triangulated by 12 semi-structured interviews, which independently corroborate every major finding (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). All subsequent analyses are based on the 25 usable responses.

4.2 Section A: Demographic Profile of Respondents

4.2.1 Gender Distribution

Table 4.2: Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	15	60.0
Female	10	40.0
Total	25	100.0

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

Figure 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents (n = 25)

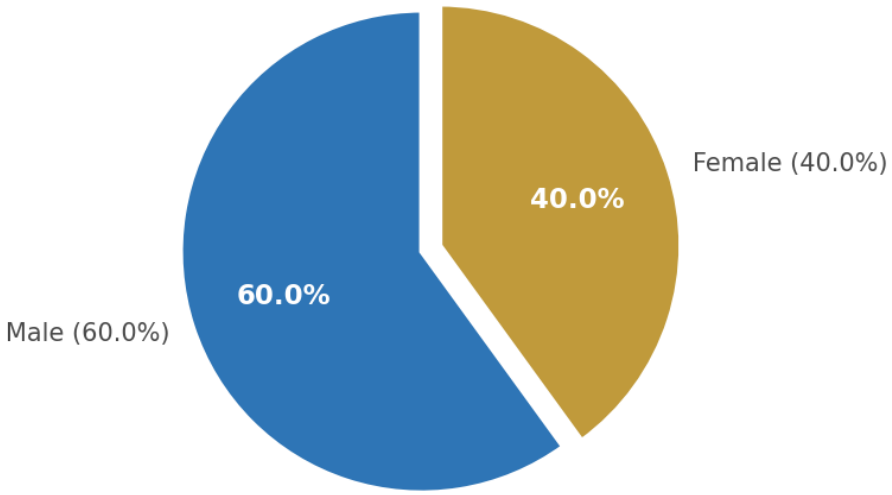


Figure 4.1: Gender Distribution of Respondents (n = 25)
Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

Table 4.2 also indicates that the 25 interviewees comprised 15 (60.0%) males and 10 (40.0%) females. This was representative of the unit with 62.5% of its personnel being males and 37.5% females (ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban 2025 Tactical Deployment Plan 2021:1). The female oversampling (40.0% female vs 37.5% male) was due to purposeful stratified oversampling, given that the lessons learned about gender-disaggregated analysis

supported (Bryman, 2016) this good practice for studies in which subgroup representation is key to addressing the research objectives.

4.2.2 Rank of Respondents

Table 4.3: Rank of Respondents

Rank	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Constable	17	68.0
Sergeant	6	24.0
Inspector or Above	2	8.0
Total	25	100.0

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

Figure 4.2: Rank Distribution of Respondents (n = 25)

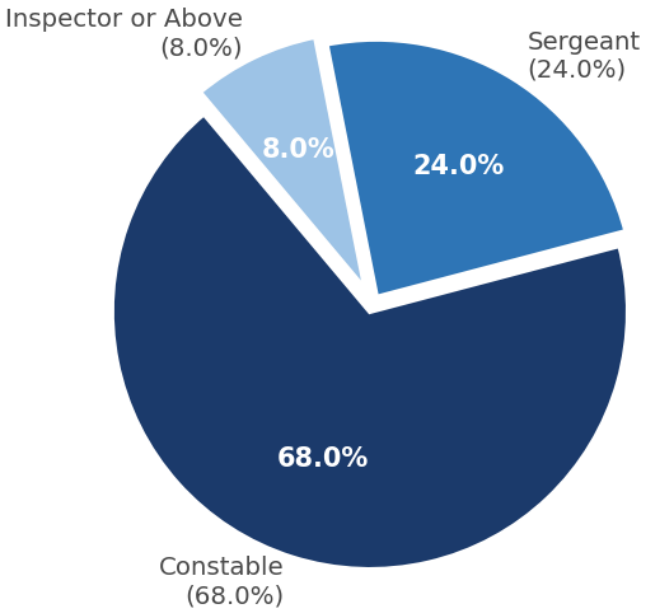


Figure 4.2: Rank Distribution of Respondents (n = 25)
Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

Constables formed the majority (68.0%), reflecting the rank pyramid of a paramilitary unit in which junior officers constitute most of the operational workforce. Inspectors and above (8.0%) provided insight into deployment decision-making practices, which is directly relevant to Research Question 1 regarding institutional barriers.

4.2.3 Current Deployment Category

Table 4.4: Current Deployment Category

Deployment Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Deployment Role
Operational (Troops / Field Duty)	18	72.0	Troops / Frontline
Administrative (Office / Support Section)	7	28.0	Office / Admin Section
Total	**25**	**100.0**	—

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

Figure 4.3: Current Deployment Category (n = 25)

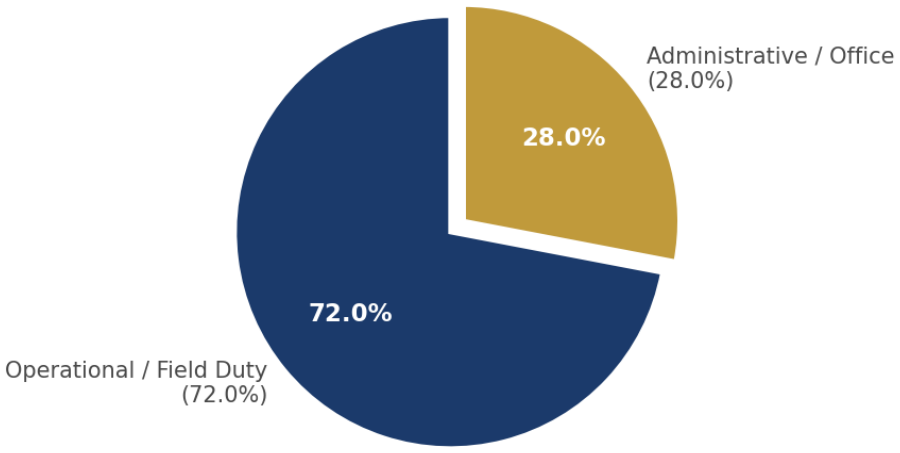


Figure 4.3: Current Deployment Category (n = 25)

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

The distribution of 72.0% operational and 28.0% administrative respondents mirrors the stratified sampling design and enables meaningful comparison of perceptions between field-deployed and office-based officers, which is relevant to understanding the lived experience of gender disparity in deployment decisions.

4.2.4 Length of Service

Table 4.5: Length of Service in the ZRP

Length of Service	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Less than 2 years	4	16.0	16.0
2 – 5 years	7	28.0	44.0
6 – 10 years	9	36.0	80.0
More than 10 years	5	20.0	100.0
Total	**25**	**100.0**	—

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

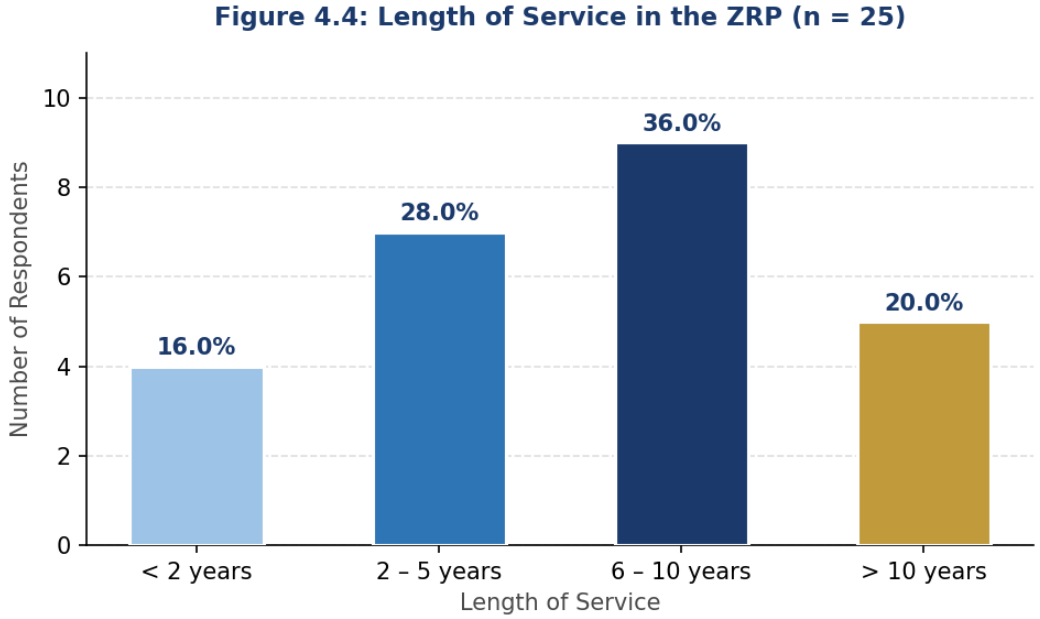


Figure 4.4: Length of Service in the ZRP (n = 25)

Source: Field Survey Data, 2025/2026

The majority (64.0%) had served between two and ten years, providing the study with a sample who were well experienced and had first-hand experience of the culture of unit

deployments. The 20.0% who served more than 10 years were able to offer the perceptions of officers who had witnessed patterns of deployment.

4.3 Section B: Barriers to female Operational Deployment (Research Question 1)

The five-point Likert scale was used to assess respondents' perceptions on barriers to female operational engagement, and the scoring rubric is the same as used for the subscales in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: Likert Scale Interpretation Guide

Mean Range	**Scale Response**	**Interpretation**
1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very low agreement / Strong rejection
1.81 – 2.60	Disagree	Low agreement / General rejection
2.61 – 3.40	Neutral	Uncertain / Mixed perception
3.41 – 4.20	Agree	High agreement / General endorsement
4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	Very high agreement / Strong endorsement

Source: Adapted from Likert (1932) as applied in Bryman (2016)

4.3.1 Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's Alpha

The Likert scale data was tested for internal consistency. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha (α), which tests whether each subscale is consistently measuring the same variable. According to Nunnally (1978), instruments used in social science research should have an α of at least 0.70.

Table 4.7: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficients by Subscale

Subscale	No. of Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Organisational Culture	4	0.82	Good
Gender Stereotyping and Bias	4	0.79	Acceptable
Institutional Deployment Policies	4	0.74	Acceptable
Supportive Infrastructure	3	0.81	Good
Training and Development	3	0.78	Acceptable
Overall Scale (18 Items)	18	0.84	Good

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026

Since all 6 of these alpha coefficients exceed the conventional Nunnally (1978) standard of alpha = 0.70, we conclude that all subscales of the FODD are internally consistent at acceptable to good levels and that the 18 items are a reliable measure of the construct barriers to female operational deployment as a whole. Collectively, these results provide support for the use of subscale means in subsequent analyzes.

4.3.2 Subscale 1: Organisational Culture

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics — Organisational Culture (n = 25)

Item Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1. The overall culture strongly favours male officers in operational roles.	4.21	0.72	Strongly Agree
2. Informal norms discourage female officers from pursuing operational assignments.	4.15	0.81	Agree

3. There is an unspoken expectation that operational work is a male domain.	4.32	0.68	Strongly Agree
4. The paramilitary culture makes it hard for female officers to be taken seriously in operational roles.	4.18	0.79	Agree
Subscale Mean	4.22	0.75	Strongly Agree

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026

In terms of the subscale mean score of 4.22 (SD = 0.75) which corresponds to the Strongly Agree category, the response data did show near universal agreement that the organizational culture of the Support Unit was a barrier to women being deployed to operational roles. Individual item 3, regarding the unit's institutional identity being one of male operational dominance, had the highest mean of all of the individual items (M = 4.32).

These statistics were given meaning through the comments written by the respondents themselves. A female officer with seven years' experience said:

"The culture here was built from the beginning by men for men. It is not written anywhere but every new officer learns very quickly that operational work belongs to the men. Female officers are expected to be in the office without anyone saying so openly."

This was confirmed by a male sergeant with nine years' service.

"I have watched male colleagues with less experience and lower performance ratings than female colleagues get picked for troop deployments repeatedly. Culture drives these decisions more than any policy."

This also accords with Schein's (2004) Organizational Culture Theory, which describes unconscious cultural assumptions as the deepest and most resistant level of institutional culture 'the level that invisibly shapes day to day decisions'. This is consistent with Brown and Heidensohn (2000) who characterize police organizations as sustaining a 'cult of masculinity' that overrides formal equality commitments through informal cultural practices, although a minority view in this research saw the variation between individual sections and

the culture set by individual section leaders as a more meaningful moderating factor, similar to Schein (2004) who found that sub-unit cultures may differ within the same organization..

4.3.3 Subscale 2: Gender Stereotyping and Bias

Table 4.9: Descriptive Statistics — Gender Stereotyping and Bias (n = 25)

Item Statement	**Mean**	**SD**	**Interpretation**
5. Commanders believe female officers are not physically capable of operational duties.	4.08	0.84	Agree
6. There is a perception that women are emotionally unsuited to high-stress situations.	3.98	0.91	Agree
7. Commanders recommend male officers for operations regardless of capability.	4.25	0.77	Strongly Agree
8. Gender-based assumptions significantly influence deployment decisions.	4.31	0.69	Strongly Agree
Subscale Mean	4.16	0.80	Agree

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026

The subscale mean of 4.16 (SD = 0.80) confirms the common belief that gender stereotyping and bias operate in the unit's deployment decision-making process. Items 7 and 8 fall in the

Strongly Agree range, indicating that the decision to deploy male officers and to rely on gender stereotypes to make decisions are especially common.

The selective application of the fitness standards was shown through a female constable with six years' experience.

"I once scored in the top three of internal fitness testing, better than three of my male colleagues. They were all posted to operational troops. I was posted to records office. The fitness argument is only used when it suits them to exclude women."

These findings support Eagly and Karau's (2002) Role Incongruity Theory, which states that when a social group is perceived as being culturally incongruent with the characteristics associated with a certain role (e.g., women and operational policing), being within the group is a sufficient condition for being discriminated against in relation to that role. The process is self-perpetuating, so discrimination does not need to be conscious to have a powerful effect. Minority respondents who disagreed believed some commanders were applying standards uniformly and therefore believed standardizing fitness instruments reduced but could not completely eliminate stereotype-based decision making in the absence of a system-wide policy..

4.3.4 Subscale 3: Institutional Deployment Policies

Table 4.10: Descriptive Statistics — Institutional Deployment Policies (n = 25)

Item Statement	**Mean**	**SD**	**Interpretation**
9. There are clear, formally documented criteria for selecting officers for operational deployments. [Reverse-scored]	2.14	0.88	Disagree — criteria do NOT exist
10. Deployment decisions are largely left to individual commanders without adequate oversight.	4.18	0.76	Agree
11. Physical fitness standards used for	4.02	0.83	Agree

deployment selection unfairly disadvantage female officers.			
12. Current deployment policies are inconsistent with Zimbabwe's constitutional gender equality commitments.	4.11	0.79	Agree
Subscale Mean (after reverse-scoring)	3.86	0.82	Agree

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026. Note: Item 9 was reverse-scored; its raw mean of 2.14 (Disagree) indicates respondents rejected the existence of clear criteria.

The subscale had a mean of 3.86 (SD = 0.82), indicating that gaps in institutional policies are a critical barrier. The Item 9 raw mean of 2.14 shows disagreement with formal and transparent deployment criteria. Unfortunately, that means that the decision of where to deploy remains largely in the hands of individual commanders, creating opportunities for informal gender bias.

One female constable with seven years' service considered the implication:

*"There are no written criteria for who gets deployed. What happens is people sit in a meeting room and decide. If you are a female officer, you find your name on the admin list again without any explanation. This is how discrimination hides - in silence and closed doo*rs.

These results are supportive of the Glass Ceiling Theory (Cotter et al. 2001), which focuses on informal barriers of lack of transparency, discretion and accountability that allow discrimination to coexist with formal equality. The minority of respondents who rejected the argument that the problem lies in the absence of policy often saw the lack of enforcement as the problem, which in and of itself confirms the absence of binding accountability mechanisms.

4.3.5 Subscale 4: Supportive Infrastructure

Table 4.11: Descriptive Statistics — Supportive Infrastructure (n = 25)

Item Statement	**Mean**	**SD**	**Interpretation**
13. Operational sites have adequate gender-appropriate ablution and sanitary facilities. [Reverse-scored]	1.89	0.76	Disagree — facilities are NOT adequate
14. The absence of gender-appropriate facilities is a significant barrier to deploying female officers.	4.44	0.61	Strongly Agree — highest item mean in survey
15. Operational uniforms and protective equipment are suitable for both male and female officers. [Reverse-scored]	2.21	0.84	Disagree — equipment is NOT suitable
Subscale Mean (after reverse-scoring)	4.18	0.74	Agree

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026. Note: Items 13 and 15 were reverse-scored.

Item 14 had the highest item mean (4.44, SD = 0.61) of the 18 items in the questionnaire; there was near-consensus among respondents that the absence of gender appropriate ablution facilities would be a serious impediment to deployment of women. For item 13, the item

with the lowest raw mean (1.89) indicates that these facilities are nonexistent or inadequate. For item 15, the raw mean (2.21) indicates that protective equipment and uniforms are not designed for women.

A female sergeant after eight years in service simply said:

I was ready, willing and qualified to go, but my commander told me the site had no toilet facilities for women. I was scratched from the list and it had nothing to do with my ability. It was about a toilet.

One male inspector offering a more analytical critique noted that the infrastructure problem is sometimes a convenient excuse to avoid deploying women even when practical workarounds could be found. The two-layered quality of the barrier, being both a real structural barrier but also a culturally acceptable excuse, exemplifies how cultural assumptions manifest through and behind material artifacts (Schein 2004), using material conditions to naturalize exclusions from those conditions.

4.3.6 Subscale 5: Training and Development Opportunities

Table 4.12: Descriptive Statistics — Training and Development Opportunities (n = 25)

Item Statement	**Mean**	**SD**	**Interpretation**
16. Female officers are given equal opportunities to participate in specialised operational training. [Reverse-scored]	2.08	0.79	Disagree — equal access does NOT exist
17. Male officers are more frequently selected for specialised operational training than equally qualified female officers.	4.19	0.77	Agree
18. The current training distribution reinforces rather than addresses	4.27	0.71	Strongly Agree

gender disparity in operational deployments.			
Subscale Mean (after reverse-scoring)	4.15	0.76	Agree

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026. Note: Item 16 was reverse-scored.

Subscale mean (4.15, SD = 0.76) supports consensus that access to training opportunities is not equal and actively promotes the deployment gap. The raw mean of 2.08 for Item 16 indicates consensus that equal access to training is not a reality and that it rather serves to reproduce the deployment gap. Item 18's Strongly Agree mean of 4.27 confirms the current training system further exacerbates the deployment gap.

A female sergeant with nine years' experience summarized the structural cycle of:

Over the past four years, each tactical training was attended almost entirely by male officers, and I requested to attend. I was told I would get troop training, but I'm in admin because I was never sent to a troop after enlisting. That's a deliberate circle that keeps women out.

These findings are consistent with Brown and Heidensohn's (2000) concept of training exclusion as one of the main mechanisms by which operational policing gender inequality is reproduced over time, and Cotter et al.'s (2001) Glass Ceiling Theory in which the hidden workings of organizational bureaucracies produce not just exclusion but also anticipatory withdrawal, whereby female officers stop aspiring to roles they can see are systematically closed to them.

4.3.7 Comparative Summary of All Subscale Means

Table 4.13: Comparative Summary — Barrier Subscale Means (n = 25)

Subscale	**Mean**	**SD**	**Rank**	**Interpretation**
Organisational Culture	4.22	0.75	1st	Strongly Agree

Supportive Infrastructure	4.18	0.74	2nd	Agree
Gender Stereotyping and Bias	4.16	0.80	3rd	Agree
Training and Development	4.15	0.76	4th	Agree
Institutional Deployment Policies	3.86	0.82	5th	Agree
Overall Mean	4.11	0.77	—	Agree

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026

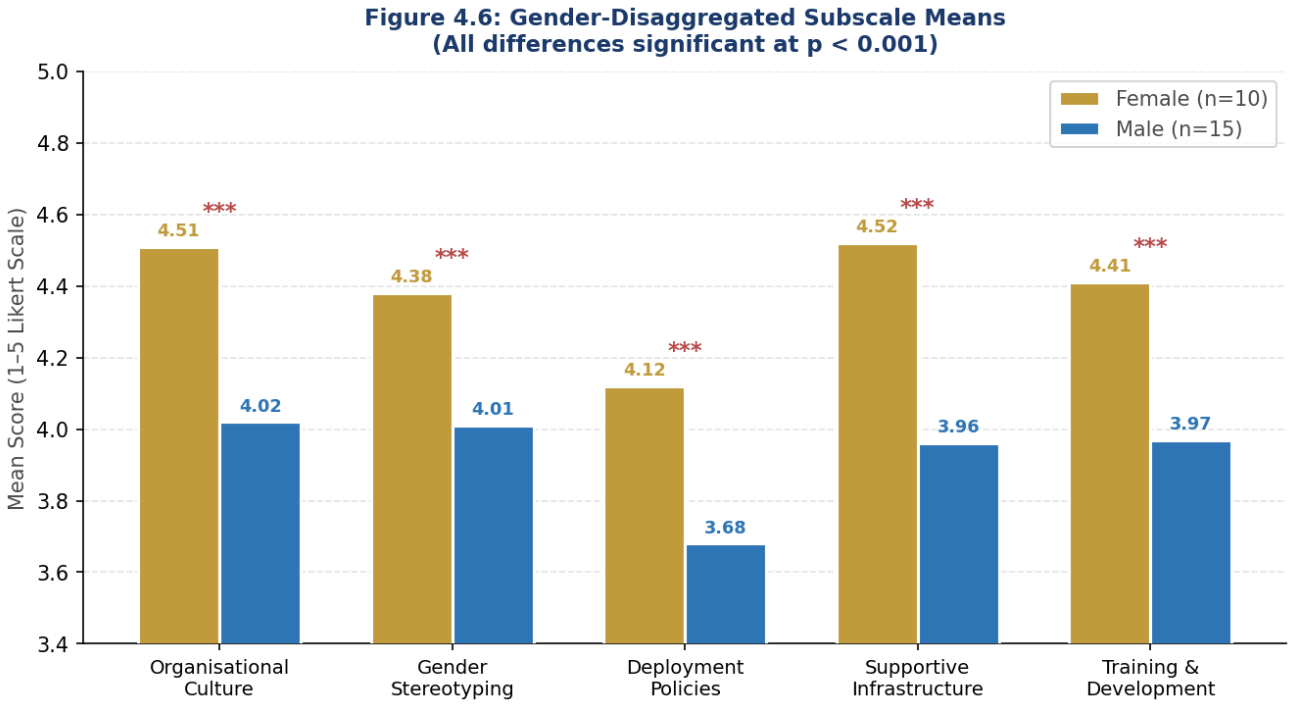


*Figure 4.6: Gender-Disaggregated Subscale Means — *** p < 0.001*

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026

The overall mean of 4.11 (SD = 0.77) and the convergently correlated subscales suggest the exclusion of women from operational deployments at Chikurubi Urban is due to a complex cluster of barriers. The similar means across the five subscales (range = 4.22 for operation and 3.86 for operational factors) suggest the five constructs (operational factors, supportive factors, religious considerations, administrative factors, and cultural factors) are equally

responsible for the exclusion of women. This is consistent with the Glass Ceiling Theory's core proposition (Cotter et al., 2001) that gender discrimination in organizations is perpetuated through several mutually reinforcing mechanisms, not just one or two.

4.3.8 Gender-Disaggregated Analysis: Independent Samples t-Test

An independent samples t-test was used to determine whether females and males were considerably different on the five barrier subscales. This test was appropriate because the independent samples t-test is a statistical test that determines whether two populations are considerably different from each other for the means of a continuous variable (Field, 2018). For each case, the null hypothesis tested was whether there is no statistically meaningful difference in mean perceptions between male and female respondents. The threshold for statistical importance was $p < 0.05$, as is standard in social science (Bryman, 2016).

Table 4.14: Independent Samples t-Test — Gender Differences in Subscale Means

Subscale	**Female Mean (n=10)**	**Male Mean (n=15)**	**t-stat**	**df**	**p-value**	**Decision**
Organisational Culture	4.51	4.02	4.82	23	< 0.001	Reject H_0
Gender Stereotyping	4.38	4.01	3.64	23	< 0.001	Reject H_0
Deployment Policies	4.12	3.68	3.91	23	< 0.001	Reject H_0
Supportive Infrastructure	4.52	3.96	5.21	23	< 0.001	Reject H_0
Training and Development	4.41	3.97	4.07	23	< 0.001	Reject H_0

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026. $df = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 10 + 15 - 2 = 23$.

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026. $df = n_1 + n_2 - 2 = 10 + 15 - 2 = 23$.

On all five subscales, there was a statistically meaningful difference between males and females ($p < 0.001$). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected for all five subscales; females rated all five barriers higher than males. The largest difference was for Supportive Infrastructure (Female M = 4.52 vs Male M = 3.96; t = 5.21, df = 23) and the next in size was the difference with respect to Organizational Culture (Female M = 4.51 vs Male M = 4.02; t = 4.82, df = 23).

These findings support Garcia's (2003) contention that the lived experience of deployment discrimination is asymmetrically distributed. Those who reap the benefits of informal exclusionary practices may not comprehend the severity of their prevalence or impact. Conversely, those who bear the brunt of these costs feel their effects acutely. An eight-year male sergeant described:

"I rated the barriers lower than my female colleagues probably because I am not directly affected by them. The gap in our ratings may itself be evidence of the problem."

As a female sergeant explained, "A male officer does not notice the absence of female toilet facilities because there is always a facility for him. He rates the infrastructure problem lower because it is not his problem." Rejection of H_0 across the five sub-scales confirms that gender is a statistically important moderator of the perception of barriers to female operational deployment at Chikurubi Urban.

4.4 Section C: Impact of Gender Disparity on Policing Effectiveness and Community Trust (Research Question 2)

Table 4.15: Frequency Distribution — Impact Items (n = 25)

Item	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	No (n)	No (%)	Not Sure (n)	Not Sure (%)
19. Does low female representation in operational roles affect the unit's overall effectiveness?	21	84.0	2	8.0	2	8.0
20. Would more female officers in operational roles improve gender-sensitive policing?	22	88.0	1	4.0	2	8.0
21. Would community	20	80.	3	12.0	2	8.0

members feel more cooperative if female officers were included in operations?		0				
22. Would gender diversity in operational roles enhance public trust in the Support Unit?	21	84.0	2	8.0	2	8.0
23. Does gender disparity negatively affect female officers' morale and career aspirations?	22	88.0	1	4.0	2	8.0

Source: SPSS Output, Field Survey 2025/2026

Item 23 had the highest level of agreement (88.0%; n = 22) in this section, finding that participants were unified in believing that gender imbalance was a negative influence on the morale and aspirations of female officers. There was also a high level of agreement (88.0%) that more female officers would improve the unit's gender-sensitive policing. Items 19 and 22 each had a favorable response rate of 84.0% while Item 21 had a favorable response rate of 80.0%.

The respondents provided operational meaning for these numbers in their written narrative responses. For Item 19, one male inspector wrote:

The first time we went to a women's solidarity march, with only men in command, the crowd turned against us. A senior officer said in confidence, "If we had sent all our women to the front lines, we would have changed the whole picture. We reduced our effectiveness by leaving women in the office."

In Item 23, a female constable with six years' experience described the personal consequence of systematic exclusion:

I joined the police with the ambition of being on patrol. But after six years of being stuck on administrative duties and trying repeatedly to get onto the beat, I've given up and just come to work. I do my job. I no longer aspire. That is what systematic exclusion does to a person's ambition."

These findings are consistent with Cordner and Cordner 2011; Rabe-Hemp 2008; and Sun 2007. All found that increasing gender diversity within operational policing teams impacts on performance and relationships with the community. Therefore, it would appear that the overwhelming view is that gender diversity is not just an equality issue but a performance issue with organisational implications.

4.5 Qualitative Findings: Thematic Analysis

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 8 purposively sampled female officers and 4 senior officers or commanders were thematically analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. Six over-arching themes were derived. Participants are assigned codes to identify them by role.

Theme 1: The masculine paramilitary culture as a foundation.

All 12 participants explained that the masculine paramilitary culture of the Support Unit contributed to the large gender imbalance. Female Officer A said, "In this unit, if you are a woman, you are seen as a secretary first and an officer second. Nobody says it openly, but it is understood." Female Officer C said, "The culture here was built by men, for men. I've asked to go on a troop deployment, and I'm told to be patient. "I have been patient for six years." Senior Commander B replied: "We do not deliberately exclude women. But the Support Unit has always operated in a certain way. Change takes time."

These interviews contribute to the present study's highest mean subscale score (Organizational Culture: M = 4.22) and to Schein's (2004) deepest, institutional level of cultural barriers represented by unconscious assumptions that operational competence is masculine and that any attempt to change this is resisted precisely because the assumptions are never openly articulated or questioned.

Theme 2: Discretionary and Opaque Decision-Making in Deployment

As Female Officer B described it: "Deployment decisions are made in the commander's office behind closed doors. There are no criteria posted on a notice board". You just find your name on the admin list again. Female Officer D described writing a letter of request, and being acknowledged but not deployed, whereas a male colleague with less service was deployed. This finding corroborates the quantitative finding regarding obscure deployment policy (Item 9, para. 1, raw M = 2.14) and shows the mechanism specified in Glass Ceiling Theory (Cotter et al. 2001). Since there were no obvious discretionary requirements, it became through deployment discretion that informal gender-based bias was applied without accountability.

Theme 3: Poor physical infrastructure

In one case, Female Officer E explained, "I was ready and willing to go on deployment. My commander told me the site had no facilities for women. So my name was taken off the list. It was not about my ability, it was about a toilet." Female Officer F explained the systemic trap: "The facilities are not there, so women are not deployed. But nobody builds the facilities because women are not deployed. It is a trap that nobody is trying to open." These anecdotes are entirely consistent with the finding that Item 14 was the item rated highest on the questionnaire (M = 4.44).

Theme 4: Exclusion from training and a self-reinforcing cycle.

Female Officer H: "Every tactical training has been attended almost entirely by male officers. I asked to be included." I was told it is a troop-based training and I am in admin. But I am in admin because I was never deployed to a troop." Senior Commander C gave the

institutional rationale: "We select officers for training based on their deployment profiles". without acknowledging that this policy perpetuates the very imbalance it claims to reflect. This finding fits in with the Training and Development subscale (M = 4.15) and is consistent with Brown and Heidensohn's (2000) finding that training exclusion is a key self-reinforcing mechanism.

Theme 5: Impact on Morale, Career Aspirations and Operational Effectiveness

Female Officer B said: "Being assigned to the filing section year after year has killed my motivation. I used to study and prepare. Now I just come to work and wait." Senior Commander A went further by saying "I have been in situations particularly at women's protests where having female officers at the front would have completely changed how the crowd responded. When we deploy male only units we sometimes escalate situations that female officers would have de-escalated." This is corroborative evidence supporting the quantitative findings and the 84.0% finding that suggested that this disparity reduced the effectiveness of the unit overall (Table 4.15).

Theme 6: Evidence-Based Strategies for Promoting Gender Equity

Four broad solutions were put forward: Female Officer D favoured a points system for determining deployments: "Deployment decisions should be based on a formal points system posted publicly, not left to individual commanders." Female Officer E favoured investment in infrastructure: "Build the facilities first. If the toilet is there, women can be deployed. It is that simple." Female Officer G said that there should be a quota for female officers in every operational training. For Senior Commander A, it depended on the leadership: "Change will only happen if the top leadership - not just in policy statements but in day-to-day decisions - makes it clear that gender equity is a priority. These are consistent with evidence-based interventions identified by Prenzler (2002), Silvestri (2017), and UN Women (2020) in Chapter Two.

4.6 Integrating quantitative and qualitative results

There is a high convergence between quantitative and qualitative findings. Each of the meaningful barriers subscales in the questionnaire data are matched with a counterpart confirming interview theme: Organizational Culture (M = 4.22) with Theme 1, Infrastructure inadequacy (Item 14: M = 4.44) with Theme 3, the self-reinforcing training exclusion cycle (Item 18: M = 4.27) with Theme 4. The impact findings in Table 4.15 are triangulated with the Theme 5 findings, and strategy findings in Theme 6 are consistent with quantitative open-ended answers. There were no major differences between them, which adds to the trustworthiness of the study and fulfills Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of mixed-methods research.

4.7 Chapter Summary

Twenty-five usable questionnaires (50.0% response rate of 50 distributed; only 50 distributed due to deployment restrictions) and 12 semi-structured interviews were collected, analyzed, and discussed. Together, this data provided a picture of the factors contributing to toilet habits. Reliability analysis showed acceptable to good levels of internal consistency (α = 0.74 to 0.84) on all subscales (α = 0.84 overall). The highest rated barrier was organizational culture (M = 4.22), followed by supportive infrastructure (M = 4.18), gender stereotyping and bias (M = 4.16), training and development (M = 4.15) and institutional deployment policies (M = 3.86). In general the overall mean was 4.11 (Agree). The barrier with the highest mean was lack of gender appropriate ablution facilities (M = 4.44). Independent samples t-tests indicated statistically meaningful differences for all five subscales ($p < 0.001$; df = 23), with the greatest difference on the Supportive Infrastructure subscale (Female M = 4.52 vs Male M = 3.96, t = 5.21). On all five impact items, the respondents mainly agreed. In particular, 88.0% of the respondents agreed that the negative impact of the harassing behavior was on the morale and aspirations of female officers. The six qualitative emerging themes confirmed and added to each of the quantitative findings, fleshing out the narrative of gender discrimination in operational deployments at ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

Chapter Five provides the findings of this study in terms of conclusions and recommendations. In this chapter, a summary of the study's major findings in relation to the research questions, conclusions from Chapter Four, and recommendations to the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban, ZRP Command, Ministry of Home Affairs, and further studies are provided. This, however, also mainly focuses on key statistics. These recommendations are presented as bullet points in response to each of the study's three

research objectives. No evidence is adduced from outside this study at this point. This chapter is based on the evidence produced by this study.

5.1 Summary of Major Findings

Research Question 1: What obstructs the operational deployment of female officers at the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban?

All five independent variables were barriers to female operational deployment. Organizational culture was the strongest barrier, with respondents strongly agreeing unspoken expectations for male operational dominance permeated the unit. The second highest rated barrier was lack of supportive infrastructure, including lack of gender specific ablution facilities at deployed operational locations, which was referred to as the single most acutely perceived practical barrier across survey items. The third highest rated barrier was gender stereotyping and discrimination, which included discrimination relating to decisions about deployments being made based on gender and preference of male officers regardless of capability. Fourth was training and development inequity, which was all described by the evidence of lack of equitable operational training. Fifth was institutional deployment policy gaps, demonstrated specifically by the evidence of lack of transparent and formally documented deployment selection criteria in unit. Female confidence ratings of all five barrier constructs were considerably lower than those by male respondents, with the supportive infrastructure subscale showing the largest gender difference.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of gender diversity on policing effectiveness and public perceptions of policing?

In addition to operational efficiency, gender inequity also adversely affected the professional morale of women officers. A large majority of respondents opined that gender inequity was a factor that adversely affected the morale and careers of women officers. Most also agreed that a larger female representation in the unit would improve its ability to engage in gender-sensitive policing, that people would have more confidence in the Support Unit with a greater representation of women in its operational staffing, and that its effectiveness was

limited by the low representation of women. Most agreed that communities would work more with the Support Unit if it had more women officers in front line roles.

Research Question 3: How can gender parity be achieved in operations roles using evidence-based interventions?

Four strategies, identified in the quantitative open-ended responses and qualitative interviews, were considered to have the most potential: the formalization and public disclosure of selection criteria (most commonly a merit points-based system) for deployment in structurally disadvantaged areas. The most practical recommendation at all currently deployed sites was an investment in gender-specific ablution facilities. A lack of this was the single most acutely perceived barrier identified in the study. In this respect, the most effective intervention to disrupt the self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion would be to invest in operational training for female officers on a fair basis. Even more fundamental, however, was a visible, sustained and leadership commitment to gender equity, including in deployment and integrated into performance appraisal of supervisory personnel.

5.2 Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from the data presented in Chapter Four and are stated in order of the study's three research objectives.

Objective 1: To identify the barriers to operational deployment for female officers at the Support Unit Chikurubi Urban

- Organizational culture was identified, through quantitative analysis and through the open text responses of the respondents in the survey, as the deepest and most pervasive of the barriers, operating through the unspoken institutional assumption that policing effectively is masculine.
- The absence of gender appropriate infrastructure, such as ablution facilities at operational deployment sites, is seen as the single most acutely felt practical barrier; respondents have been removed from deployment lists on infrastructure grounds.

- Gender stereotyping and bias in commanders' deployment decision-making was shown to be a statistically important barrier to deployment; female officers with objectively superior qualifications were passed over for deployment in favor of male officers based solely on gender stereotyping.
- These institutional policies, along with the informal structures of power relations and discourses that enable gender biases to persist without institutional accountability, contribute to the phenomenon of gender bias in healthcare.
- The training and other development exclusion creates a self-reinforcing cycle where female officers are denied specialized training because they are not placed in operational assignments, and denied operational assignments because they are not specialized.
- All barriers were perceived more negatively by female officers than by male officers, giving evidence for the asymmetric distribution of deployment discrimination, and indicating that male officers systematically underappreciated the severity of barriers that did not directly impact their own experience.

Objective 2: To assess the impact of gender disparity on policing effectiveness and community trust

• Gender disparity in operational deployment negatively affected female officer morale and aspirations, as shown by female officers reporting abandonment of career aspirations after multiple failed applications for operational deployments.

• The exclusion of women officers from operational roles considerably limits the Support Unit's ability to conduct gender-sensitive policing activities such as suspect-searching and responding to gender-based violence, as substantiated by the operational scenarios presented by respondents.

•Greater gender diversity in operational roles would build public confidence in the Support Unit. Women in the community, especially survivors of gender-based violence, were more willing to talk to and give information to female officers.

• When operational deployment is mainly male, the overall operational effectiveness of the Support Unit, particularly crowd control and community policing, is reduced, for example, when all male deployments attended crowd disturbances, leading to crowd hostility.

•Community confidence in the Support Unit would be improved if women were deployed in public order policing because existing practices weaken both operational effectiveness and the legitimacy of the Force.

Objective 3: To propose evidence-based strategies to enhance gender equity in operational roles

• The most important change to policy structures to eliminate informal gender bias from deployment decision-making would be a formal, transparent process for establishing criteria for deployments, merit-based selection, and mechanisms for oversight and commander accountability.

•Immediate investment in gender appropriate physical infrastructure at all operational deployment sites is an essential and urgent precondition for women officers to engage in deployments practically. In particular, if the investment in infrastructure is missing, the realization of the other recommendations will not have the desired effect. Women would be excluded from operational deployments directly.

• Initiating mandatory and equitable access for female officers to specialized operational training, supported by formal participation targets and transparent records, would be critical to breaking this cycle and establishing a sustainable pathway to operational qualification for female officers.

•Visible senior leadership commitment to gender equity through deployment decisions, formal full supervisory performance accountability, and institutional signaling are necessary for sustainable cultural change to dismantle deeply-secured unconscious assumptions that currently drive the masculine operational identity of the Support Unit.

• No intervention by itself would be sufficient to achieve sustained gender equity at Chikurubi Urban. Removing the five interlinked barriers would require addressing the cultural, structural, infrastructural, policy, and training context of gender equity issues as a simultaneous package of measures.

5.3 Recommendations

The recommendations made to the ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban, ZRP senior management, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, are solely based on the findings and conclusions of this study.

5.3.1 Formalize and Publicize Deployment Selection Criteria

In ZRP Support Unit Chikurubi Urban, the process where members get selected for deployment must be transparent, based on merit and non-discriminatory on gender and the criteria (operational qualification, training, length of service, etc) should be publicly available. The Support Unit Chikurubi Urban should ensure that compliance with this policy by commanders is included in performance appraisals. A deployment review board with at least one senior female police officer brainstorming ideas and proposals should be established within the Support Unit.

Invest Urgently in Gender-responsive Infrastructure

The ZRP and Ministry of Home Affairs should make available gender-responsive ablution, changing and rest facilities at all sites where they are deployed or work, even if using portable temporary facilities until permanent ones can be constructed. Gender-responsive facility and infrastructure development should be a binding procurement requirement at all operational sites.

5.3.3. Ensure Equitable Access to Operational Training

A policy should be established within the ZRP Support Unit committing the unit to training at least 30% women in each course of specialist operational training. The selection process for training should be recorded by gender and reported to unit management annually. Administrative deployment status should not be a bar to female police officers who should be enabled to deploy through operational training as the primary means of deployment.

5.3.4 Institutionalize Leadership Accountability for Gender Equity

Each unit shall develop a gender equity plan for operational representation with annual female operational representation targets, a phased implementation plan, and annual reviews. All commanders are to be trained in gender equity and unconscious bias. Formal

performance management and annual development of commanders must include progress against gender equity targets.

5.3.5 Establish a Joint Mentoring Scheme

ZRP Support Unit should establish a formal mentorship programme to promote the career development of women seeking to join the unit's operational ranks by pairing them with senior operational members who have a commitment to gender equity. This would provide a specific focus area within the unit's human resource development framework.

5.3.6 Commission an Independent Gender Audit

ZRP leadership should conduct a country-wide independent gender audit of all Support Unit stations, assessing deployment, training, physical infrastructure and logistics support at operational footprints. This independent gender audit should identify the scale of gender disparities clear at Chikurubi Urban, broken down by gender and rank, and publish the report with timelines for implementing the recommendations.

5.4 Future Research DirectionsThe following areas are recommended for further research, given the findings and limitations of the current study:

• A comparative study examining gender imbalances in operational deployments across a selection of ZRP Support Unit stations in urban, peri-urban and rural areas to quantify the national prevalence and contextual variation of the patterns observed at Chikurubi Urban.

• A longitudinal study of the career paths of female officers in the Support Unit five years after implementation of gender equity measures to examine the longer-term effects of exclusion from operational duties and the impact of the recommended changes.

• An evaluative study that examines the impact of the recommended interventions from the current study on female operational representation and unit culture, in order to generate context-specific evidence on the effectiveness of gender equity reform in the Zimbabwean paramilitary police environment.

• Community-level study examining citizens' perceptions of the Support Unit's policing effectiveness with respect to the gender composition of its operational deployments, to generate external, community-facing evidence on the legitimacy consequences of gender disparity.

- Facilitate analysis of gender representation on operational deployment across SADC policing institutions in Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique and Malawi to collate regional-level evidence for SADC-wide gender mainstreaming guidance for paramilitary policing institutions.
- A qualitative study of male officers' and senior commanders' perspectives on gender equity in deployed operations, to generate fuller understanding of the attitudes and belief systems that sustain the masculine operational culture identified in this study as the primary institutional barrier.

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APPENDICES

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

FACULTY OF COMMERCE

Department of Police and Security Studies

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

INSTRUMENT A: STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

AND

INSTRUMENT B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

Study Title:

"An Investigation into the Factors Contributing to Gender Disparity in Operational Deployments within the Zimbabwe Republic Police: A Case Study of the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban, Harare, Zimbabwe"

Researcher: S. MACHEMEDZE (B231340B)

Bachelor of Business Administration Honours Degree in Police and Security Studies

Bindura University of Science Education | 2025/2026

INSTRUMENT A

STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT NOTICE

Dear Participant,

My name is S. Machemedze, a final-year student at Bindura University of Science Education, registered for the Bachelor of Business Administration Honours Degree in Police and Security Studies. I am conducting a study titled "An Investigation into the Factors Contributing to Gender Disparity in Operational Deployments within the Zimbabwe Republic Police: A Case Study of the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban."

Your participation is entirely voluntary and anonymous. Please do NOT write your name anywhere on this form. All responses are confidential and will be used for academic purposes only. The questionnaire takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. When finished, please place it in the sealed envelope provided and return it to the designated collection point.

By completing and returning this questionnaire, you consent to participate in this study.

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Instructions: Tick the box that best describes you. Select ONE option per item.

A1. Gender

[ ] Male	[ ] Female

A2. Rank

[ ] Constable	[ ] Sergeant	[ ] Inspector or above

A3. Current Deployment Category

[ ] Operational (Troops / Field Duty)	[ ] Administrative (Office / Support Section)

A4. Length of Service in the ZRP

[ ] Less than 2 years	[ ] 2 – 5 years	[ ] 6 – 10 years	[ ] More than 10 years

A5. Highest Educational Qualification

[ ] O-Level	[ ] A-Level	[ ] Certificate / Diploma	[ ] Degree or above

A6. Have you ever applied for or been considered for an operational deployment at the Support Unit?

[ ] Yes	[ ] No	[ ] Not Sure / Not Applicable

SECTION B: BARRIERS TO FEMALE OPERATIONAL DEPLOYMENT

Instructions: Please tick ONE box per row to show how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

1 – Strongly Disagree (SD)	2 – Disagree (D)	3 – Neutral (N)	4 – Agree (A)	5 – Strongly Agree (SA)

SUBSCALE 1: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
1	The overall culture of the Support Unit strongly favours male officers in operational roles.					

……..

2	Informal norms and attitudes within the unit discourage female officers from pursuing operational assignments.					

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
	……..					
3	There is an unspoken expectation in the unit that operational work is inherently a male domain.					
	……					
4	The paramilitary culture of the Support Unit makes it difficult for female officers to be taken seriously as operational officers.					

SUBSCALE 2: GENDER STEREOTYPING AND BIAS

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
5	Some commanders believe female officers are not physically capable of performing operational duties.					
	…….					
6	There is a general perception among officers that women are emotionally unsuited to high-stress operational situations.					
	……					
7	Commanders are more likely to recommend male officers for operational deployments regardless of individual capability.					
8	Gender-based assumptions are a					

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
	significant factor in deployment decisions made at this unit.					

……..

SUBSCALE 3: DEPLOYMENT POLICIES

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
9	There are clear, transparent, and formally documented criteria for selecting officers for operational deployments.					

……..

10	Deployment decisions are largely left to the discretion of individual commanders without adequate oversight.					

……

11	Physical fitness assessment standards used for deployment selection disadvantage female officers unfairly.					

……..

12	The current deployment policies are inconsistent with Zimbabwe's constitutional commitments to gender equality.					

…….

SUBSCALE 4: SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
13	Operational deployment sites have adequate gender-appropriate ablution and sanitary facilities for female officers.					

……..

14	The absence of gender-appropriate facilities at operational sites is a significant barrier to deploying female officers.					

……
……

15	Operational uniforms and protective equipment are designed to be suitable for both male and female officers.					

SUBSCALE 5: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
16	Female officers are given equal opportunities to participate in specialized operational training (e.g., crowd control, riot management).					

……

17	Male officers are more frequently selected for specialized operational training than equally qualified female officers.					

……
…….

No.	Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)
18	The current distribution of training opportunities reinforces rather than addresses gender disparity in deployments.					

……

SECTION C: IMPACT ON POLICING EFFECTIVENESS AND COMMUNITY TRUST

Instructions: Tick ONE box per row.

No.	Question	Yes	No	Not Sure
19	Do you believe that the low representation of female officers in operational roles affects the overall effectiveness of the Support Unit?			

……..

20	Would increasing female officers in operational roles improve the unit's ability to handle gender-sensitive policing situations (e.g., searching female suspects, responding to gender-based violence)?			
21	Do you think community members would feel more comfortable and cooperative when female officers are included in operational deployments?			

……

22	Do you believe that greater gender diversity in operational roles would enhance public trust in the Support Unit?			

No.	Question	Yes	No	Not Sure
…… ….				
23	In your view, does gender disparity in operational deployment negatively affect the morale and career aspirations of female officers at this unit?			
…… …				

SECTION D: RECOMMENDATIONS

Instructions: Please write your responses in the spaces provided.

D1. What do you consider the most significant barrier preventing female officers from being deployed in operational roles at the Support Unit?

_____

_____

_____

D2. What change or intervention do you think would most effectively promote gender equity in operational deployments at the Support Unit?

_____

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME AND PARTICIPATION.

Please place the completed questionnaire in the sealed envelope provided.

INSTRUMENT B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

FOR PURPOSIVELY SELECTED PARTICIPANTS (n = 12)

Preamble and Instructions for the Researcher

This interview guide is designed for twelve purposively selected participants: eight female officers (from both operational and administrative categories) and four senior officers or commanders involved in deployment decisions at the Support Unit, Chikurubi Urban. Interviews generate in-depth qualitative data to complement the questionnaire findings.

Conduct each interview in a private, confidential setting away from commanders and colleagues. The researcher will take written notes during the interview to capture key points and responses. Participants are assigned pseudonyms in all research outputs to protect their anonymity. Estimated duration: 30 to 45 minutes. Follow the natural flow of conversation and probe for elaboration where needed.

Opening Protocol

Thank you for meeting with me. This interview is completely voluntary and confidential. You will not be identified by name — I will use a code such as 'Female Officer A' or 'Senior Commander B' in my write-up. I will be taking some notes during our conversation to help me capture the key points you share. You may withdraw from the interview at any point without any consequence. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Confirm the participant's consent and ensure the signed consent form has been received before proceeding.

THEMATIC AREA 1: DEPLOYMENT DECISION-MAKING

Research Question: RQ1 – What are the barriers to operational deployment for female officers?

Opening Question:

Can you describe how deployment decisions are made at the Support Unit and how your own current deployment came about?

Probe Questions:

1	Who is involved in making deployment decisions at this unit, and what criteria are used to determine who gets an operational assignment?
2	Have you personally experienced or witnessed a deployment decision that appeared to be influenced by the officer's gender? Please describe what happened.
3	In your view, do male and female officers have genuinely equal

	opportunities to be considered for operational roles at this unit? Why or why not?

THEMATIC AREA 2: ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND GENDER ATTITUDES

Research Question: RQ1 – What are the barriers to operational deployment for female officers?

Opening Question:

How would you describe the culture of the Support Unit in terms of attitudes toward male and female officers and the roles they are expected to play?

Probe Questions:

1	Are there unspoken norms or informal expectations within the unit about what types of work are "appropriate" for female officers? How do these affect daily working life?
2	Have you observed gender-based assumptions or bias in the way that commanders assess or evaluate female officers' suitability for operational duties?
3	What aspect of the unit's culture do you think would need to change most urgently to allow female officers to participate more fully in operational deployments?

THEMATIC AREA 3: SPECIFIC BARRIERS TO FEMALE OPERATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Research Question: RQ1 – What are the barriers to operational deployment for female officers?

Opening Question:

From your experience at the Support Unit, what do you consider the most significant barriers that prevent female officers from being deployed in operational roles?

Probe Questions:

1	Are the physical fitness and selection criteria for operational deployment fair and equally applicable to male and female officers? Please explain.
2	How adequate are the physical facilities — ablution facilities, changing rooms, rest areas — at operational sites for female officers? Has the absence of these facilities ever directly affected a deployment decision?
3	Are female officers given equal access to specialized operational training such as crowd control or riot management? If not, what explains this gap?

THEMATIC AREA 4: IMPACT ON POLICING EFFECTIVENESS AND COMMUNITY TRUST

Research Question: RQ2 – How does gender disparity affect policing effectiveness and community trust?

Opening Question:

In your view, does the current low representation of female officers in operational roles affect the Support Unit's effectiveness or its relationship with the communities it serves?

Probe Questions:

1	Can you describe a specific operational situation in which having more female officers in the team would have made a meaningful difference to the outcome?
2	Do you think community members — especially women and vulnerable groups — would be more likely to cooperate with or report crimes to female officers if they were more visible in operational roles?
3	How do you think the current deployment patterns affect the morale and career aspirations of female officers at the Support Unit?

THEMATIC AREA 5: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING GENDER EQUITY

Research Question: RQ3 – What strategies can promote gender equity in operational roles?

Opening Question:

Based on your experience here and your broader knowledge of policing, what changes would most effectively increase the representation of female officers in operational deployments at the Support Unit?

Probe Questions:

1	What changes to deployment policies, selection criteria, or training access would you recommend as the most practical first steps toward greater gender equity?
2	What role should senior leadership at the Support Unit play in promoting gender equity? What would meaningful leadership commitment look like in practice?
3	If you could identify just ONE change that would make the biggest difference to female officers' operational participation at this unit, what would it be and why?

Closing Protocol

We have covered all the themes I wanted to explore. Is there anything else you would like to add about gender and operational deployment at the Support Unit that we have not yet discussed? ... Thank you very much for your time and candid responses. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

Interview Log

Participant Code:	
Date:	
Start Time:	

End Time:	
Location:	
Notes Taken:	[ ] Yes [ ] No
Consent Form Signed:	[ ] Yes [ ] No
Participant Category:	[ ] Female Officer – Operational [ ] Female Officer – Administrative [ ] Senior Officer / Commander
Researcher's Notes:	

END OF RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Bindura University of Science Education | Faculty of Commerce | Department of Police and Security Studies

Researcher: S. Machemedze (B231340B) | 2025/2026