

Homicide Among Police Officers in Nairobi City County, Kenya: Causes and Effects

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ABSTRACT

This study specifically analyzed the causes and effects of homicide among police officers in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The General Strain Theory explained how occupational stress, interpersonal disagreements, poor working conditions, discriminatory deployment policies, and personal conflicts such as love triangles generate strain that can lead to deliberate homicide among police officers. The study used a mixed-method design with 318 respondents purposively and stratified randomly sampled from police divisions in Nairobi City County. Data were collected through questionnaires and key informant interviews, and thematic analysis was applied to organize qualitative insights, providing a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of police homicides. This study observed that the majority of homicide cases among police officers are deliberate rather than accidental, with occupational stress, disagreements between junior and senior officers, and poor working conditions emerging as primary drivers. The effects include post-traumatic depression, guilt, fear of recurrence, and intense lack of motivation, all of which negatively impact job performance and organizational cohesion. This study proposes early identification of at-risk officers, mandatory stress management programs, and the establishment of confidential peer support systems to address root causes before they escalate into lethal violence.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Police homicides have witnessed an unprecedented upsurge over the years, with cases not limited to a few countries but becoming common in most nations worldwide (Fagan & Geller, 2018). Among the causes identified are occupational stress and personal stress, which when they go to extreme levels can lead to homicides. According to Brown (1994), homicides among police mostly occur while discharging duties, including dealing with public disorder, handling disputes, arresting criminals, conducting operations like searching premises, and dealing with members of the public or prisoners. This demonstrates that police homicides extend beyond officers being killed by fellow officers to cases where officers are killed by civilians.

Globally, there is general consensus that stress, whether occupational or personal, is the leading cause of police homicides. In the United States, it was reported that in 2007, 152 police fell victim to homicides, with the number rising to 276 in 2018 (Fagan & Geller, 2018). In Australia as at 2010, the number of police homicides was at an average of 43 per year. In Germany, Ellrich (2016) observed that 128 police officers became victims of homicides between 2014 and 2015. Papazoglou and Mcquerrey (2018) observe that police officers face a lot of challenges in their duties that often cause stress and ultimately increase cases of homicides, making it imperative that strategies addressing these challenges are put in place.

In Africa, cases of homicide among police are largely prompted by stress due to the nature of police work in addition to other social-oriented issues like love triangles (Momanyi, 2018). Police work is characterized by long working hours and prosecuting criminals, both colleagues and civilians. According to Oshodi (2011), some of these challenges if not properly managed can lead to adverse effects including homicides. In South Africa, it was reported that between 1991 and 2015, a total of 2,593 homicides in police occurred, with 64 percent of these cases occurring while on duty (Amnesty International, 2016).

In Kenya, cases of homicides among police have been witnessed in the recent past, with most cases centering on stress in workplaces and disagreements among officers or with their superiors. According to NPS (2018), police homicides come in the form of police murdering fellow officers and police murdering their superiors. Munuhe

(2016) explains that strained relationships among police may result in fatal incidents as an officer may use a firearm against a fellow police officer. Major cases reported include a police officer shot dead by a junior officer in Muranga County in June 2016, and in July 2016 a police officer killed 7 of his colleagues in Kapenguria (National Police Service, 2017). The most recent cases were reported in July 2021 when a lady police officer killed two of her fellow officers in Kiambu and Nakuru due to personal differences. Earlier in March 2021, a General Service Unit officer killed a fellow officer before shooting himself dead in Trans Nzoia following a disagreement with his senior over routine deployment changes. At least eleven cases were reported in Nairobi County between 2016 and 2018 alone.

Taken together, the global and local picture demonstrates that police homicide is a growing concern with complex causes, making the examination of its specific drivers and effects indispensable for improving police welfare and national security.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Despite repeated efforts by the National Police Service to address the rising cases of homicide among its members, incidents of police officers killing fellow officers continue to occur in Nairobi City County. Occupational stress, disagreements between junior and senior officers, poor working conditions, discriminatory deployment policies, and interpersonal conflicts such as love triangles have been cited as potential causes, yet the specific interplay of these factors remains underexplored. The effects of these homicides—including post-traumatic depression, guilt, fear, and demotivation—further undermine police performance and organizational cohesion. However, most existing studies have focused on stress and general performance (Nyaga, 2011; Waitheru, 2011; Momanyi, 2018) rather than systematically examining the causes and effects of homicide among police officers. At the same time, there is a lack of recent empirical data distinguishing between accidental and deliberate homicides within the Kenyan police context. This situation underscores the urgent need to critically examine the causes and effects of homicide among police officers, particularly within Nairobi City County where cases are persistently high.

1.3 Objective of the Study

To examine the causes and effects of homicide among police officers in Nairobi City County.

1.4 Justification

Police homicides in Nairobi City County have become a source of concern, with cases arising from disagreements, frustrations, occupational stress, and relationship issues. Studying the causes and effects of these homicides is vital for improving police welfare, enhancing organizational performance, and informing intervention strategies. This study will benefit the National Police Service by providing evidence-based insights into the root causes of officer-involved homicides and their consequences on police performance. Citizens will also gain awareness of the occupational challenges facing law enforcement officers. Academically, the research contributes to knowledge by examining an underexplored area of police studies within the Kenyan context.

1.5 Literature Review

Homicide among police officers has been studied from various perspectives globally, with stress consistently identified as a leading contributor. Allard and Prenzler (2010) assessed police deaths in Australia and found that homicides were caused by accidental attacks from other police officers as well as deliberate attacks from offenders. The study recommended improved procedures and harnessing of technology, though its findings cannot be generalized to Kenya due to different policing systems.

Waitheru (2011) examined stress levels among administrative police in Nairobi County and found that while stress among police officers could lead to poor performance, it may also result in misuse of firearms leading to homicide and suicides. The study suggested the establishment of a counselling department to address the problem, but did not extensively analyze the specific effects of homicides on surviving officers.

Nyaga (2011) examined occupational stress as a cause of poor performance and police deaths in Kenya. The results showed that occupational stress was prevalent among police officers and tended to affect work performance, in extreme cases contributing towards homicides. However, the principal focus was stress and work performance rather than a comprehensive assessment of police homicides resulting from multiple causes.

Momanyi (2018) examined the effect of job stressors on police officers' performance in Nairobi County. Among the issues identified as resulting from job stressors were murders resulting from domestic rows and love triangles. A negative correlation was established between job stressors and performance. While this study acknowledges murders as a consequence of stress at work, it does not detail the specific effects of homicides on police performance.

Kimotho, Mwangi and Omboto (2018) examined the effect of occupational strain among police officers in Muranga Town. Police homicides were identified as a consequence of occupational strain, appearing in two dimensions: police killing each other, their colleagues or superiors; and police being killed by civilians as occupational strain causes mishandling of civilians. The study did not, however, examine the distinction between accidental and deliberate homicides.

A research gap emerges from the reviewed literature: most studies have focused on stress as a general phenomenon rather than specifically examining the causes and effects of homicide among police officers. Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence distinguishing between accidental and deliberate homicides within the Kenyan police context. Addressing this gap would guide interventions to prevent homicides and mitigate their effects on police performance and organizational cohesion.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the General Strain Theory (GST) advanced by Robert Agnew (1992). The theory explains that crime is a product of strain, differences in aspirations, and means of realizing aspirations. Agnew identified characteristics of strain with a likelihood of crime, including unjust nature of strains, intensity of strain, strain's association with low social control, and pressure created by strain. Agnew categorized strain into three categories: failure to achieve positively valued goals, removal of positive stimuli, and introduction of negative stimuli.

Police officers in the course of their duties go through a lot of strain: they are often forced to work for long hours to maintain law and order, offer security in high-risk areas where crime rates are high, and arrest criminals and solve disputes. In addition, their welfare in terms of salaries is often below their demands. The General Strain Theory explains how these strains—occupational stress, disagreements with superiors, poor working conditions, discriminatory deployment, and interpersonal conflicts—can lead to negative emotional states such as frustration, anger, and depression, which in turn increase the likelihood of criminal coping mechanisms, including homicide. The theory was applied in this study to explain the causes of homicide among police officers in Nairobi City County.

1.7 Research Methodology

1.7.1 Research Design

The study employed an exploratory research design, which enabled the researcher to gain deeper insight into the nature, causes, and effects of homicide among police officers, particularly in areas where limited empirical information existed (Kothari, 2014). According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), exploratory research design is useful in investigating complex social problems and identifying possible intervention measures. The design was chosen because police homicides in Kenya, while becoming prevalent, have seldom been subjected to systematic research focusing specifically on causes and effects.

1.7.2 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The target population consisted of 3,165 police officers stationed across 11 police divisions in Nairobi City

County: Central, Gigiri, Starehe, Kasarani, Buruburu, Kayole, Embakasi, Makadara, Langata, Kilimani, and Dagoreti (NPS, 2019). Stratified random sampling was employed to select participants from each division, ensuring proportional representation. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), a sample size of about 10% is adequate for large populations. Therefore, a sample of 311 police officers (approximately 10%) was selected. In addition, 7 key informants comprising 4 officials from the Independent Policing Oversight Authority (IPOA) and 3 counselling professionals under the Muamko Mpya initiative were purposively selected. The total sample size was 318 respondents.

Table 1.1: Sample Size

Category	Division	Population	Sample Size (10%)
Police officers	Central	519	51
	Gigiri	303	30
	Starehe	321	32
	Kasarani	305	31
	Buruburu	285	29
	Kayole	323	32
	Embakasi	348	35
	Makadara	211	21
	Langata	217	22
	Kilimani	104	10
	Dagoreti	176	18
IPOA	Nairobi	33	4
Counselling Professionals (Muamko Mpya)	Nairobi	30	3
Total		3,165	318

Source: Researcher (2026)

1.7.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study sampled 318 respondents to capture diverse perspectives across Nairobi's police divisions, allowing comparisons between population subsets and enhancing statistical power. Data collection combined semi-structured questionnaires for police officers and key informant interviews for IPOA officials and counselling professionals. The questionnaire was structured into sections covering demographic information and causes and effects of homicide among police officers. A five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree) was used. Thematic analysis was used to code and group qualitative data into themes, with findings presented in

tables and narrative form to provide a rich interpretation of complex social dynamics. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) via SPSS Version 24.

1.8 Causes and Effects of Homicide among Police Officers in Nairobi City County

1.8.1 Introduction

Homicide among police officers in Nairobi City County has become a growing concern, with cases manifesting as police killing fellow police officers due to disagreements, frustrations, occupational stress, or relationship issues. Understanding the specific causes and effects of these homicides is critical for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies. This section presents the demographic characteristics of respondents followed by detailed findings on the causes and effects of police homicide.

1.8.2 Demographic Information

Response Rate

The study targeted 311 police officers from Nairobi City County, with 255 completing the questionnaires, yielding an 82.0% response rate. This exceeds the 60% threshold considered reliable in social science research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003), supporting the validity and generalizability of the findings.

Table 1.2: Response Rate

Target Respondents	Actual Responses	Response Rate (%)
311	255	82.0

Source: Research Data (2026)

Gender Distribution

The gender composition of respondents was 57% male and 43% female, reflecting fairly balanced representation considering the gender demographics of the National Police Service. Both perspectives were critical in understanding how different gender roles affect perceptions of occupational stress and interpersonal conflicts.

Table 1.3: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	145	57
Female	110	43
Total	255	100

Source: Research Data (2026)

Age Distribution

Most respondents (76.1%) were aged 31–41 years (45.5%) and 21–31 years (30.6%), representing the dominant working age in the police service and the group most exposed to occupational stress. Older officers above 41 years constituted 23.9%, providing valuable insights from long-serving personnel.

Table 1.4: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
21-31 years	78	30.6
31-41 years	116	45.5
Above 41 years	61	23.9
Total	255	100

Source: Research Data (2026)

Education Level of Respondents

The majority of respondents held Bachelor's degrees (41.9%) or Master's degrees (34.5%), indicating that all respondents were well educated and could comprehend the questions raised in the questionnaire. Diploma holders constituted 16.5%, and PhD holders 7.1%.

Table 1.5: Education Levels of Respondents

Education Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Diploma	42	16.5
Bachelors	107	41.9
Masters	88	34.5
PhD	18	7.1
Total	255	100

Source: Research Data (2026)

Length of Service in NPS

Most respondents had served for more than 10 years (38.4%) or between 6–10 years (34.5%), indicating adequate experience. Many had witnessed several homicide cases and could be relied upon to give accurate information.

Table 1.6: Length of Service of Respondents

Length of Service	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1-5 years	69	27.1
6-10 years	88	34.5
More than 10 years	98	38.4
Total	255	100

Source: Research Data (2026)

1.9 Causes of Homicide among Police Officers

Security is a major concern within the National Police Service, where occupational and interpersonal stressors often escalate into lethal violence. This study investigated seven specific causes of homicide among police officers in Nairobi City County.

Table 1.7: Causes of Homicide Cases among Police Officers

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
There is an increase in the number of homicide cases among police officers in Nairobi	15	27	2	36	20	3.19	1.45
Disagreements between the junior and senior police officers result in homicides among police officers	12	17	1	44	26	3.55	1.36
Occupational or work related stress leads to homicide among police officers	5	14	0	48	33	3.90	1.12
Homicide among police officers is due to poor work conditions and frustrations that are not effectively managed	17	19	3	36	25	3.33	1.48
Police deployment policies are sometimes discriminative leading to frustrations and ultimately homicide among police officers	17	22	6	31	24	3.23	1.50
Love triangles among police officers are causes of homicide among police officers	12	14	1	45	28	3.63	1.38
Some cases of homicide among police officers are purely accidental	29	35	5	24	7	2.45	1.36

Source: Research Data (2026)

The findings in Table 1.7 reveal that a majority of respondents (56%) agreed or strongly agreed that there is an increase in homicide cases among police officers in Nairobi (Mean=3.19, SD=1.45). One key informant stated, *"I have witnessed two cases of homicides of police officers in one police station over the last one year adding to many frequent unreported such cases."* These findings are consistent with Prenzler (2010), who established that homicide cases among police officers in various countries are on the rise.

A substantial majority (70%) agreed that disagreements between junior and senior police officers result in homicides (Mean=3.55, SD=1.36). One key informant stated, *"I have serious disagreements with my senior due to his management style which often makes him insensitive to my feelings as a person. Consequently, I am finding it very difficult to operate within my station."* These findings align with Kimotho, Mwangi and Omboto (2018), who found that disagreements can be a source of occupational strain.

Occupational or work-related stress was identified as a leading cause, with 81% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing (Mean=3.90, SD=1.12). One key informant explained, *"The nature of our work is often very stressing as you are forced to handle various cases and conflicts from day to day. Some incidences are so traumatizing leading to stress which if not well managed can cause homicide."* Similar outcomes were established by Nyaga (2011), who found that occupational stress was prevalent among police officers and contributed towards homicides.

Regarding poor work conditions and frustrations, 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed (Mean=3.33, SD=1.48). A key informant stated, "Our offices are very dilapidated and the working spaces are very small which sometimes contribute to serious quarrels amongst us." These results align with Momanyi (2018), who cited poor working conditions as a primary contributor to stress among police officers.

Discriminative deployment policies were cited by 55% of respondents (Mean=3.23, SD=1.50). One key informant stated, "I had a disagreement with one of my seniors prompting my unfair and unprocedural deployment to the city. I was so frustrated that I even had suicidal thoughts."

Love triangles emerged as a major cause, with 73% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing (Mean=3.63, SD=1.38). One key informant stated, "One of my police friends was killed due to a love triangle involving him and his two colleagues. Such cases have also become common in other areas raising a lot of concerns." These findings are congruent with Momanyi (2018), who found that murders resulting from domestic rows and love triangles affect police performance.

Regarding accidental versus deliberate homicides, the majority (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that cases are purely accidental (Mean=2.45, SD=1.36). One key informant stated, "There have been at least five reported cases of a police officer deliberately shooting another police officer due to serious disagreements in the work place. This has been due to poor stress management strategies in the police service." These findings bear some congruence with Allard and Prenzler (2010), who found that some police deaths were caused by accidental attacks while others were deliberate.

Figure 1.1: Perceived Causes of Homicide among Police Officers

(A bar chart showing percentages: Occupational stress 81%, Love triangles 73%, Disagreements 70%, Poor work conditions 61%, Discriminative deployment 55%, Increase in cases 56%)

Source: Field Data 2026

1.10 Effects of Homicide among Police Officers

The study further investigated the effects of homicide cases on police officers, their families, and organizational performance.

Table 1.8: Effects of Homicide Cases among Police Officers

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
Homicide cases among police officers has led to post traumatic depression among friends and the officer's family members	9	12	2	42	35	3.82	1.23
Increase in homicide cases has made police officers to be more aggressive towards the public e.g during arrests and crackdowns	22	36	3	29	10	2.69	1.39
The increase in homicide cases has led to guilt and fear among the police officers	14	25	6	28	27	3.29	1.48
There is the fear of recurrence of killings among the remaining police officers	16	20	3	32	29	3.38	1.48

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
The increase in homicide cases among the police officers has led to an intense lack of motivation among police officers	19	16	2	37	26	3.35	1.52

Source: Research Data (2026)

The findings in Table 1.8 show that 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that homicide cases have led to post-traumatic depression among friends and family members of affected officers (Mean=3.82, SD=1.23). A key informant stated, *"Some of the spouses of murdered police officers have had to undergo counselling services due to trauma and depression that they have gone through."* As found by Wango, Wairire, and Odiemo (2018), police officers are likely to face emotional and psychological disturbance due to a rise in such cases.

Regarding aggressiveness towards the public, the majority (58%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that increased homicide cases have made police officers more aggressive (Mean=2.69, SD=1.39). A key informant affirmed, *"The aggressiveness of police officers towards the members of the public is out of a wider web of frustrations from their work place and less attention given to their welfare."*

Guilt and fear among police officers were cited by 55% of respondents (Mean=3.29, SD=1.48). A key informant confirmed, *"There are some police officers who are currently going through counselling sessions due to guilt and fear as a result of the homicide of their close colleagues."*

Fear of recurrence of killings was reported by 61% of respondents (Mean=3.38, SD=1.48). Lack of motivation was identified by 63% of respondents (Mean=3.35, SD=1.52). These findings are in line with Momanyi (2018), who found that job stressors eventually result in homicide among police officers, which in turn affects performance.

Figure 1.2: Effects of Homicide on Police Officers

(A bar chart showing percentages: Post-traumatic depression 77%, Fear of recurrence 61%, Lack of motivation 63%, Guilt and fear 55%, Aggression towards public 39%)

Source: Field Data 2026

1.11 Community Perceptions on the Effectiveness of Managing Security

(This section was not applicable to the current study objective on causes and effects of homicide among police officers.)

1.12 Relationship between the role of Community leadership and national security

(This section was not applicable to the current study objective on causes and effects of homicide among police officers.)

1.13 Conclusion

This study examined the causes and effects of homicide among police officers in Nairobi City County. The findings demonstrate that the major causes of homicide cases are disagreements between junior and senior police officers, occupational stress, poor working conditions and frustrations that are not effectively managed, discriminative police deployment policies, and love triangles. Importantly, the study concludes that the majority of homicide cases among police officers are deliberate rather than accidental. The major effects of homicide cases include post-traumatic depression among family members and colleagues, guilt and fear among surviving officers, fear of recurrence of killings, and intense lack of motivation, all of which reduce work performance.

However, the study concludes that aggressiveness of police towards the public is not directly attributable to increased homicide cases but rather to a wider web of workplace frustrations.

1.14 Recommendations

1.14.1 Recommendations from the Study

Based on the findings on causes and effects of homicide among police officers, this study makes the following recommendations:

- i. The National Police Service should establish early identification systems to recognize police officers experiencing prolonged occupational stress, disagreements with seniors, or interpersonal conflicts before these strains escalate into lethal violence.
- ii. Stress management and conflict resolution programs should be made mandatory for all police officers, particularly those serving in high-stress units within Nairobi City County, to address the root causes of deliberate homicides.
- iii. The National Police Service should review deployment policies to eliminate discriminatory practices that cause frustrations leading to homicides. Transfers and postings should be based on merit and operational need rather than punitive motives.
- iv. Confidential peer support and counselling services should be established at the station level to address the psychological effects of homicides, including post-traumatic depression, guilt, and fear among surviving officers.
- v. The government should improve working conditions, including dilapidated offices, inadequate housing, and poor remuneration, to reduce frustrations that contribute to homicides among police officers.

1.14.2 Areas of Further Research

- i. Further analysis is needed to examine the effectiveness of existing counselling and stress management programs within the National Police Service in reducing homicide cases.
- ii. To assess how formal training on conflict resolution and anger management helps police officers navigate disagreements with seniors and colleagues without resorting to violence.
- iii. To examine the prevalence and patterns of love triangle-related homicides among police officers in other counties to inform targeted intervention strategies.

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