



**Employee Perceptions on the Employee Assistance Programme to  
Boost Productivity in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality**

by

**Ms Philile Sissy Mhlongo**

**Student number: 219023027**

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**MASTER OF COMMERCE IN LEADERSHIP**

**College of Law and Management Studies**

**Graduate School of Business and Leadership**

**Supervisor**

**Dr Xoliswa Majola**

**February 2026**

**SUPERVISOR'S PERMISSION TO SUBMIT**

## DECLARATION

I, **Ms Philile Sissy Mhlongo**, declare that:

1. The research presented in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my own original work conducted in fulfilment of the requirements for the **Master of Commerce in Leadership Studies (MCLS) qualification** at the **University of KwaZulu-Natal**.
2. This dissertation has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This dissertation does not contain data, figures, tables, images, or any other material from the work of others, unless such sources have been specifically acknowledged and appropriately referenced.
4. This dissertation does not contain writing from other authors unless explicitly cited. Where other authors' work has been used:
  - a) Their words have been paraphrased, but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
  - b) Where direct quotations have been used, they have been enclosed in quotation marks and duly referenced.
5. In cases where sections of the work are derived from publications for which I am an author, co-author, or editor, I have clearly indicated the portions written solely by myself and have provided full bibliographic details of such publications.
6. This dissertation does not include material copied from online sources without proper acknowledgement. All electronic and Internet-based sources used have been appropriately cited and included in the reference list.

**Signature** : \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** : \_\_\_\_\_

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I give thanks to God Almighty for granting me strength, wisdom, and perseverance throughout this research journey. Without His guidance, completing this dissertation would not have been possible.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr Xoliswa Majola, for her guidance, patience, and encouragement. Your insightful feedback and unwavering support were invaluable in navigating this research successfully.

I also sincerely thank Nokukhanya Mthethwa, the programme administrator, for her consistent support and for ensuring that I met all deadlines, even when it seemed impossible.

I further acknowledge the Coega Development Corporation for approving my studies and ensuring that all payments were processed promptly, as well as my manager, Thandile Ngxekana, for the encouragement, understanding, and support that enabled me to remain focused and complete this work.

To my children, Siyabonga and Nombuso Nzama, I am deeply grateful for your love, patience, and understanding, particularly during times when I was physically present but unable to give you my full attention due to my studies. Your support, small gestures such as making me coffee each night, and the random hugs and kisses made a significant difference and gave me the strength to persevere.

I would also like to thank my best friend, Philile Mdanda, for being my anchor and for cheering me up whenever I felt down.

Finally, I extend my sincere appreciation to all those who supported me, directly or indirectly, during this academic journey.

## ABSTRACT

This study explored employee perceptions of the employee assistance programme (EAP) as a strategic intervention to enhance workplace productivity in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, with the focus on the eThekweni Metro Police Service (EMPS). EAPs are designed to support employees in managing personal and work-related challenges that affect performance; however, their utilisation and impact on South African municipal policing remain inconsistently understood. A qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted, using semi-structured interviews with purposively selected EMPS employees in Queensburgh. Guided by the person-in-environment, ecological systems, and general systems theories, the study examined how individual, organisational, and environmental factors influence EAP utilisation and perceived effectiveness. Thematic analysis revealed that employees recognise the EAP's potential to support well-being and productivity, but its effectiveness is constrained by low awareness, confidentiality concerns, cultural stigma, accessibility challenges, and inconsistent leadership support. These factors shape both the utilisation and employees' perceptions of the EAP's value and its contribution to productivity-related outcomes. The study concludes that employees' perceptions and experiences are central to the effective implementation and strategic impact of EAPs in municipal policing. It recommends strengthening leadership involvement, improving communication, enhancing accessibility, and fostering a supportive organisational culture to increase EAP uptake, employee well-being, and overall performance.

**Keywords:** employee assistance programme (EAP), perceptions and experiences, productivity-related outcomes, workplace wellness, qualitative case study

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUPERVISOR’S PERMISSION TO SUBMIT .....	i
DECLARATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
LIST OF FIGURES .....	xi
LIST OF TABLES .....	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	xii

### CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY .....	1
1.3 FOCUS OF THE STUDY .....	2
1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT .....	3
1.5 AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY .....	4
1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES .....	4
1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	4
1.8 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY .....	5
1.9 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY .....	5
1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.11 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY .....	6
1.12 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS .....	7
1.13 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY .....	8
1.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	9

### CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	10
2.2 DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS .....	11

2.2.1	Definitions of health, wellness, and employee assistance programmes (EAPs) .....	11
2.2.1.1	<i>Definition of health</i> .....	11
2.2.1.2	<i>Definition of wellness</i> .....	12
2.2.1.3	<i>Definition of EAPs</i> .....	12
2.2.2	History of EAPs .....	13
2.2.3	The role of EAPs .....	14
2.2.4	Effective application of wellness programmes in the workplace .....	15
2.2.5	Benefits of EAPs to employees and employers .....	17
2.3	FACTORS THAT AFFECT EAP IMPLEMENTATION AND UTILISATION .....	19
2.3.1	Leadership and organisational support .....	19
2.3.2	Logistical and resource factors .....	20
2.3.3	Funding as a barrier and enabler .....	20
2.3.4	Stigma and cultural barriers .....	20
2.3.5	Employee awareness and communication .....	21
2.3.6	Confidentiality concerns .....	21
2.3.7	Employee perceptions .....	21
2.4	MENTAL HEALTH AND EAP IMPACT ON THE WORKPLACE .....	22
2.4.1	Mental health challenges in the workplace .....	22
2.4.2	Impact of mental health on organisational productivity .....	23
2.4.3	The role and impact of EAPs on employee productivity .....	23
2.4.4	Employee perceptions and utilisation of EAPs .....	24
2.5	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	25
2.5.1	Overview of the selected theories .....	26
2.5.2	The ecological systems theory (EST) .....	26
2.5.3	Relevance of the EST to this study .....	28
2.5.4	The link between the theoretical framework and the research objectives .....	28
2.6	EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES .....	29
2.6.1	EAPs in the international context .....	31

2.6.2	EAPs in the South African context.....	32
2.7	RESEARCH GAPS AND STUDY CONTRIBUTION .....	35
2.7.1	Research gaps.....	35
2.7.2	Study contribution.....	37
2.8	CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	38
2.9	CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	40

### **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	42
3.2	RESEARCH DESIGN .....	42
3.3	RESEARCH APPROACH.....	43
3.4	STUDY SITE .....	43
3.5	TARGET POPULATION .....	44
3.6	SAMPLING METHODS/STRATEGIES .....	44
3.7	SAMPLE AND SAMPLE SIZE .....	45
3.8	DATA-COLLECTION INSTRUMENT.....	45
3.9	PRETESTING THE RESEARCH TOOL.....	46
3.10	TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY .....	46
3.11	DATA-COLLECTION METHODS .....	47
3.12	METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS.....	47
3.13	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS .....	47
3.13.1	Ethical clearance .....	48
3.13.2	Protecting anonymity and confidentiality .....	48
3.13.3	Voluntary participation .....	48
3.13.4	Psychological risk mitigation .....	48
3.14	DATA MANAGEMENT AND DISPOSAL .....	48
3.15	CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	49

## CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	50
4.2	DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS .....	50
4.3	OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND DATA SATURATION .....	51
4.3.1	Theme 1: Limited awareness and poor communication of EAP services .....	51
4.3.1.1	<i>Aim of the theme/question</i> .....	51
4.3.1.2	<i>Results and descriptive analysis</i> .....	52
4.3.1.3	<i>Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations</i> .....	52
4.3.2	Theme 2: Trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation.....	52
4.3.2.1	<i>Aim of the theme/question</i> .....	53
4.3.2.2	<i>Results and descriptive analysis</i> .....	53
4.3.2.3	<i>Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations</i> .....	53
4.3.3	Theme 3: Cultural and gender norms that influence help-seeking behaviour.....	53
4.3.3.1	<i>Aim of the theme/question</i> .....	54
4.3.3.2	<i>Results and descriptive analysis</i> .....	54
4.3.3.3	<i>Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations</i> .....	54
4.3.4	Theme 4: Management and organisational influence on EAP utilisation .....	54
4.3.4.1	<i>Aim of the theme/question</i> .....	55
4.3.4.2	<i>Results and descriptive analysis</i> .....	55
4.3.4.3	<i>Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations</i> .....	55
4.3.5	Theme 5: Perceived impact of the EAP on employee well-being and productivity.....	55
4.3.5.1	<i>Aim of the theme/question</i> .....	56
4.3.5.2	<i>Results and descriptive analysis</i> .....	56
4.3.5.3	<i>Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations</i> .....	56
4.3.6	Participant recommendations for enhancing EAP utilisation (Objective 4).....	56
4.4	RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS AND FIELD NOTES.....	57
4.4.1	Introduction .....	57
4.4.2	Narrative summary .....	58

4.4.3	Summary of observations.....	59
4.5	CHAPTER SUMMARY .....	59

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	60
5.2	SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS .....	60
5.3	DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS .....	62
5.3.1	Limited awareness and poor communication of EAP services .....	62
5.3.2	Trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation .....	63
5.3.3	Cultural and gender norms that influence help-seeking behaviour .....	63
5.3.4	Management and organisational influence on EAP utilisation .....	64
5.3.5	Perceived impact of the EAP on employee well-being and productivity.....	64
5.4	FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES.....	64
5.4.1	Objective 1: Identify factors that promote effective EAP implementation .....	64
5.4.2	Objective 2: Explore barriers that hinder EAP effectiveness.....	65
5.4.3	Objective 3: Assess employees’ perceptions of the impact of the EAP on their well-being and productivity.....	65
5.4.4	Objective 4: Recommend strategies to improve the effectiveness and utilisation of EAP services .....	65
5.5	IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EMPS .....	66
5.5.1	Strengthen continuity-of-care and follow-up mechanisms.....	67
5.5.2	Improve the accessibility of EAP services in operational contexts.....	67
5.5.3	Enhance communication and awareness of EAP benefits.....	68
5.5.4	Reinforce confidentiality and build employee trust .....	68
5.5.5	Strengthen leadership support and organisational commitment.....	68
5.5.6	Integrate EAP outcomes into organisational monitoring and evaluation .....	69
5.6	PRIORITISATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	69
5.7	RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION .....	69
5.8	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	70

5.9	AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....	71
5.10	CONCLUSION .....	72
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>		<b>73</b>
 <b>APPENDICES</b>		
	Appendix A: Ethical Clearance From the University of KwaZulu-Natal.....	85
	Appendix B: eThekweni Metropolitan Police Services Gatekeepers’ Letter .....	86
	Appendix C: Research Interview Guide .....	87
	Appendix D: Informed Consent Form .....	90
	Appendix E: Permission to Audio-Record Interview .....	91
	Appendix F: Participant Biographic Data.....	92
	Appendix G: Field Notes – Researcher Observations During the Interview Stage .....	93
	Appendix H: Editing Letter .....	94
	Appendix I: Originality Report (Turnitin) .....	95

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: The EST applied to EAP utilisation .....	27
Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework for EAP implementation .....	40
Figure 3.1: Durban metropolitan station landmarks .....	44

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1: Key roles of EAPs in the workplace .....	15
Table 2.2: Comparative overview of effective EAP components by Berry et al. (2010) and Himani (2023) .....	16
Table 2.3: Benefits of EAP to employees and employers.....	18
Table 2.4: Summary of theoretical framework and linkage to research objectives .....	29
Table 4.1: Participant demographics (anonymised).....	51
Table 4.2: Observations based on Theme 1 .....	52
Table 4.3: Observations based on Theme 2 .....	53
Table 4.4: Observations based on Theme 3 .....	54
Table 4.5: Observations based on Theme 4 .....	55
Table 4.6: Observations based on Theme 5 .....	56
Table 4.7: Summary of researcher observations .....	59

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

\$	Dollar [United States]
CBN	Cape Business News
DPSA	Department of Public Service and Administration
EAP	Employee assistance programme
EAPA-SA	Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa
EMM	eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality
EMPS	eThekweni Metro Police Service
EST	Ecological systems theory
GST	General systems theory
JD-R	Job demands-resources
PIE	Person-in-environment [theory]
PRASA	Passenger Railway Agency of South Africa
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
ROI	Return on investment
SAPS	South African Police Service
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

# **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the study's background, problem statement, aim and objectives, research questions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and assumptions, as well as definitions of key terms. It establishes the foundation for examining employee perceptions of the employee assistance programme (EAP) and its influence on productivity in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM), focusing specifically on the eThekweni Metro Police Service (EMPS).

Recent evaluations of the industry and organisations suggest a growing trend towards treating employee well-being as a strategic priority, rather than a supplementary support function (Allen & Bosworth, 2022; Hayes, 2025). In high-demand public sector environments, such as policing, this shift reflects an increasing recognition of the link between employee well-being, sustained performance, and service delivery outcomes. This context underscores the importance of examining EAPs in municipal policing structures.

Employee wellness initiatives in high-stress environments such as policing are essential for supporting mental health, sustaining performance, and improving service delivery. Practitioner literature indicates that work-related stress has become a leading contributor to employee strain in contemporary organisations, even exceeding concerns related to economic and technological change (Hayes, 2025).

While EAPs are recognised as effective tools for enhancing well-being, research on municipal employees' perceptions and utilisation thereof in South Africa is limited. Organisational culture, trust, confidentiality, awareness, stigma, and leadership support play a critical role in the effectiveness of these programmes. Employees' perceptions of organisational commitment to well-being may influence their willingness to engage with workplace support initiatives. Understanding these perceptions is key to developing strategies that optimise employee welfare and organisational outcomes.

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Employee wellness has transitioned from a discretionary measure to a legal and economic necessity. South African legislation increasingly holds employers accountable for supporting employees who experience mental health challenges (Botha, 2025). Poor mental health is

linked to absenteeism and presenteeism, which reduce organisational productivity (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). De Oliveira et al. (2022) highlight the negative impact of depression and anxiety on work performance.

Municipal employees and police officers face unique stressors, including operational pressures, exposure to trauma, and limited awareness or utilisation of EAP services (Dipela & Mgwenya, 2025; Masuku et al., 2025; Mavuso, 2023). Mental health issues impose significant economic burdens; in South Africa, workplace-related medical costs due to mental health issues amount to between R12 and R16 billion annually (De San José, 2020). Globally, health expenditure reached \$8.3 trillion in 2018, roughly 10% of world gross domestic product (WHO, 2020). Organisations implement EAPs to mitigate these challenges, which provide psychological support and interventions for stress management (Du Plessis & Rabie, 2025).

South African companies invest between R40 000 and R60 000 annually in such programmes. Reported benefits include improved mental health, reduced stress, and increased productivity (Hahn, 2023; MantraCare Corporation, 2022). Structured EAP interventions have demonstrated stress reductions of 20% to 25% and productivity improvements of 10% to 18% (Mathaphuna et al., 2024; Naidu & Olivier, 2025). Nevertheless, barriers such as low participation, stigma, confidentiality concerns, and limited managerial support persist (Veldsman & Van Aarde, 2021).

This study focused specifically on EAPs due to their direct relevance to psychological well-being and productivity. Mental health issues are increasing globally, with one in seven individuals affected by depressive disorders (Boyce & Frankish, 2025; WHO, 2022b). The EMM has implemented EAPs to support employee well-being in recognition of the importance of work-life balance, job satisfaction, and reduced absenteeism and presenteeism (Masuku et al., 2025; Mathaphuna et al., 2024).

### **1.3 FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

This study investigated police officers' perceptions of the EAP in the EMPS. Police work is inherently stressful, as it is characterised by exposure to trauma, operational pressures, and public scrutiny, which makes mental health support essential.

The study was guided by the person-in-environment (PIE) theory, which emphasises the dynamic interaction between individuals and their social context. This framework facilitates an understanding of how workplace and community factors collectively influence employee

well-being and productivity. By applying the PIE theory, the study captured the interplay between organisational structures, operational demands, and individual experiences, as well as identifying the barriers and enablers of EAP utilisation.

#### **1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Work-related stress adversely affects physical and mental health. It arises when job demands exceed employees' coping capacity (WHO, 2023). Employers are responsible for implementing mechanisms to mitigate these challenges, as stress reduces performance, productivity, and service quality.

EMPS officers face job-related stress, financial pressure, long working hours, and irregular shifts, all of which contribute to burnout, diminished job satisfaction, and decreased productivity (Dawood, 2025; Queirós et al., 2020). Mental health challenges, including depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and gender-based violence, negatively impact both employees and organisational outcomes (De Oliveira et al., 2022).

Despite the availability of EAPs, utilisation among municipal employees remains low, with only 35% to 45% accessing such services regularly (Dipela & Mgwenya, 2025; Mavuso, 2023). Barriers such as stigma, limited awareness, and confidentiality concerns further hinder engagement (Ncube, 2022). Awareness among South African Police Service (SAPS) officers in Limpopo is reported to be as low as 10% (Dipela & Sithole, 2021). Recent workplace wellness discourse suggests that generic, one-size-fits-all support programmes often fail to achieve sustained engagement, particularly in high-stress occupations where employee needs are complex and varied (Hayes, 2025). Limited engagement with available support mechanisms may reduce the effectiveness of EAPs, despite their formal availability in organisations. This highlights the importance of understanding employee perceptions, as these perceptions directly influence utilisation and programme outcomes.

Critically, there is no publicly available data on EAP utilisation or employee perceptions in the EMPS, which highlights a significant evidence gap. Understanding these perceptions is essential, as they directly influence engagement, programme effectiveness, and the overall impact on employee well-being and productivity. Industry-based analyses further indicate that organisations that fail to embed wellness initiatives within broader organisational strategies

risk increased disengagement, absenteeism, and higher staff turnover, which result in escalating indirect organisational costs (Allen & Bosworth, 2022).

Failure to address these challenges may perpetuate high stress, chronic burnout, declining morale, and increased organisational costs due to absenteeism, presenteeism, and staff turnover (Dhanpat et al., 2025). This underscores the urgent need for research that examines frontline police officers' perceptions of EAPs, the factors that enable or hinder utilisation, and the influence of these perceptions on programme effectiveness and organisational outcomes.

## **1.5 AIM AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study aimed to explore frontline police officers' perceptions of the EAP and its role in enhancing productivity in the EMPS. It sought to evaluate how these perceptions influence programme effectiveness and to identify factors that enable or hinder successful implementation. The findings will inform strategies to improve mental health support, increase EAP utilisation, and enhance organisational outcomes.

## **1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To identify factors that promote effective EAP implementation.
- To explore barriers that hinder EAP effectiveness.
- To assess employees' perceptions of the impact of the EAP on their well-being and productivity.
- To recommend strategies to improve the effectiveness and utilisation of EAP services.

## **1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study sought to answer the following questions:

- What factors support effective EAP implementation?
- What barriers hinder the EAP from achieving its strategic goals?
- How do employees perceive the impact of the EAP on their well-being and productivity?
- What strategies can improve the effectiveness and utilisation of the EAP?

## **1.8 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Although EAPs have been implemented in the EMM, mental health challenges persist, particularly among EMPS officers who are routinely exposed to trauma (Dawood, 2025; De Oliveira et al., 2022). The police culture discourages the acknowledgement of mental health concerns, which limits voluntary help-seeking and increases the risk of burnout and PTSD (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018). Understanding officer perceptions is critical for improving the relevance and uptake of programmes. Effective EAPs enhance employee well-being, organisational performance, and public trust. Supportive leadership and organisational culture significantly increase participation, which reduces stress by 20% to 25% and improves productivity by 10% to 18% (Masuku et al., 2025; Mathaphuna et al., 2024; Naidu & Olivier, 2025). This study sought to address gaps in municipal and South African EAP research by providing evidence to inform culturally sensitive, targeted interventions.

## **1.9 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

This study focused on the EAP counselling services in the EMPS, specifically examining employee perceptions and programme effectiveness in enhancing productivity. Participants were purposively selected from authorised officers, constables, sergeants, and inspectors, as these ranks represent the operational frontline in the EMPS. These roles are directly exposed to high levels of occupational stress, trauma, and public safety responsibilities, which makes their experiences particularly relevant for evaluating the effectiveness and utilisation of the EAP. Including multiple operational ranks ensured that the study would capture diverse perspectives on workplace challenges and coping mechanisms that would reflect variations in responsibility, decision-making authority, and interaction with EAP services. Employees in administrative roles, support staff, and senior management were excluded, as their roles involve different responsibilities and wellness needs.

Although the study focused on one station, the findings may offer insights that are applicable to other EMPS units and similar high-pressure occupational environments, which can inform organisational policy and EAP implementation strategies.

## 1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study acknowledges several limitations that may have influenced the findings:

- **Researcher bias:** The researcher's personal experience with a family member in law enforcement who died by suicide may have influenced the interpretation of the data. Mitigation: Adherence to ethical protocols, independent coding, and thematic triangulation.
- **Sample size:** The study involved 13 frontline police officers, which may limit generalisability. Mitigation: The qualitative design prioritised depth of understanding over breadth.
- **Subjectivity in coding:** The thematic analysis process was complex and potentially subjective. Mitigation: Collaboration with an independent coder and systematic cross-checking mitigated this potential issue.
- **Sensitive topic:** Discussions around mental health posed a risk of misinterpretation. Mitigation: Member checking and verbatim transcription ensured accuracy and reliability.

## 1.11 ASSUMPTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following assumptions:

- **Honest participation:** The participants would provide candid and truthful responses, which would allow for an authentic exploration of their perceptions and experiences. This would underpin the credibility of the data and ensure that the findings reflect the officers' lived realities.
- **Mitigated researcher bias:** Any potential bias was effectively minimised through strict ethical protocols, collaboration with an independent coder, thematic triangulation, and peer debriefing to ensure objective and reliable analysis.
- **Psychological impact and EAP relevance:** EMPS officers' psychological well-being is influenced by limited access to professional support, inconsistent debriefing, and exposure to high-stress, traumatic work environments (Dawood, 2025; Magubane, 2021). This assumption justifies the focus on EAPs as a mechanism to enhance coping, reduce stress, and improve productivity.

## 1.12 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

The following are key terms used in this thesis:

- **Absenteeism:** Habitual or frequent absence from work represents a withdrawal behaviour that can negatively affect organisational efficiency and service delivery. In the EMPS, absenteeism can compromise operational effectiveness and public safety (Cleveland & Shore, 2007).
- **Corporate wellness programmes** are organisational initiatives designed to promote employees' physical, mental, and emotional well-being. These programmes, including EAPs, aim to reduce stress, enhance productivity, and align employee health with organisational goals (Latha, 2024).
- **Durban Metro Police:** This is the metropolitan police service responsible for traffic policing, crime prevention, and bylaw enforcement in the EMM. Officers' well-being directly influences their performance and the safety of the communities they serve (South African Government, 1995).
- **eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM)** is a metropolitan municipality in KwaZulu-Natal that serves approximately 3.9 million residents. It manages diverse public services, including law enforcement, where employee well-being and engagement are critical for effective service delivery (eThekweni Municipality, 2018).
- **Job satisfaction:** This refers to an employee's overall evaluation of their work experience, which is shaped by motivators such as recognition and growth opportunities, and hygiene factors such as working conditions and remuneration. For police officers, job satisfaction affects productivity, morale, and retention (Meier & Spector, 2015).
- **Mental health** is a state of psychological, emotional, and social well-being that enables individuals to cope with stress, perform effectively at work, and contribute to society. In policing, mental health is crucial for resilience, decision making, and maintaining operational effectiveness (WHO, 2022a).
- **Presenteeism** is the reduced productivity that occurs when employees are physically present at work but do not function fully due to mental or physical health issues. In the EMPS, presenteeism can impact response times, decision making, and service quality (Kenton, 2020).

- **Productivity** refers to the efficiency with which inputs are transformed into outputs. In the EMPS, productivity is reflected in crime resolution rates, response times, and community satisfaction, all of which are influenced by officers' mental health and engagement (Perry, 2023).
- **Work-life balance** is the optimal equilibrium between professional duties and personal life, which reduces stress and supports overall well-being. For police officers, maintaining work-life balance is critical to preventing burnout, sustaining mental health, and preserving family and community relationships (Hreha, 2023; Sandhya, 2024; Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025).

### **1.13 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY**

#### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study by presenting the background and context of EAPs and their role in supporting employee well-being and productivity. It outlines the research problem, aim, objectives, research questions, scope, limitations, assumptions, and key terms, and provides a chapter outline and overall summary.

#### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter reviews theoretical and empirical studies on EAPs (including international and South African research), examines factors that enable or hinder their effectiveness, identifies gaps in current knowledge, and presents a conceptual framework that links existing theories to the study. It concludes with a summary.

#### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

This chapter explains the research design, approach, population, sampling, and data-collection and data-analysis methods. It also addresses ethical considerations and measures for reliability and validity, and concludes with a summary that links the methodology to the data analysis.

#### **Chapter 4: Data Presentation and Analysis**

This chapter presents and analyses the findings according to the study's research objectives and questions. It highlights employee perceptions, organisational influences, and factors that affect EAP utilisation, and concludes with a summary of key results to guide the discussion in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

This chapter interprets the findings in relation to the research objectives and literature, draws conclusions on EAP effectiveness, provides recommendations for practice, reflects on the study's limitations, suggests areas for future research, and concludes with the study's overall contribution to existing knowledge.

### **1.14 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

Chapter 1 established the foundation for this study by outlining the research problem, aim, objectives, questions, scope, delimitations, and key definitions. It emphasised the importance of understanding EMPS officers' perceptions to enhance EAP effectiveness and organisational outcomes. The chapter also highlighted the rationale for a context-specific investigation. This groundwork sets the stage for Chapter 2, which reviews literature on EAPs and workplace wellness and their impact on employee performance, as well as provides the theoretical and empirical framework for the study.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Employee wellness is increasingly recognised as a critical determinant of organisational performance, particularly in high-stress professions such as policing. In municipal policing, officers face unique operational demands, high exposure to traumatic incidents, and socio-cultural pressures, which make wellness support particularly essential (Berry et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2023; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

EAPs are structured workplace interventions designed to provide professional counselling and support to employees who experience personal and work-related challenges that affect their mental health, well-being, and productivity (Hahn, 2023; Mattke et al., 2013; Naidu & Olivier, 2025). EAPs address not only individual psychological needs but also contribute to organisational outcomes, such as operational readiness, workforce stability, and reduced absenteeism (Attridge, 2019; Berry et al., 2010).

In the South African public sector, EAPs are particularly relevant due to challenges such as limited resources, high workloads, and socio-cultural factors that influence employee engagement (Department of Public Service and Administration [DPSA], 2024; Zondo, 2017). While EAPs are acknowledged for supporting mental health, research on municipal employees' perceptions and utilisation remains limited, particularly in policing contexts (Dipela & Mgwanya, 2025; Mavuso, 2023). Factors such as organisational culture, leadership commitment, confidentiality, awareness, and stigma have been shown to significantly affect programme uptake and effectiveness (Masuku et al., 2025; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

Recent applied and industry-oriented literature further indicates that the effectiveness of workplace wellness initiatives depends not only on programme availability but also on employees' perceptions of relevance, accessibility, and organisational support (Allen & Bosworth, 2022; Hayes, 2025). In high-stress occupational settings, wellness interventions that are perceived as generic or poorly aligned with employee needs may fail to achieve sustained engagement, despite formal organisational investment.

Understanding these foundational concepts is essential before examining the factors that influence EAP utilisation in municipal contexts. This chapter therefore presents a comprehensive review of literature on EAPs, including definitions and conceptual foundations, historical evolution, roles and applications, benefits, factors that affect implementation, theoretical underpinnings, and empirical evidence from both international and South African contexts. The chapter concludes with a synthesis of the key findings, identified research gaps, and the conceptual framework that guided this study.

Taken together, this introduction establishes the rationale for examining municipal employees' perceptions, utilisation patterns, and organisational outcomes of EAPs, which sets the stage for the detailed review in Sections 2.2 to 2.6.

## **2.2 DEFINITIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS**

Building on the introduction (Section 2.1), which highlighted the significance of employee wellness and the role of EAPs in municipal policing, it is essential to clearly define the key constructs that underpinned this study. In municipal policing contexts such as the EMPS, EAPs support officers' mental health, operational readiness, and resilience by bridging gaps between individual coping strategies and organisational support mechanisms (Cape Business News [CBN], 2023; De Jesus & O'Neil, 2024). Understanding the specific definitions of health, wellness, and EAPs provides a conceptual foundation for examining employee perceptions, engagement, and utilisation patterns, which directly link to the research objectives and contextualise subsequent sections of this chapter.

### **2.2.1 Definitions of health, wellness, and employee assistance programmes (EAPs)**

Monroe (2021) observes that although the terms "health" and "wellness" are often used interchangeably, they represent distinct constructs that are crucial to differentiate, particularly in the context of workplace interventions such as EAPs. Establishing clear definitions ensures that subsequent discussions of implementation factors, benefits, and organisational outcomes are anchored in a shared understanding of these foundational concepts.

#### ***2.2.1.1 Definition of health***

The WHO (2024) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This definition encompasses two interrelated dimensions:

- **Mental health**, which refers to psychological well-being that enables individuals to manage stress, recognise personal strengths, engage in effective learning, perform optimally at work, and contribute positively to society (WHO, 2022a).
- **Physical health**, which concerns the proper functioning of the body's systems, organs, tissues, and cells (Leist, 2021).

For municipal police officers, both physical and mental health are critical not only for their personal well-being but also for operational effectiveness. Officers' health directly impacts their capacity to engage with EAP services and apply coping strategies in high-stress policing environments.

### ***2.2.1.2 Definition of wellness***

Wellness is conceptualised as the active pursuit of behaviours, choices, and lifestyles that foster holistic health and overall well-being (Global Wellness Institute, n.d.; WHO, 2022)a. Unlike health, which is often considered a static state, wellness is dynamic and process-oriented, and reflects ongoing efforts to maintain or enhance mental, physical, and social functioning.

In the context of municipal policing, officers' wellness extends beyond clinical or physical health to include proactive coping strategies, resilience, and adaptive behaviours that enable sustained performance under operational pressures (CBN, 2023; De Jesus & O'Neil, 2024). This dynamic conceptualisation underscores the importance of organisational support mechanisms, such as EAPs, in promoting sustained well-being and operational effectiveness. Understanding wellness in this sense informs Objective 1, which examines factors that promote EAP implementation.

### ***2.2.1.3 Definition of EAPs***

EAPs are structured, employer-sponsored workplace initiatives that are designed to support employees' mental, physical, and occupational well-being, which will ultimately enhance organisational productivity (Attridge, 2019; Du Plessis & Rabie, 2025). They provide interventions aimed at improving mental health, managing modifiable behavioural challenges, and addressing work-related stressors that may affect performance. Typical services include counselling, referrals, follow-up support, and wellness programmes to reduce absenteeism, mitigate personal or work-related challenges, and foster a supportive workplace environment (EAPA-SA, 2025; Naidu & Olivier, 2025).

In the South African context, including municipal policing, EAPs are recognised as both reactive and proactive strategies that aim to support officers in coping with operational stress, trauma, and mental health challenges while also enhancing operational readiness (CBN, 2023; De Jesus & O’Neil, 2024). Understanding EAPs in this dual role provides the foundation for exploring Objectives 1 and 3, which examine employee perceptions, engagement, utilisation patterns, and their impact on well-being and productivity in high-pressure operational environments.

Taken together, health and wellness may be understood as interrelated but distinct constructs within municipal policing contexts. Health represents a foundational condition that enables officers to function effectively in demanding operational roles, while wellness reflects an ongoing process supported by organisational environments and responsive interventions. In this framework, EAPs serve as structured mechanisms that address both immediate employee needs and longer-term organisational objectives. This dual framing of EAPs supports this study’s examination of both individual-level experiences and organisational-level outcomes associated with programme implementation and utilisation.

### **2.2.2 History of EAPs**

EAPs originated in the United States of America (USA) during the 1930s as occupational alcoholism programmes, which were developed to support employees in the manufacturing sector who were struggling with alcoholism and to assist them in regaining work skills and reintegrating into the workforce (Attridge, 2019). Early adoption was limited due to stigma, as employees who participated in these initiatives were often perceived negatively.

In the post-World War II era, EAPs expanded to address a broader range of mental health and substance abuse challenges, particularly among returning military veterans. This period marked a shift in managerial thinking, with a growing recognition of the link between employees’ personal difficulties and organisational productivity (Merriwether, 2021). Over time, EAPs were adopted across multiple sectors and countries, including South Africa, where they became integrated into organisational wellness strategies.

In South Africa, formal EAPs emerged in the 1980s following a feasibility study by the Chamber of Mines, which explored the implementation of employee wellness programmes in the mining sector (Terblanche, 1992). The Chamber of Mines subsequently commissioned the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa (EAPA-SA) in 1983 to

conduct a sector-specific feasibility study, which was completed in 1985 and laid the groundwork for expansion beyond the mining industry.

This evolution facilitated the institutionalisation of EAPs in the South African public sector, which was guided by the DPSA. National, provincial, and local government departments were mandated to establish EAPs aligned with EAPA-SA principles to ensure a standardised approach across the public service (EAPA-SA, 2024). Guidelines were reviewed in 1999, 2005, and 2009 to remain responsive to workforce needs and organisational challenges.

By the early 2000s, EAPs evolved to include mental health, stress management, work-life balance, and overall wellness, and thus shifted beyond narrow productivity goals (Sieberhagen et al., 2011; Tahir, 2024). Organisations adopted EAPs as strategic tools for wellness, occupational health compliance, corporate social responsibility, and employer branding. Despite this broader orientation, EAPs continue to focus on addressing individual psychological and personal challenges that affect workplace functioning.

Typically administered through human resources departments, EAPs provide counselling, referral systems, wellness programmes, and crisis intervention. In South Africa, the Public Service Commission (2006) emphasised the role of EAPs in mitigating workplace stress, managing conflict, and supporting employees who face personal and work-related challenges.

In the context of municipal policing, including the EMPS, the historical evolution of EAPs informs current implementation strategies, which balance individual support with organisational objectives and operational readiness (CBN, 2023; Csiernik, 2021).

This historical evolution illustrates how EAPs have transitioned from limited remedial initiatives to comprehensive organisational support structures, which provides a crucial foundation for analysing contemporary issues related to employee attitudes, utilisation, and programme effectiveness in municipal policing contexts.

### **2.2.3 The role of EAPs**

EAPs provide confidential counselling and support to address personal, emotional, and work-related challenges. They assist employees with stress, mental health concerns, substance use, family issues, and other factors that affect performance (Ahad et al., 2023; Robbins, 2016). Confidentiality and accessibility are pivotal, as employees are more likely to engage when they trust that services are private and operationally accessible (Gupta & Moid, 2025).

In municipal policing contexts, including the EMPS, EAPs play a dual role: supporting officers' well-being and maintaining operational effectiveness under high-stress, shift-based conditions (De Jesus & O'Neil, 2024; Masuku et al., 2025) (see Table 2.1). Understanding these functions is critical for evaluating employee perceptions, engagement patterns, and organisational outcomes. This is directly linked to Objectives 1 and 3.

**Table 2.1: Key roles of EAPs in the workplace**

<b>Role</b>	<b>Description / organisational impact</b>
Supporting employee well-being	Provides confidential counselling and support for personal and work-related challenges in order to promote resilience and mental health.
Enhancing workplace productivity	Addresses factors that contribute to absenteeism and presenteeism to enable employees to perform effectively.
Reducing absenteeism and turnover	Offers early intervention and support to minimise lost work days and improve employee retention.
Promoting a healthy work environment	Fosters a supportive organisational culture that values employee welfare and engagement.
Mitigating organisational risks	Assists in managing conflicts, crises, and potential legal issues through guidance and referral services.
Supporting leadership and management	Provides managers with training and guidance on effectively supporting employee well-being and performance.

Source: Author's compilation based on Ahad et al. (2023), Gupta and Moid (2025), Moore et al. (2023), and Robbins (2016)

Collectively, these roles illustrate how EAPs translate organisational support into practical benefits for employees. In municipal policing, EAPs not only address personal challenges but also enhance operational effectiveness by promoting resilience, reducing stress-related errors, and sustaining workforce readiness. This understanding provides a foundation for assessing officers' perceptions, utilisation patterns, and the broader impact of EAP services on the EMPS.

#### **2.2.4 Effective application of wellness programmes in the workplace**

In contemporary organisational settings, employee well-being is increasingly recognised as a strategic priority, particularly in high-pressure environments such as municipal policing. Wellness programmes, including EAPs, serve as structured interventions that aim to support employees' mental, physical, and occupational health in order to enhance both individual resilience and organisational performance. The effectiveness of these programmes depends not only on the availability of services but also on how they are implemented, communicated, and supported in an organisation (Himani, 2023).

Operationally, EAPs require careful attention to factors such as confidentiality, accessibility, communication, and managerial engagement to ensure meaningful employee participation.

Himani (2023) identifies six key operational components: counselling and confidentiality, referral systems, programme communication, evaluation, manager support, and integration with other benefits, which translate strategic objectives into practical delivery. Complementing this, Berry et al. (2010) propose a strategic framework that highlights leadership commitment, alignment with organisational goals, programme scope, accessibility, internal and external partnerships, and effective communication as essential for embedding wellness initiatives into organisational strategy. Recent research further supports these strategic pillars (Long & Cooke, 2022; Aziz & Ong, 2025), demonstrating their continued relevance in contemporary workplace wellness programmes.

In the public sector context, including municipal environments such as the EMM, these considerations are especially critical. Leadership endorsement strongly influences employee trust and engagement, while strategic alignment ensures that EAPs contribute meaningfully to institutional objectives such as service delivery, operational readiness, and employee welfare. Additionally, flexible delivery mechanisms such as trauma counselling, telephonic support, and multi-language communication address practical and psychological barriers to programme uptake to ensure that services remain accessible to a diverse and operationally mobile workforce.

By synthesising strategic and operational perspectives, it becomes clear that successful EAP implementation relies on the integration of leadership commitment, accessible service delivery, and structured wellness offerings. Table 2.2 illustrates how the frameworks of Berry et al. (2010) and Himani (2023) complement each other to provide a comprehensive approach for evaluating and optimising EAP effectiveness in municipal organisations.

**Table 2.2: Comparative overview of effective EAP components by Berry et al. (2010) and Himani (2023)**

Berry et al. (2010) (strategic framework)	Himani (2023) (operational components)	Interpretation and synergy
Engaged leadership at multiple levels	Manager and supervisor support	Leadership and supervisor involvement build trust, increase referrals, and promote programme credibility.
Strategic alignment with organisational aspirations	Integration with other benefits	EAPs that are aligned with organisational goals and support structures have greater sustainability and impact.
Broad scope, high relevance, and quality	Confidentiality and counselling	Professional, confidential counselling ensures relevance to employee needs and enhances trust.
Broad accessibility	Referral services	Self-referral and management-referral pathways ensure that all employees can access support.

Internal and external partnerships	Programme evaluation	Collaborations strengthen delivery, and regular evaluation ensures continuous improvement.
Effective communication	Communication and education	Awareness campaigns and education reduce stigma and improve EAP utilisation.

Source: Adapted from Berry et al. (2010) and Himani (2023)

Table 2.2 presents a comparative overview of the key components for effective EAP implementation as proposed by Berry et al. (2010) and Himani (2023). Berry et al. (2010) focus on strategic-level factors, such as leadership commitment, alignment with organisational goals, and integration into broader wellness strategies. In contrast, Himani (2023) emphasises operational-level elements, including service delivery processes, communication, and programme accessibility. Both frameworks highlight that leadership involvement, clear communication, and accessible services are essential for successful EAP outcomes. Additionally, comprehensive offerings such as confidential counselling, referrals, and wellness interventions, combined with collaborative internal and external partnerships, enhance overall programme effectiveness. Recent studies provide additional support for the continued relevance of strategic wellness pillars in contemporary organisations (Long & Cooke, 2023; Abdul Aziz & Ong, 2025). This synthesis demonstrates how linking strategic intent with practical implementation provides a robust foundation for evaluating and optimising EAPs within contexts such as the EMM, where both leadership support and operational execution determine programme success.

### **2.2.5 Benefits of EAPs to employees and employers**

Organisations are increasingly adopting wellness programmes as strategic tools to promote employee well-being while achieving organisational objectives. These initiatives support employees in managing personal and work-related stressors, which provide benefits that extend to both the workforce and the organisation. By addressing personal challenges, employees can sustain performance, remain engaged, and maintain psychological resilience, which illustrates the strong link between mental well-being and workplace productivity. EAPs typically provide ongoing support, including voluntary counselling services that are available around the clock, with confidentiality maintained as a core principle (Kuvaas, 2018). Beyond individual well-being, wellness programmes contribute to affective commitment and organisational loyalty among employees (see Table 2.3).

For employers, EAPs support strategic goals by reducing absenteeism, improving productivity, and enhancing employee retention. Zondi (2023) emphasises that the implementation of EAPs

benefits the organisation holistically, with both employees and employers as primary beneficiaries. However, these benefits are contingent on utilisation, which remains low globally (Franco, 2025), often between 5% and 10%, which potentially reduces the return on investment (ROI).

Leadership engagement is critical for embedding wellness within organisational culture. Robbins (2016) suggests that linking wellness initiatives to performance incentives, such as recognition or salary adjustments, can increase programme engagement. Managers are encouraged to foster healthy behaviours such as physical activity, stress management, and proactive help-seeking rather than focusing solely on outcomes such as absenteeism or healthcare costs. Integrating wellness into managerial priorities cultivates a supportive culture that reinforces both employee and organisational outcomes.

As stated by Altman et al. (2023), workplace wellness initiatives achieve the greatest success when they are integrated into the organisational culture and clearly supported by leaders and staff at every level. Understanding factors that affect participation, such as motivation and ability, can help organisations tailor wellness initiatives to meet employee needs, which will strengthen a nurturing organisational culture.

Despite these benefits, challenges remain in maximising EAP effectiveness. Successful implementation requires addressing barriers such as stigma, confidentiality concerns, communication gaps, inconsistent leadership support, and logistical constraints (Sieberhagen et al., 2011). Recognising these benefits and challenges provides a foundation for understanding why EAP utilisation varies and highlights the importance of tailored strategies to ensure engagement.

**Table 2.3: Benefits of EAP to employees and employers**

Beneficiary	Benefits
Employees	Reduced stress, improved mental health, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced engagement.
Employers	Lower absenteeism, improved productivity, reduced turnover, and a supportive organisational culture.

Source: Adapted from Sieberhagen et al. (2011)

Understanding these benefits is essential before examining the critical factors and barriers that influence EAP implementation, including leadership support, confidentiality, stigma, communication, and operational constraints, as discussed in the following section.

## **2.3 FACTORS THAT AFFECT EAP IMPLEMENTATION AND UTILISATION**

The effectiveness of EAPs depends not only on their design but also on the organisational, logistical, and cultural factors that influence implementation and employee uptake. Understanding these factors is essential for evaluating how EAPs support employee well-being and organisational productivity, which is directly linked to Objective 3 of this study. Empirical evidence from South African workplaces provides valuable insights into these dynamics.

In the South African public sector, structural constraints, high service delivery pressures, and limited organisational capacity further complicate the effective implementation of employee wellness initiatives, including EAPs (Zondo, 2017). For example, Nyambose (2024) explored employee wellness programme utilisation at the Passenger Railway Agency of South Africa (PRASA) and found that poor promotion, confidentiality concerns, and organisational culture significantly limited service uptake, despite general approval of the programme. Similar findings are reported in organisational communication studies, which emphasise that EAPs are more likely to be utilised when they are clearly communicated, consistently promoted, and framed in ways that build trust and reduce uncertainty around confidentiality (Coffelt, 2024). This perspective is further reinforced by applied workplace research, which indicates that employee assistance and mental health initiatives demonstrate higher levels of utilisation and effectiveness when supported by leadership, embedded within organisational culture, and communicated in ways that promote trust and encourage help-seeking behaviour (Kumar, 2023).

### **2.3.1 Leadership and organisational support**

Strong leadership is critical to EAP success. When leaders do not prioritise employee well-being, programmes are perceived as low priority, which results in limited visibility, low engagement, and underutilisation (Robbins, 2016). Ineffective leadership, characterised by poor communication, lack of empathy, and insufficient recognition, negatively affects employee resilience and well-being (Dagar & Sisodia, 2023). Conversely, active managerial involvement signals organisational commitment, encourages trust, and promotes programme uptake, which foster both individual and organisational benefits.

Similarly, Nyambose (2024) found that leadership attitudes and organisational culture at PRASA strongly influenced employee engagement with the wellness services. Employees reported that limited managerial support discouraged utilisation, even when services were

deemed valuable. Leadership support also mitigates stress that arises from poor working conditions, interpersonal conflicts, and family pressures (Mushwana et al., 2019) by functioning as both a practical enabler and a motivational factor in municipal contexts.

### **2.3.2 Logistical and resource factors**

Operational constraints such as inconvenient service hours, limited resources, language barriers, and insufficient staffing hinder EAP accessibility and utilisation. These challenges often compound other barriers, including stigma and mistrust. Taute and Manzini (2014) report that 59% of employees preferred on-site EAP services, while 80% favoured counselling in their native language, which emphasises the importance of accessibility and cultural relevance.

Nyambose (2024) further highlights that service location and accessibility affect employees' willingness to engage with wellness programmes. Employees at PRASA expressed concerns with service locations that compromised confidentiality and ease of access, which demonstrates that logistical arrangements are critical for effective utilisation, particularly in decentralised municipal workplaces.

### **2.3.3 Funding as a barrier and enabler**

Funding plays a dual role in the implementation of EAPs. Inadequate financial resources can limit programme sustainability, service delivery, and evaluation. Without funding to track objective indicators such as absenteeism and productivity, as well as subjective indicators like psychological well-being, the value of EAPs may remain unclear, which will reduce managerial commitment and limit expansion (Mathaphuna et al., 2024). Conversely, sufficient funding enables structured monitoring, demonstrates programme impact, and reinforces leadership buy-in.

### **2.3.4 Stigma and cultural barriers**

Stigma surrounding mental health impedes EAP utilisation, as employees may fear judgement or negative career consequences (Ahad et al., 2023; Subramaniam, 2024). High-stress professions, such as policing, exacerbate these barriers due to irregular shifts, operational stress, and workplace norms that discourage help-seeking behaviour (Papazoglou & Tuttle, 2018; Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025). Culturally sensitive interventions and proactive communication are therefore essential in creating an environment where employees feel safe to engage with EAP services.

### **2.3.5 Employee awareness and communication**

Insufficient awareness and poor communication of EAP services are widely reported barriers (Moore et al., 2023; Taute & Manzini, 2014). Proactive communication strategies can improve engagement, but the most effective methods in municipal workplaces remain under-researched. Nyambose (2024) found that inadequate promotion of wellness services at PRASA limited employee uptake, despite general approval of the programmes. Employees frequently lacked information about the available services and how to access them, which highlights that clear and accessible communication is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement. Enhancing awareness aligns directly with Objective 3 by assessing how employees understand and perceive EAP services in the EMM.

### **2.3.6 Confidentiality concerns**

Concerns about confidentiality significantly influence EAP utilisation. Taute and Manzini (2014) found that 33% of employees would not use EAP services again due to uncertainty about privacy and report sharing. Maintaining strict confidentiality is therefore fundamental to encouraging participation and ensuring that employees derive the full benefit from EAPs (Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025). Nyambose (2024) similarly reported that PRASA employees hesitated to engage with wellness services due to concerns over confidentiality and service visibility. Trust in the organisation's handling of sensitive information is central to programme utilisation, which highlights the role of organisational trust as a key factor that shapes employee perceptions.

### **2.3.7 Employee perceptions**

Collectively, leadership, logistics, funding, stigma, awareness, and confidentiality shape employees' perceptions of EAPs, which influence how they view the programme's value, relevance, and safety. The PRASA study reinforces that organisational culture, leadership attitudes, and communication practices play a pivotal role in engagement and utilisation, even when services are well received. Adequate funding, a supportive culture, and careful logistical arrangements provide the foundation for analysing mental health and the impact of EAP on the workplace in Section 2.4.

## **2.4 MENTAL HEALTH AND EAP IMPACT ON THE WORKPLACE**

Employee mental health is a critical determinant of both individual well-being and organisational productivity. Occupational pressures and socio-economic factors contribute to stress, anxiety, burnout, depression, and PTSD (De Oliveira et al., 2022; WHO, 2023). High-stress professions, such as policing and municipal services, are particularly susceptible, leading to absenteeism, presenteeism, reduced job satisfaction, and compromised operational effectiveness (Dawood, 2025; Huzefa et al., 2024; Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025). Understanding these impacts provides a foundation for evaluating the role of EAPs in supporting employee well-being and organisational outcomes, which addresses Objective 3 of this study.

### **2.4.1 Mental health challenges in the workplace**

Mental health challenges often arise subtly from work-related pressures and may include stress, anxiety, burnout, and depression, which significantly impair employees' functioning, reduce productivity, and increase absenteeism. Employees frequently endure these challenges in silence, uncertain of how to seek support.

Workplace stress has intensified due to evolving organisational demands and socio-economic pressures, which adversely affect both physical and mental health (WHO, 2023). High-stress professions, such as policing and municipal services, face unique mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and substance misuse, which compromise employee well-being and operational effectiveness (Dawood, 2025; De Oliveira et al., 2022). These factors not only contribute to absenteeism and presenteeism but also erode morale and job satisfaction, which further impacts organisational performance.

Among police officers and municipal employees, mental health challenges are exacerbated by work-life imbalance that results from irregular shifts and operational stressors. Salgar and Nizamuddin (2025) identify shift work, job-related stress, and the psychological demands inherent in policing as major contributors to burnout, absenteeism, and strained family relationships. Organisational interventions, including flexible scheduling, wellness programmes, and accessible EAPs, can foster resilience and sustainable work performance.

Globally, poor workplace mental health incurs substantial economic and human costs. The WHO (2024) estimates that approximately 12 billion work days are lost annually due to mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, which represent nearly \$1 trillion in

economic losses. These figures highlight the necessity of proactive mental health strategies, including well-implemented EAPs, which serve as both preventative and responsive interventions.

Effectively integrating EAPs with flexible work arrangements, awareness campaigns, and a supportive organisational culture strengthens employee psychological well-being, reduces operational risks, and supports organisational sustainability.

#### **2.4.2 Impact of mental health on organisational productivity**

Poor employee mental health is strongly associated with absenteeism, presenteeism, and reduced job satisfaction. Globally, mental health challenges represent a major economic burden that affects workforce performance (Zhu, 2023). In South Africa, workplace stress, anxiety, and depression are estimated to cost the economy approximately R232 billion annually (Muchnick, 2023). Globally, one in eight individuals experiences mental health or depressive disorders, with nearly 28 million people being diagnosed with depression. This growing economic and human burden underscores the necessity for organisational wellness initiatives, including EAPs, to sustain workforce productivity and resilience.

Organisations that actively promote mental health support report healthier work environments, higher job satisfaction, and improved productivity, while also reducing absenteeism and presenteeism (Luyten & Knapp, 2017). In South Africa, over 25% of employees report high workplace stress levels; of these, 80% of employees diagnosed with depression take leave, and 32% conceal the cause due to insufficient organisational support (South African Depression and Anxiety Group, 2025). These findings illustrate the direct impact of untreated mental health challenges on organisational performance.

#### **2.4.3 The role and impact of EAPs on employee productivity**

EAPs are structured interventions that are designed to enhance productivity by addressing mental health and well-being challenges. Ahmed (2025) reports that organisations that invest in mental health initiatives experience a reduction in absenteeism, an increase in engagement, and a positive ROI, which highlights the tangible impact of EAPs on performance. Similarly, Deloitte (2020) indicates that every dollar invested in mental health programmes yields an average return of \$4 through increased productivity and reduced absenteeism. Neglecting mental health can lead to higher turnover, diminished morale, and elevated costs. South African

evidence mirrors these trends. Xulu (2024) found that employees in a state-owned enterprise reported feeling happy when engaged in intensive work, expressed enthusiasm about attending work, enjoyed solving complex problems, and appreciated tackling new challenges. These findings reinforce the link between engagement, motivation, and productivity, and illustrate the role of EAPs in supporting workforce effectiveness.

Senthil (2021) highlight that wellness initiatives assist employees in managing work-life balance and maintaining lower stress levels, thereby improving performance and job satisfaction. The job demands-resources (JD-R) model further explains that EAPs function as critical job resources that mitigate stress, reduce burnout, and enhance engagement, which are key drivers of productivity (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

The effectiveness of EAPs is commonly evaluated through reductions in absenteeism and presenteeism, improved retention, enhanced performance, and ROI. Ongoing evaluation ensures that EAPs remain responsive to the evolving needs of employees and the objectives of the organisation.

#### **2.4.4 Employee perceptions and utilisation of EAPs**

Collectively, the factors discussed in Section 2.3, namely leadership support, logistical arrangements, funding, stigma, awareness, and confidentiality, shape how employees perceive and engage with EAPs. These organisational and individual influences determine whether employees trust the programme, feel safe to utilise it, and recognise its relevance to their personal and professional well-being. Understanding these dynamics provides a critical foundation for examining actual employee perceptions, utilisation patterns, and the resulting impact on productivity. By linking organisational enablers and barriers to employees' lived experiences, the study could assess how EAP effectiveness translates into tangible outcomes for both employees and the municipality.

Employee engagement with EAPs is influenced by trust, confidentiality, accessibility, and perceived relevance. Positive perceptions are associated with higher utilisation, improved well-being, and measurable gains in productivity. The literature indicates that organisational and contextual factors such as leadership support, logistical arrangements, funding, stigma, awareness, and confidentiality are consistently associated with how employees perceive and engage with EAPs. These factors are widely discussed as shaping employees' trust in EAP

services, their willingness to utilise available support, and their perceptions of the programme's relevance to personal and professional well-being (Attridge, 2019; Attridge, 2023).

Across organisational contexts, studies converge in identifying perceptions of confidentiality, trustworthiness, accessibility, and organisational support as central determinants of EAP utilisation. Where EAP services are described as confidential and accessible, higher levels of utilisation are reported, while stigma, mistrust, and limited awareness are commonly associated with reduced engagement (Senthil, 2021; Makhanya, 2021; Zondi, 2017).

The literature further reports associations between EAP engagement and employee well-being and productivity-related outcomes. Prior studies have examined indicators such as absenteeism, presenteeism, work performance, and employee engagement when evaluating EAP effectiveness across different organisational settings (Ahmed, 2025; Deloitte, 2020; Xulu, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, the JD-R model has been applied in previous research to explain how workplace support mechanisms, including EAPs, may function as job resources that buffer job demands, reduce stress, and support employee engagement and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In this body of literature, the ongoing evaluation of EAPs is commonly emphasised to ensure alignment with employee needs and organisational objectives.

Importantly, these outcomes are closely tied to employees' perceptions of trust, confidentiality, accessibility, and programme relevance. When perceptions are positive, utilisation increases, and the organisational benefits of EAPs are fully realised. Conversely, negative perceptions that arise from stigma, lack of awareness, or mistrust can limit uptake and undermine programme effectiveness, even when services are designed well and widely available.

By connecting organisational enablers and barriers to employee perceptions and utilisation, this section demonstrates how EAPs serve as a strategic mechanism to enhance both individual well-being and organisational productivity, which aligns directly with Objective 2 of this study.

## **2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theoretical framework provides a structured lens to examine and interpret the research problem and guides concept selection, data analysis, and interpretation of findings within an established body of knowledge (Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). In the context of employee well-being and organisational support mechanisms such as EAPs, a robust theoretical foundation is

essential for understanding how individual behaviours, perceptions, and productivity are shaped by workplace and organisational contexts.

This study was underpinned by the PIE theory, ecological systems theory (EST), and general systems theory (GST) in recognition that employee behaviour and perceptions are influenced by continuous interactions between individuals and their environments (Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). Among these, the EST served as the primary framework because it offered a holistic, multi-level perspective for examining employee perceptions and utilisation of the EAP in the EMM.

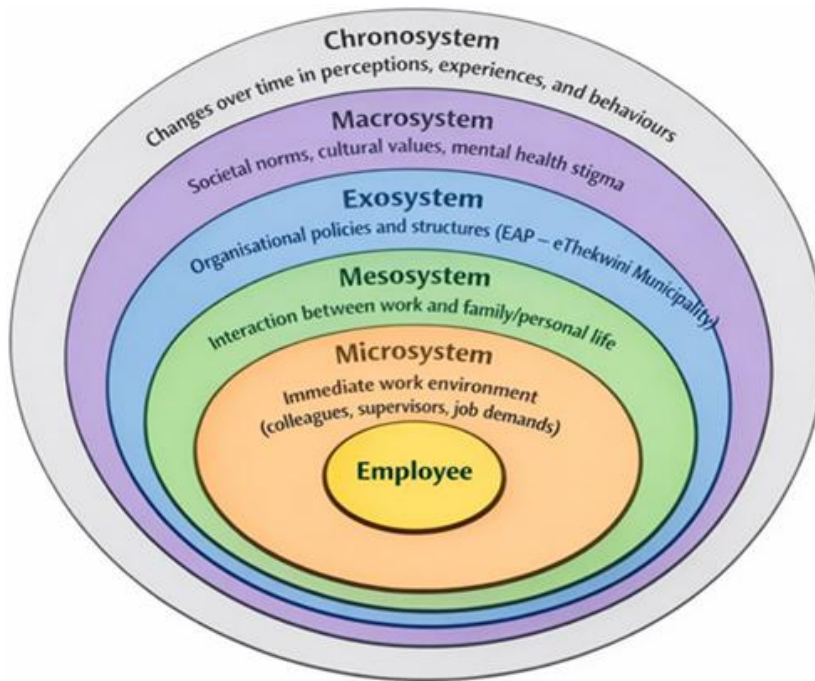
### **2.5.1 Overview of the selected theories**

The PIE theory emphasises the dynamic relationship between individuals and their social and organisational contexts and highlights that personal challenges cannot be fully understood without considering environmental influences (Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). The GST views organisations as interconnected systems in which changes in one component affect the functioning of the entire system (Rothmann & Cooper, 2015). These theories complement the EST, which integrates individual, organisational, and societal factors into a single explanatory framework. Together, they enabled this study to examine employee perceptions and utilisation of EAP services not only at the individual level but also within the broader organisational and municipal context, where policies, leadership, and culture influence participation.

### **2.5.2 The ecological systems theory (EST)**

The EST, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), proposes that human behaviour is influenced by nested environmental systems that interact over time. Although originally created to explain human development, it is now widely applied in workplace research to understand how contextual factors shape decisions and behaviours (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In this study, the theory provided a framework for analysing employee perceptions and utilisation of EAPs, acknowledging that the decision to seek support is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by interactions with supervisors, colleagues, organisational policies, and societal norms.



**Figure 2.1: The EST applied to EAP utilisation**

Source: Bronfenbrenner (1979)

- a) **Microsystem:** The immediate work environment, which includes interactions with supervisors and peers, daily job demands, and operational pressures, directly affects stress levels, coping mechanisms, and the willingness to use EAP services. Supportive relationships encourage engagement, while unsupportive practices or fear of judgement may discourage utilisation (Robbins, 2016).
- b) **Mesosystem:** Interactions between work and personal life influence EAP engagement. High work demands or emotionally stressful environments may affect family life and employees' capacity or willingness to participate in wellness programmes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Robbins, 2016).
- c) **Exosystem:** Organisational policies and programme structures, such as accessibility, confidentiality, communication, and managerial support, indirectly influence employee trust and engagement, even if employees are not involved in policy development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rothmann & Cooper, 2015).
- d) **Macrosystem:** Societal and cultural norms, particularly mental health stigma, may discourage employees from using available support services, regardless of workplace accessibility (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
- e) **Chronosystem:** Changes over time in organisational policies, leadership, or personal circumstances affect EAP engagement, which demonstrates that employee perceptions

are dynamic and responsive to evolving contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Rothmann & Cooper, 2015).

### **2.5.3 Relevance of the EST to this study**

The combined application of the PIE theory, EST, and GST provided a multidimensional lens for understanding the factors that enable or hinder EAP implementation and utilisation. Microsystem and mesosystem factors illustrate barriers and enablers such as leadership engagement, peer support, and work-life dynamics, while exosystem and macrosystem factors demonstrate how organisational policies and societal norms influence employee perceptions. The chronosystem ensures that these dynamics are understood as evolving over time.

In applying these theories, the study examined how leadership practices, trust, confidentiality, stigma, communication, and policy environments interact to shape EAP effectiveness in the EMM. This theoretical foundation directly supported the research objectives by providing a structured approach to evaluate employee perceptions, factors that influence utilisation, and organisational impact, in linking wellness interventions to productivity outcomes.

### **2.5.4 The link between the theoretical framework and the research objectives**

The selected theoretical frameworks collectively emphasise how individual employee behaviours and perceptions are shaped by their immediate work environment, broader organisational structures, and socio-cultural contexts.

Microsystem factors, such as supervisory support, influence engagement directly, while exosystem factors, such as municipal policies and communication strategies, affect trust and accessibility. Societal stigma, represented in the macrosystem, interacts with organisational practices to either facilitate or constrain participation.

This theoretical foundation addresses supervisor feedback by clearly mapping each theory to the research objectives. It demonstrates how individual behaviours, workplace dynamics, municipal policies, and socio-cultural factors interact to shape engagement with wellness interventions. This ensured a coherent, theoretically grounded approach for analysing factors that influence EAP effectiveness in the EMM.

**Table 2.4: Summary of theoretical framework and linkage to research objectives**

Theory	Core idea	Link to research objectives
EST	Multiple environmental systems interact over time to influence behaviours.	Highlights the role of organisational structures, leadership practices, municipal policies, and societal norms that act as enablers or barriers to EAP implementation (Objectives 1 and 2).
PIE theory	Employee behaviour and well-being are influenced by interactions between personal circumstances and environments.	Explains how personal challenges, workplace culture, and social contexts shape employees' perceptions and experiences of EAP services (Objective 3).
GST	Organisational subsystems are interdependent; changes in one subsystem affect the system as a whole.	Demonstrates how improving EAP effectiveness influences employee well-being and productivity, which informs strategic recommendations for enhancing EAP utilisation (Objective 4).

*Note: Table 2.4 demonstrates how each framework informed the research objectives. It focuses on employee perceptions, EAP utilisation, and productivity outcomes.*

## 2.6 EMPIRICAL REVIEW OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

Workplace health and safety challenges continue to pose significant risks to employees worldwide, affecting both personal well-being and organisational productivity. Mental health issues, such as depression, substance abuse, and chronic stress, are strongly linked to suicide and suicide attempts, with approximately 720 000 people dying by suicide globally each year (WHO, 2019). EAPs are employer-sponsored initiatives that provide confidential support services to employees who face personal, work-related, or psychological challenges. These programmes typically include counselling, mental health resources, stress management, and referral services, and aim to improve overall well-being, reduce absenteeism, and enhance productivity. By addressing interconnected personal and occupational stressors, EAPs form a core component of comprehensive workplace wellness strategies (Berry et al., 2010; Hahn, 2023; Naidu & Olivier, 2025). In this review, references to workplace wellness initiatives are discussed primarily within the scope of EAPs, as these programmes constitute the central organisational mechanism examined in this study.

Despite widespread recognition of the benefits of EAPs, their effectiveness is highly contingent on programme design, organisational support, and employee engagement, all of which are influenced by contextual, cultural, and managerial factors. Recent research emphasises the need to examine not only programme availability but also employees' lived experiences and perceptions to understand true effectiveness (Ahad et al., 2023; Sundler et al., 2019).

While the benefits of EAPs are widely acknowledged, existing empirical studies vary in context and methodology, and many do not sufficiently capture employees' lived experiences of

programme utilisation. This review synthesises key international and South African evidence to identify empirical trends and gaps that directly informed the focus of this study.

Kankousky (2022) emphasises the increasingly blurred boundaries between professional and personal life and notes that significant life stressors persist regardless of work location, which reinforces the need for integrated workplace support systems. Globally, approximately 2.78 million workers die each year from occupational accidents and work-related conditions, which is equivalent to roughly 7 500 deaths per day due to unsafe and unhealthy work environments (CBN, 2023; International Labour Organization, 2019; United Nations Global Compact, 2021). In the USA, Brown (2025) reported over 2.6 million work-related injuries in 2023, including illness-related absenteeism. According to the WHO (2024), mental health challenges account for approximately 12 billion lost work days each year, which result in an estimated \$1 trillion in productivity losses. These figures underscore the strategic importance of employee health and safety for organisational sustainability and competitiveness (Hayes, 2025).

Organisations have increasingly adopted proactive wellness strategies to address these challenges. Kumar (2023) argues that interventions aimed at reducing employee stress are essential for fostering positive work environments. A 2025 Forbes Advisory survey found that 88% of employees regard workplace well-being initiatives as important as remuneration (Hayes, 2025). Globally, organisations are investing in holistic wellness programmes that address both mental and physical health needs (Garfield et al., 2024; OECD, 2022). However, the presence of such programmes does not automatically translate into engagement or measurable outcomes; the quality of implementation, programme communication, and leadership support play pivotal roles in utilisation (Dipela & Sithole, 2021; Katema & Hapunda, 2024; Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025). Despite these efforts, Ong (2025) reports that 38% of employees remain at risk of mental health challenges, while 65% have experienced burnout. This indicates the continued need for effective support mechanisms. Empirical evidence shows that wellness interventions, including flexible work arrangements and targeted programmes, reduce stress and improve engagement, which aligns closely with EAP objectives of promoting mental health, reducing absenteeism, and enhancing productivity (Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025).

However, international literature highlights that the presence of EAPs alone does not guarantee effective utilisation. Employees frequently delay or avoid accessing EAP services due to stigma, lack of awareness, and concerns about confidentiality, which limits their potential

impact (Dipela & Sithole, 2021; Katema & Hapunda, 2024). Rather than attributing this solely to programme deficiencies, the authors emphasise broader contextual and organisational influences on engagement and advocate for proactive, integrated well-being frameworks. Furthermore, studies highlight the importance of tailoring interventions to sector-specific needs and high-stress environments, such as healthcare and policing, where stigma and operational pressures are amplified (Arjmand et al., 2025; Hengboriboon & Yukongdi, 2024). These findings suggest that EAP effectiveness is shaped not only by availability but also by organisational trust, communication practices, and cultural integration, which warrant closer examination across contexts.

This perspective aligns with South African research, where local studies indicate that employee engagement with EAPs is influenced by awareness, organisational culture, and perceived service relevance. This highlights the need for context-specific strategies to enhance programme effectiveness (Naidu & Olivier, 2025). Additionally, South African studies highlight the influence of managerial behaviour and peer norms, with employees in municipal policing and other public sector contexts expressing hesitation to engage due to perceived stigma, confidentiality concerns, and limited managerial advocacy (CBN, 2023; Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

### **2.6.1 EAPs in the international context**

International studies consistently demonstrate that EAPs enhance employee well-being, reduce absenteeism, and improve productivity. Their effectiveness depends on factors such as trust, awareness, leadership support, and stigma. The evidence can be grouped under the following key themes:

- **Confidentiality and trust:** Trust and confidentiality are central to engagement. Hengboriboon and Yukongdi (2024) found that privacy protection strengthens engagement, while trust enhances perceived severity and self-efficacy. Attridge (2023) emphasises that employees are more likely to use EAPs when personal information is secure, and Hanley-Dafoe (2024) notes that ongoing confidentiality concerns remain a key barrier. These findings suggest that programmes that fail to adequately safeguard privacy risk low uptake and limited effectiveness.
- **Awareness and communication:** Awareness strongly influences participation. Song and Baicker (2019) report that employees who are exposed to wellness programmes demonstrate improved health behaviours, but uptake depends on clear communication.

Aziz and Ong (2025) found that only 29% of employees in Southeast Asia were aware of available EAP services, despite demonstrated benefits. This highlights the critical role of sustained communication strategies and proactive promotion to foster meaningful engagement.

- **Leadership support:** Leadership endorsement and organisational culture significantly shape utilisation. Joseph et al. (2017) found that management support drives participation, while small and micro enterprises may hesitate due to perceived uncertainty about ROI (Coppens et al., 2023). Hanley-Dafoe (2024) stresses that leadership and cultural integration build confidence in the relevance of EAPs. Proactive supervisor engagement can normalise help-seeking behaviour and increase the perceived legitimacy of EAP services.
- **Stigma in high-risk professions:** Stigma consistently reduces EAP uptake. Arjmand et al. (2025) report that Australian police officers avoided support due to negative peer perceptions, while Aziz and Ong (2025) found that stigma persists in Southeast Asian workplaces. Addressing stigma through organisational culture change and targeted awareness campaigns is therefore essential for programme success.
- **Operational and productivity outcomes:** International studies show strong links between EAP utilisation and productivity gains. Attridge (2023) found that employees who experienced distress and accessed EAPs improved their productivity from approximately 60% to 70% to 85%. Aziz and Ong (2025) report enhanced engagement, reduced stress, and lower turnover intentions among EAP users. Zieringer and Zapf (2024) demonstrated health-related productivity improvements using biological and standardised assessment tools, with estimated economic gains of \$15 600 per employee annually. These findings underscore the economic and operational value of EAPs beyond their well-being benefits.

Overall, international studies emphasise the benefits of EAPs, but most focused on corporate or healthcare settings and rarely considered municipal policing environments or employees' subjective interpretations of productivity outcomes.

## 2.6.2 EAPs in the South African context

South African studies highlight the same key themes but reflect unique cultural and organisational realities in municipal policing and the public sector. Organising the evidence

under the same themes allowed for direct thematic comparison while emphasising local nuances:

- **Confidentiality and trust:** Confidentiality concerns are particularly salient. Dipela and Mgwenya (2025) found that employees perceive EAPs as intervention-only and avoid using them due to fear of stigma. Zieringer and Zapf (2024) emphasise that culturally aligned programmes are critical enablers, while Nyambose (2024) identified hesitation stemming from concerns about confidentiality and service visibility. Silinda and Mpungose (2025) highlight that limited managerial support and weak protocols reduce confidence, which demonstrates the importance of structural and cultural trust factors for programme uptake. Earlier research in the South African public sector similarly indicates that mistrust in confidentiality and uncertainty about information handling reduce the willingness to access workplace support services, particularly in security and enforcement-related environments (Zondi, 2017).
- **Awareness and communication:** Awareness remains low. Dipela and Sithole (2021) report low visibility and staffing challenges, while Psychology and Mediation Services (2025) emphasises the importance of proactive communication strategies. Nyambose (2024) and Silinda and Mpungose (2025) found that poor promotion, inconsistent communication, and a lack of training reduce utilisation, which reinforces the need for well-structured, context-sensitive strategies. Makhanya (2021) similarly observed that limited awareness of wellness services in South African public sector organisations contributes to underutilisation, particularly when communication is informal, inconsistent, or not reinforced by management.
- **Leadership support:** Limited managerial advocacy and leadership involvement are significant barriers. Studies report that, without active engagement from supervisors and management, employees are less likely to trust or access services (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025). This underscores the central role of leadership as a catalyst for EAP engagement. Additionally, Altman et al. (2023) found that wellness initiatives are most successful when they are integrated into organisational culture and visibly supported by leaders and staff at all levels. This underscores the critical role of leadership and cultural integration in promoting participation, which in turn enhances both employee engagement and programme effectiveness.
- **Stigma in high-risk professions:** Stigma remains a barrier. Dipela and Mgwenya (2025) and Katema and Hapunda (2024) report that fear of peer judgement limits

access, while Nyambose (2024) emphasises the combined impact of this fear with concerns about confidentiality. Silinda and Mpungose (2025) highlight how cultural norms and peer perceptions reduce engagement, which highlights the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

- **Operational and productivity outcomes:** Effective EAP implementation can improve well-being and performance. Naidu and Olivier (2025) note reductions in stress among trainee accountants, while Zieringer and Zapf (2024) report enhanced health-related productivity in municipal workplaces. African EAP models suggest that culturally and organisationally adapted programmes yield stronger outcomes. However, underutilisation, organisational barriers, inconsistent support, and resource limitations constrain productivity gains (EAPA-SA, 2015).

Overall, evidence from South Africa indicates that the effectiveness of EAPs is often limited by factors such as awareness, confidentiality, leadership support, and stigma, with limited research on municipal policing environments. Most studies prioritise compliance and quantitative outcomes, with limited qualitative insights into employees' lived experiences, which reinforce the need for context-specific exploration.

This synthesis supports this study's aim to explore how municipal policing employees perceive and experience EAP services, and how these perceptions relate to well-being and productivity by providing a direct foundation for identifying research gaps and positioning the study's contribution.

International and South African literature demonstrates that EAPs can enhance employee well-being, reduce absenteeism, and improve productivity. However, most studies focus on corporate or healthcare settings, with limited attention to municipal policing environments. Few studies examined employees' subjective experiences and perceptions of EAP effectiveness, particularly regarding productivity outcomes. Much of the available evidence relies on quantitative or survey-based designs, while qualitative approaches that capture employees' lived experiences remain limited. Evidence from Nyambose (2024) and Silinda and Mpungose (2025) highlights the influence of practical, cultural, and managerial factors on EAP engagement, thus reinforcing the need for context-specific qualitative inquiry. This synthesis justifies the study's focus on exploring how municipal policing employees perceive and experience EAP services, and how these perceptions relate to their well-being and

productivity. This provides a clear rationale for the research questions and objectives in the subsequent chapters.

## 2.7 RESEARCH GAPS AND STUDY CONTRIBUTION

Despite extensive international and South African literature acknowledging the value of EAPs in promoting employee well-being, reducing absenteeism, and enhancing productivity, notable gaps remain in the empirical evidence. Most research does not sufficiently explore employees' lived experiences, perceptions of service relevance, or how these factors directly influence productivity outcomes in the South African public sector.

Most available studies rely heavily on quantitative or survey-based methodologies, which, although valuable, offer limited depth in understanding how employees interpret, experience, and engage with EAP services in practice. There is a strong need for qualitative approaches that capture employees' voices and the nuances of organisational and cultural dynamics that influence EAP utilisation.

Evidence from South African public sector studies, such as those by Nyambose (2024) and Silinda and Mpungose (2025), suggests that organisational culture, leadership commitment, confidentiality concerns, and practical access issues significantly influence EAP utilisation and perceived effectiveness. However, these factors remain underexplored within municipal policing contexts.

### 2.7.1 Research gaps

Several interrelated gaps emerged from the review of international and South African literature:

- **Sector-specific context:** Most international studies focus on large corporations or high-risk sectors such as healthcare and policing (Arjmand et al., 2025; Song & Baicker, 2019), while South African research predominantly addresses general public sector departments. There is limited empirical evidence on the implementation and effectiveness of EAPs in municipal policing environments, which are characterised by high operational stress, hierarchical decision making, and unique socio-cultural pressures (Dipela & Sithole, 2021; Katema & Hapunda, 2024). Evidence from South African railway and public safety sectors indicates that organisational culture, leadership attitudes, and logistical constraints significantly influence employee engagement with wellness services (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

This highlights the need for context-specific research that focuses on municipal policing settings.

- **Underexplored employee perceptions:** While South African studies report low awareness, underutilisation, and managerial challenges associated with EAPs (Dipela & Sithole, 2021; Makhanya, 2021; Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025; Zondo, 2017), few investigations provide in-depth qualitative insights into employees' lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of EAP services (Grobler & Joubert, 2012; Makola & Tabané, 2022). Qualitative evidence suggests that although employees may express general approval of wellness initiatives, practical, cultural, and organisational barriers often limit meaningful engagement, which has direct implications for perceived productivity outcomes (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).
- **Limited empirical linkage to productivity:** Although theoretical relationships between employee wellness and productivity are well established (Juba, 2024; Senthil, 2021), empirical evidence that links EAP utilisation to measurable outcomes such as absenteeism, presenteeism, and service delivery within municipal contexts remains scarce. Existing evaluation frameworks for the ROI of wellness programmes (Mathaphuna et al., 2024) have seldom been applied in public sector policing environments. This gap highlights the need to investigate perceived productivity outcomes as experienced by employees themselves, rather than relying solely on organisational metrics. Evidence from related public sector studies indicates that organisational barriers and inconsistent programme support may constrain potential productivity gains (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).
- **Organisational and cultural influences are underexplored:** Leadership commitment, trust, confidentiality, and organisational culture are widely recognised as critical determinants of EAP effectiveness (Dagar & Sisodia, 2023). However, these factors remain under-examined within municipal policing contexts, where hierarchical structures, operational pressures, and the high-risk nature of the work may significantly influence programme utilisation and engagement. Empirical evidence from South African public sector contexts suggests that limited managerial support, stigma, and confidentiality concerns diminish sustained engagement with wellness initiatives (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025). Importantly, earlier South African public sector studies indicate that challenges related to confidentiality, trust, and awareness of wellness services have been evident for several years. Zondi (2017) identified persistent concerns regarding confidentiality and mistrust of organisational

support services in security-related public sector environments, while Makhanya (2021) reported ongoing limitations in awareness and communication of employee wellness initiatives across public sector organisations. However, these studies were largely descriptive and did not examine how employees subjectively experience these challenges, nor how such perceptions influence engagement with EAP services and perceived productivity outcomes. The persistence of these issues over time, without in-depth qualitative exploration within municipal policing contexts, underscores a significant empirical gap that this study sought to address.

- **Insufficient integration of employee needs:** Needs assessments to inform EAP design are often conducted with minimal employee participation (Sieberhagen et al., 2011), which can result in programmes that do not fully address workplace realities. The lack of employee input concerning accessibility, confidentiality, and service relevance contributes to underutilisation and limits perceived effectiveness (Nyambose, 2024; Sieberhagen et al., 2011; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025). Evidence from public sector organisations indicates that insufficient consideration of employee input regarding accessibility, confidentiality, and service delivery reduces programme utilisation and perceived effectiveness (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).
- **Work-life balance and EAP utilisation:** Although work-life balance is particularly relevant to policing and other high-demand public sector roles, limited research has examined its influence on EAP engagement in South African municipal contexts (Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025). Work-life pressures, combined with managerial and resource constraints, may limit employees' ability to access wellness services, which further impacts engagement and productivity.

Taken together, these gaps justify this study's focus on exploring municipal policing employees' perceptions of EAP services and examining how these perceptions relate to well-being and productivity. By adopting a qualitative, context-specific approach, the study sought to address limitations in existing research and contribute to a nuanced understanding of EAP effectiveness in municipal policing environments.

### 2.7.2 Study contribution

As demonstrated in Section 2.6, these gaps are most pronounced in high-risk public sector environments, where organisational culture and operational demands shape employee engagement with support services.

This study addressed the identified research gaps by providing an in-depth qualitative exploration of employees' perceptions of the EAP in the EMPS. Through foregrounding employee voices, it examined how individual, organisational, and environmental factors shape EAP utilisation and perceived effectiveness. This generated context-specific insights into municipal policing environments.

Key contributions include the following:

- Enlightening employees' perceptions of the confidentiality, accessibility, and relevance of EAP services within a high-stress, high-risk public sector policing context.
- Demonstrating the influence of organisational culture, leadership commitment, and trust on employee engagement with EAP services.
- Contributing empirical evidence on the perceived relationship between EAP utilisation, employee well-being, and productivity-related outcomes, including attendance, work performance, and coping capacity.
- Informing evidence-based and contextually responsive strategies to strengthen EAP implementation, utilisation, and sustainability in municipal and public sector institutions.
- Providing a foundation for future research, policy formulation, and programme development in workplace wellness in South African municipal policing environments.

By integrating insights from both international and South African literature with empirical findings from the EMPS context, this study enhances scholarly understanding of the interplay between EAPs, employee perceptions, and organisational outcomes. In doing so, it addresses a critical gap in the literature while offering practical implications for public sector human resource management and workplace wellness initiatives, which directly informed the analysis and discussions presented in Chapters 4 and 5.

## **2.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

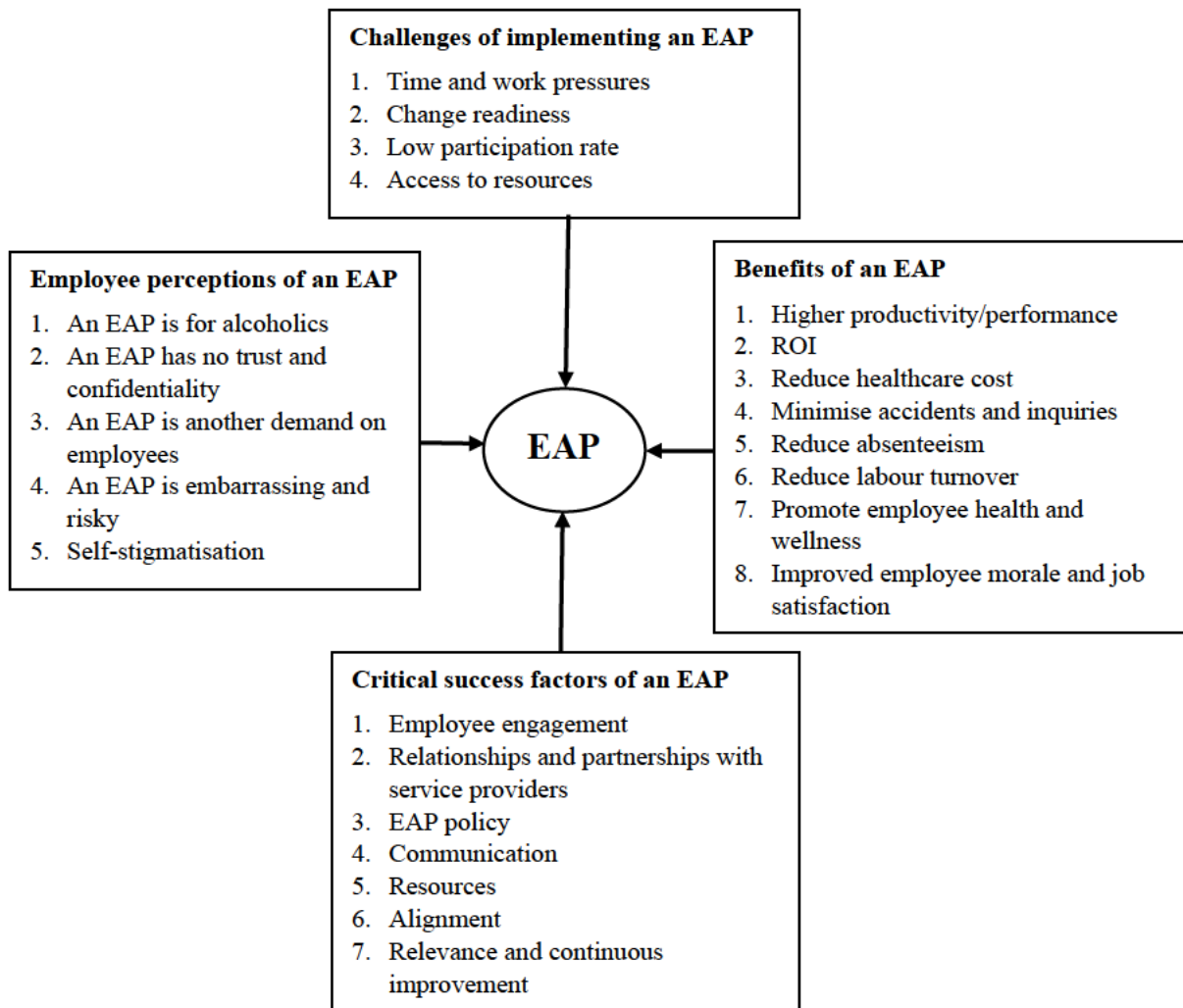
The conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 2.2) provided a structured approach to understanding and enhancing the implementation of EAPs in the South African public sector. It directly addressed the research gaps identified in Section 2.7.1, including sector-specific context, employee perceptions, organisational enablers and barriers, and the relationship between EAP utilisation and productivity.

Adapted from Berry et al. (2010), Mattke et al. (2013), and Zondo (2017), the framework highlights four interrelated components: implementation challenges, employee perceptions, critical success factors, and potential benefits. Key factors that may impede participation include employee mistrust, self-stigmatisation, limited awareness, and misinterpretation of services. These factors emphasise the importance of organisational and leadership support in mitigating these barriers (DPSA, 2024; Robbins, 2016).

Strategic implementation practices are central to the framework and include the following:

- **Leadership commitment:** Visible endorsement and active engagement from managers to promote employee well-being (Dagar & Sisodia, 2023; Robbins, 2016).
- **Supportive organisational culture:** Fostering trust, confidentiality, and psychological safety to encourage EAP utilisation (Ahad et al., 2023).
- **Accessibility and inclusivity:** Multilingual communication, flexible service delivery, and scheduling that accommodates shift workers enhance reach and engagement (Berry et al., 2010; Mattke et al., 2013; Zondo, 2017).
- **Awareness and training initiatives:** Targeted communication campaigns and educational programmes increase employee understanding of available services and reduce stigma (Moore et al., 2023).
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Systematic assessment of utilisation rates, absenteeism, employee satisfaction, and health outcomes informs continuous improvement and ensures programme responsiveness to evolving workforce needs (Berry et al., 2010; Mattke et al., 2013; Zondo, 2017).

By aligning policies and programmes with organisational strategy, supporting leadership involvement, promoting inclusivity, and embedding continuous monitoring, the framework aims to enhance employee well-being and organisational productivity. It emphasises that EAPs must be contextually relevant, particularly in resource-constrained municipal environments, where socio-cultural and operational factors uniquely influence programme success.



**Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework for EAP implementation**

Source: Adapted from Berry et al. (2010), Mattke et al. (2013), and Zondo (2017)

The framework also illustrates the dynamic interplay between organisational factors, employee perceptions, and EAP utilisation. It highlights how enablers and barriers directly affect outcomes such as reduced absenteeism, improved mental health, and enhanced productivity. This conceptual model provided a structured lens to guide the study’s methodology, data collection, and analysis, which ensured the integration of both theoretical insights and practical applications in the research.

## 2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 2 reviewed both international and South African literature on EAPs. It highlighted their significance in enhancing employee well-being, reducing absenteeism, and improving organisational productivity. Key enablers of EAP effectiveness include trust, confidentiality, leadership support, and a supportive organisational culture, while persistent challenges such as

stigma, limited awareness, and resource constraints remain, particularly in the public sector. Employee perceptions emerged as a critical factor that influences EAP utilisation, yet gaps persist in understanding the experiences and perspectives of municipal employees, especially in the EMM.

By integrating international and local evidence, the chapter demonstrated the interplay between EAP implementation, employee perceptions, organisational enablers, and productivity outcomes, thereby filling critical gaps in the literature and offering practical insights for public sector human resource management. These findings provided a strong foundation for this study, which guided the exploration of how municipal employees perceive and engage with EAP services, and how these perceptions relate to their well-being and productivity.

The conceptual framework presented synthesised these insights and highlighted the importance of strategic implementation practices, organisational culture, leadership engagement, and continuous monitoring in enhancing EAP effectiveness. It further emphasised the need for contextually relevant and employee-centred approaches, particularly in resource-constrained municipal and public sector environments.

Overall, the chapter set the stage for Chapter 3, which outlines the research methodology, including the study design, population, sampling, data-collection methods, and analytical procedures that ensured that the study was both theoretically grounded and contextually relevant.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents the research methodology used to explore employee perceptions of the EAP and its impact on productivity in the EMPS. It explains the research design, approach, study site, target population, sampling, data-collection instruments, trustworthiness, data analysis, and ethical considerations. In short, it reflects the steps followed during the study.

Guided by the research objectives outlined in Chapter 1, this chapter justifies why each methodological choice was made. It demonstrates a rigorous and purposeful design that aligns with the phenomenological approach and the sensitive nature of EAP services.

Informed by the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, particularly regarding EAP utilisation, workplace well-being, and productivity within municipal and policing contexts, this methodology was designed to generate in-depth and credible insights into employees' lived experiences.

### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A phenomenological research design was employed to capture the lived experiences of EMPS employees who had engaged with the EAP (Neubauer et al., 2019). This design was chosen because it would provide rich, detailed insights into the participants' experiences and perceptions, rather than seeking causal relationships (Sundler et al., 2019; Groenewald, 2004).

By focusing on the essence of the participants' lived experiences, phenomenology allowed the researcher to understand how EAP participation shapes employees' perceptions of productivity, coping mechanisms, and workplace well-being. This approach ensured that the findings would be contextually grounded and meaningful and would reflect authentic experiences rather than abstract assumptions (Creswell, 2013; Silverman, 2025).

Exploring lived experience was particularly important in this study, as productivity was understood in terms of the employees' perceived concentration, emotional regulation, and ability to function effectively at work following their engagement with the EAP.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit the participants' subjective experiences, which enabled an in-depth understanding of the perceived impact of the EAP on employee productivity.

### **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

A qualitative research approach guided the study, which aimed to understand employees' perspectives, attitudes, and interpretations of an EAP (Busetto et al., 2020; Hassan, 2025). This approach enabled the researcher to explore the meanings the participants attached to the programme and its perceived impact on work performance.

An inductive approach was applied, which allowed patterns and themes to emerge naturally from the participants' narratives rather than being imposed prior to data collection. This facilitated capturing the participants' values, perceptions, and emotional responses, and generating rich, contextually grounded insights.

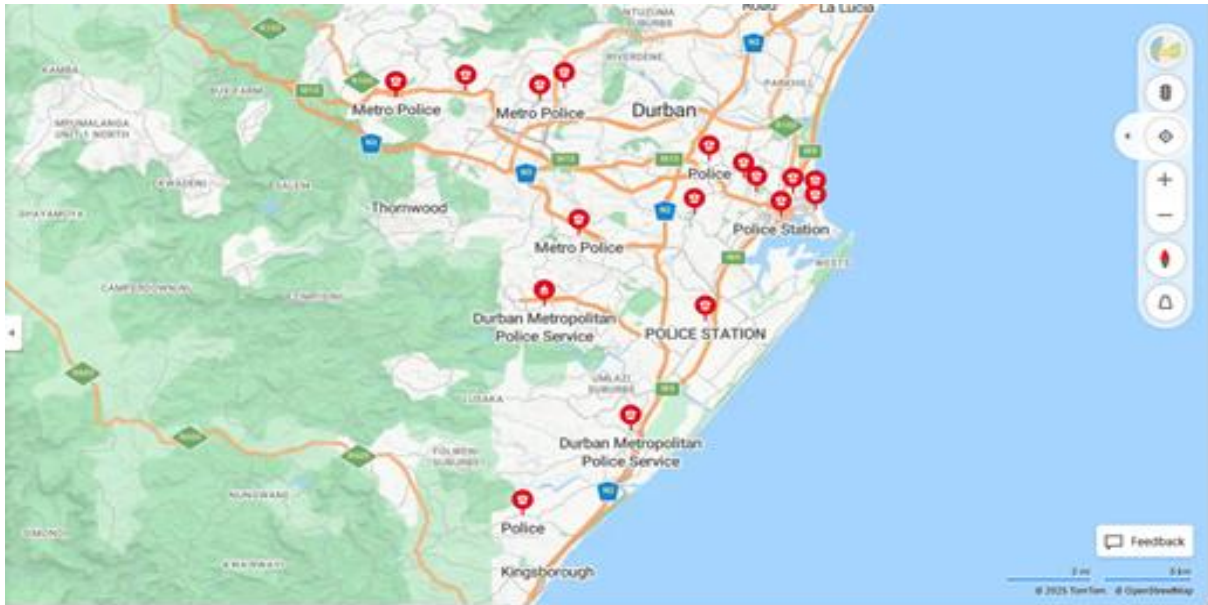
The qualitative, inductive approach was specifically employed to align with phenomenological inquiry, which emphasises the exploration of lived experiences and the generation of meaning rather than testing pre-determined hypotheses (Creswell, 2013; Flick, 2022; Silverman, 2025).

### **3.4 STUDY SITE**

The study was conducted at the Queensburgh Metro Police Station, a unit of the EMPS in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal province. The EMPS was established under the EMM to enforce municipal by-laws, manage traffic, prevent crime, and ensure public safety (eThekweni Municipality, 2018).

Queensburgh Metro Police Station was selected due to its accessibility and the active engagement of its personnel with the EAP. Although limited to a single station, this site reflects the operational realities and stress exposure typical of EMPS units. It was ideal to enhance the analytical transferability of the findings. Data-collection activities, including interviews, were conducted at this location as it provided a practical and relevant setting for examining EAP utilisation and employee perceptions (Flick, 2022).

The selection of this site enabled the researcher to explore EAP experiences in a real-world policing environment that is characterised by shift work, operational pressure, and exposure to critical incidents. Figure 3.1 illustrates metro police stations in the study area.



**Figure 3.1: Durban metropolitan station landmarks**

Source: Google Maps (2026)

### **3.5 TARGET POPULATION**

The target population comprised all employees of the Queensburgh Metro Police Station who were primarily involved with or affected by the EAP, including authorised officers, constables, sergeants, and inspectors. The focus on these officers is justified, as the nature of policing involves exposure to high-stress and traumatic events, which made the EAP particularly relevant for their coping and productivity.

Participants were selected based on their direct engagement with the EAP to ensure that the collected data captured meaningful insights into its effectiveness, challenges, and contribution to employee well-being. This focused approach allowed the researcher to explore rich, contextually grounded experiences, which rendered findings that were directly relevant to the research objectives and transferable to similar operational contexts in the EMPS.

While the target population included all officers at the station, only those with direct exposure to the EAP were included in the study sample.

### **3.6 SAMPLING METHODS/STRATEGIES**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, which is a non-probability sampling technique that is appropriate for phenomenological research. This method enabled the selection of officers with direct and relevant experience of the EAP, which ensured rich and meaningful

data. Purposive sampling aligns with phenomenology, as it focuses on individuals who can provide deep insights into the lived experiences of the phenomenon under study (Elliott, 2020; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013; Silverman, 2025).

Data collection continued until data saturation was achieved, which means that no new themes or insights emerged from successive interviews. This ensured that diverse and relevant perspectives were captured and confirmed the adequacy of the sample size. Due to logistical and operational constraints, the study focused on a single police station, with a total of 13 participants.

### **3.7 SAMPLE AND SAMPLE SIZE**

The study included 13 participants, representing constables, sergeants, authorised officers, and inspectors. This sample size was deemed adequate for phenomenological research, as Creswell (2013) recommends between five and 25 participants to capture rich, meaningful lived experiences.

Selecting 13 participants provided sufficient depth to explore the nuanced perceptions of officers regarding EAP utilisation and its influence on productivity, while also maintaining practical feasibility given operational and logistical constraints (Flick, 2022).

### **3.8 DATA-COLLECTION INSTRUMENT**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide that was aligned with the research objectives. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, were audio-recorded with the participants' informed consent (see Appendices D and E), and were complemented by field notes to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details. This method allowed the participants to freely express their experiences while enabling the researcher to probe for clarification and elaboration (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Fox, 2016). Semi-structured interviews were particularly suitable for exploring personal perceptions of sensitive topics, such as EAP utilisation (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Semi-structured interviews were deliberately selected as they balance structure with flexibility, which allowed the researcher to remain guided by the research objectives while giving the participants space to describe their experiences in their own words. This approach is well suited to phenomenological research, where understanding meaning, context, and lived experience is central to the inquiry (Creswell, 2013; Silverman, 2025).

### 3.9 PRETESTING THE RESEARCH TOOL

The interview guide was pretested with a small group of participants who shared similar characteristics with the target population. Feedback obtained during the pilot study was used to refine the questions for clarity, relevance, and appropriateness in order to ensure high-quality data collection. Creswell and Creswell (2018) emphasise that pretesting research instruments helps to identify ambiguities and weaknesses in question design prior to full-scale data collection. In this study, the pretesting process ensured that the interview questions were clearly understood and aligned with the research objectives.

Following pretesting, certain questions were reworded for simplicity, the sequencing was improved to enhance conversational flow, and additional probing prompts were incorporated to encourage deeper reflection where necessary. The final interview guide is attached in Appendix C.

### 3.10 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

To ensure the trustworthiness of this qualitative study, the four key criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were explicitly linked to the research procedures:

- **Credibility:** Member checking was utilised, which allowed the participants to review their interview transcripts for accuracy. The triangulation of interviews and field notes ensured that the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019; Noble & Smith, 2015). A subset of participants confirmed that the transcripts accurately represented their views and experiences.
- **Dependability:** A detailed audit trail documented the sampling, data-collection, pretesting, and data-analysis procedures. Reflexive practices were employed to account for the researcher's influence on data collection and interpretation (Daniel, 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).
- **Confirmability:** Reflexive journaling and peer review of coding and thematic analysis ensured that the findings were grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than researcher bias (Daniel, 2019; Neubauer et al., 2019).
- **Transferability:** Rich contextual descriptions of the study site, the participants' roles, and EAP processes enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other municipal or public sector settings (Noble & Smith, 2015; Sekaran & Bougie, 2013).

This approach ensured that the study's findings are trustworthy, rigorously grounded in data, and accurately reflect the participants' lived experiences.

### **3.11 DATA-COLLECTION METHODS**

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews, which allowed the participants to describe their experiences and perceptions of the EAP in detail. This format also provided the researcher with the flexibility to probe for further insights. Secondary sources, such as relevant journals, books, and official reports, were consulted to provide contextual background and support the analysis. Only qualitative data were collected; no quantitative measures were applied. Secondary sources were used solely to contextualise the findings and did not form part of the primary dataset.

### **3.12 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis involved the systematic organisation, interpretation, and synthesis of collected information to derive meaningful insights (Johnson, 2021). Thematic analysis was employed in this study to identify patterns, categories, and themes from the interview transcripts (Wagner et al., 2012).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the data were coded manually. Codes were grouped into recurring themes that reflected the participants' experiences and perceptions of EAP utilisation and its impact on productivity. To ensure credibility, the thematic development underwent peer review and member checking with the participants. The themes were interpreted in alignment with the research objectives to ensure comprehensive insights into factors that influence EAP utilisation and its organisational effects.

The thematic analysis followed a systematic process of familiarisation with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, and defining and naming the final themes to ensure coherence and analytical rigour.

### **3.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study adhered to ethical principles such as safeguarding the participants' rights, dignity, and privacy while ensuring data integrity (WHO, 2021). Ethical considerations were contextualised for the policing environment as follows:

### **3.13.1 Ethical clearance**

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal prior to data collection (see Appendix A). All research instruments and gatekeeper permissions (see Appendix B) were reviewed and authorised.

### **3.13.2 Protecting anonymity and confidentiality**

The participants' identities were protected, and no personal identifiers were collected. The interviews were conducted in private settings, and all data were securely stored in password-protected files that were accessible only to the researcher.

### **3.13.3 Voluntary participation**

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants before the interviews were conducted. They were informed of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, and were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Written informed consent forms documented their voluntary participation (Manandhar & Joshi, 2020; Peter, 2015).

### **3.13.4 Psychological risk mitigation**

Given the policing context and the potential sensitivity of discussing workplace and personal challenges, the participants were made aware of available counselling support. The interview questions were carefully phrased to minimise distress, and the participants could pause or terminate the interviews at any time. These measures ensured the participants' psychological well-being and contributed to the collection of honest, authentic, and credible data. This was particularly important given the potential for the interviews to evoke memories of traumatic incidents or operational stressors.

## **3.14 DATA MANAGEMENT AND DISPOSAL**

Data were retained from the date of collection and will be stored for a minimum of five years, in accordance with University of KwaZulu-Natal policy. Electronic files are encrypted and securely stored, while paper records are kept in a locked cabinet. Upon completion of the retention period, all data will be permanently destroyed.

### **3.15 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

This chapter documented the methodology applied in the study and reflected the actual research procedures. The phenomenological design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis ensured that the study rigorously captured the participants' experiences and perceptions of the EMPS EAP. Trustworthiness, ethics, and psychological risk mitigation were explicitly addressed and contextualised for the policing environment.

By outlining these methodological steps, the chapter established a clear and systematic foundation for the presentation and analysis of the findings in Chapter 4. The approach ensured that the collected data were contextually grounded, credible, and directly aligned with the research objectives, which allowed Chapter 4 to effectively explore employee perspectives on EAP utilisation, perceived effectiveness, and its influence on productivity. This linkage also prepares the reader for Chapter 5, where the findings are interpreted, discussed in relation to the theoretical and empirical literature, and applied to practical recommendations for municipal policing environments.

The next chapter presents the data analysis, findings, and a discussion that highlights employee perspectives on EAP utilisation and its influence on productivity.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter presents and analyses the qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews with and researcher observations of employees of the EMPS. The study explored employees' perceptions of the EMPS EAP, the factors that influence its utilisation, the barriers to effective implementation, and its perceived impact on employee well-being and productivity.

A thematic analysis approach was used to systematically examine the participants' responses. The findings are presented descriptively and thematically, with each theme introduced, summarised, and illustrated with participant quotations. Observations and patterns identified during data collection are integrated to provide additional context (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

Although the study involved only 13 participants from a single EMPS station, this sample size aligns with phenomenological methodology, which prioritises depth and richness of lived experiences over breadth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each participant's narrative was explored in detail, with data saturation occurring after 12 interviews, thus ensuring credible insights that are transferable to similar municipal policing contexts. Diversity of rank, gender, years of service, and EAP exposure ensured comprehensive representation of experiences relevant to the research objectives.

### **4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

A total of 13 participants were interviewed, comprising constables, sergeants, inspectors, and authorised officers. The participants had varying years of service (one to 20 years) and presented a balanced gender distribution (seven males, six females) (see Appendix F). Exposure to EAP services varied: six attended counselling sessions, two were referred through workplace channels, one received information during training only, and four reported no prior exposure. The diversity in rank, gender, and years of service provides insight into how cultural, organisational, and managerial factors influence EAP utilisation (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

**Table 4.1: Participant demographics (anonymised)**

Position/rank	Gender	Age range	Years of service	EAP exposure	Number of participants
Constable	Male	25 to 30	2 to 5	Counselling sessions	2
Constable	Female	31 to 40	3 to 10	None	2
Sergeant	Female	31 to 50	6 to 12	Workplace referrals / training	3
Inspector	Male	41 to 50	12 to 20	Counselling sessions / None	3
Authorised officer	Male	25 to 40	1 to 10	Counselling sessions	2
Authorised officer	Female	25 to 35	1 to 5	Counselling sessions	1

### **4.3 OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND DATA SATURATION**

Thematic analysis revealed five major themes. Data saturation was achieved after the 12<sup>th</sup> interview, with subsequent interviews confirming existing patterns across rank, gender, and years of service (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Nyambose, 2024).

The five major themes identified were as follows:

- 1) Limited awareness and poor communication of EAP services
- 2) Trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation
- 3) Cultural and gender norms that influence help-seeking behaviour
- 4) Management and organisational influence on EAP utilisation
- 5) Perceived impact of the EAP on employee well-being and productivity

These themes are implicitly linked to the literature (Attridge, 2023; Nyambose, 2024; Salgar & Nizamuddin, 2025; Song & Baicker, 2019), which enables the discussion in Chapter 5 to connect EMPS employees' experiences with broader evidence.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: Limited awareness and poor communication of EAP services**

##### ***4.3.1.1 Aim of the theme/question***

This theme explored the participants' awareness and understanding of the EAP. It focused on how communication, information dissemination, and the visibility of the programme influenced employees' knowledge of available services and access procedures in the EMPS.

#### 4.3.1.2 Results and descriptive analysis

The participants consistently described EAP communication as limited, irregular, and largely confined to initial training. Awareness was front-loaded during entry-level training, with minimal reinforcement once officers were deployed (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025). Several participants were aware of the EAP but lacked practical knowledge about access procedures. Suggestions for improvement included ongoing reminders, the use of digital platforms (WhatsApp and internal portals), and visible notices in stations.

These observations are consistent with previous studies, which show that low visibility and irregular communication can reduce employees' engagement with support programmes (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

#### 4.3.1.3 Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations

**Table 4.2: Observations based on Theme 1**

Sub-theme/observation	Frequency	Participants	Quotations
EAP information is limited to initial training	Majority	P2, P4, P6, P9, and P11	<i>"The only time I heard about the EAP was during training..."</i>
Uncertainty about access procedures	Several	P7, P9, and P12	<i>"I do not really know how it works or who to contact."</i>
Lack of ongoing communication	Common	P3, P5, P8, and P10	<i>"After training, there is no follow-up or reminders."</i>
Suggestions for improved communication	Several	P7 and P11	<i>"If they can use WhatsApp or internal systems, people will remember the EAP is there."</i>

Additional participant perspectives further illustrate the nature of communication gaps regarding the EAP:

*"We are told about the EAP during meetings, but there is no proper explanation of how it works or what kind of support we can actually receive from it."*

*"I am aware that the programme exists, but I have never been given clear information on where to go or who to contact when I need assistance."*

## 4.3.2 Theme 2: Trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation

### 4.3.2.1 Aim of the theme/question

This theme examined how issues of trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation influenced the participants' willingness to utilise EAP services within the EMPS context.

### 4.3.2.2 Results and descriptive analysis

Concerns about confidentiality and fear of career repercussions were frequently reported. Stigma surrounding mental health further reduced the willingness to access the EAP. Assurances of anonymity and independence from line management were identified as enablers (De Jesus & O'Neil, 2024; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

Such concerns align with prior research highlighting that trust and stigma are common barriers to accessing mental health services in organisational and policing contexts (De Jesus & O'Neil, 2024; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

### 4.3.2.3 Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations

**Table 4.3: Observations based on Theme 2**

Sub-theme/observation	Frequency	Participants	Quotations
Fear of breach of confidentiality	Common	P1, P4, P7, P10, and P13	<i>"You don't know who will hear about your problems..."</i>
Fear of victimisation or career impact	Several	P3, P6, and P9	<i>"Once they know you are struggling, they treat you differently..."</i>
Stigma around seeking help	Several	P2, P5, and P11	<i>"In this job, you are expected to be strong, not emotional."</i>
Need for anonymity and reassurance	Some	P8 and P12	<i>"If they can guarantee confidentiality, more people will use it."</i>

Further participant narratives highlight the depth of concern regarding confidentiality and trust:

*"There is always a concern that what you share might not remain confidential, especially because it is linked to the workplace environment."*

*"Even though it is said to be private, many employees feel that their information could somehow reach management, which makes them hesitant to use the service."*

### 4.3.3 Theme 3: Cultural and gender norms that influence help-seeking behaviour

#### 4.3.3.1 Aim of the theme/question

This theme explored how cultural expectations and gender norms affect engagement with the EAP.

#### 4.3.3.2 Results and descriptive analysis

Male officers reported reluctance to seek counselling due to perceived weakness. Female officers mentioned expectations of resilience and the use of religious coping mechanisms. These norms influence whether employees engage with mental health support.

These findings are consistent with prior research showing that gendered expectations and cultural norms can discourage help-seeking in male-dominated professions such as policing (Berry et al., 2010; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

#### 4.3.3.3 Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations

**Table 4.4: Observations based on Theme 3**

Sub-theme/observation	Frequency	Participants	Quotations
Male officers are discouraged from seeking help	Common	P1, P2, and P6	<i>“As men, we are taught not to show weakness.”</i>
Female officers are also affected	Several	P5 and P8	<i>“Even as a woman, showing emotion is frowned upon sometimes.”</i>
Religious or cultural coping	Some	P3 and P7	<i>“I pray or talk to family rather than use counselling.”</i>

Additional insights from participants further demonstrate the influence of cultural and gender norms:

*“In this kind of work environment, people are expected to be strong and deal with their personal problems on their own rather than seek professional help.”*

*“For many employees, especially men, going for counselling is often seen as a sign of weakness, so they avoid using services like the EAP.”*

#### 4.3.4 Theme 4: Management and organisational influence on EAP utilisation

##### 4.3.4.1 Aim of the theme/question

This theme explored how management practices, organisational factors, and operational priorities influence employee engagement with the EAP.

##### 4.3.4.2 Results and descriptive analysis

The participants described line managers as key gatekeepers for accessing EAP services. Operational priorities, workload pressures, and shift patterns were reported to limit opportunities for attending counselling sessions. The participants indicated that visible managerial endorsement increased confidence in using the EAP, while a lack of support discouraged utilisation.

These observations are consistent with prior studies highlighting that managerial endorsement and organisational culture strongly influence employees' willingness to engage with support services (Katema & Hapunda, 2024; Naidu & Olivier, 2025).

##### 4.3.4.3 Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations

**Table 4.5: Observations based on Theme 4**

Sub-theme/observation	Frequency	Participants	Illustrative quotations
Productivity is prioritised over well-being	Several	P5, P9, P11, and P12	<i>"Management focuses more on productivity than on how employees are coping emotionally."</i>
Line managers control access	Common	P2, P6, P7, P10, and P13	<i>"Sometimes you need approval from your supervisor."</i>
Managerial endorsement encourages use	Some	P1, P3, and P8	<i>"When management supports it, people feel safer."</i>
Operational demands limit engagement	Common	P2, P4, P5, P6, P12, and P14	<i>"There is no time after incidents because shifts are busy."</i>

Participant responses also emphasise the role of management in shaping EAP utilisation:

*"If supervisors and management spoke more openly about the EAP and encouraged its use, employees would feel more comfortable accessing it."*

*"There is very little emphasis from management about the importance of the programme, which makes it seem like it is not really a priority."*

### 4.3.5 Theme 5: Perceived impact of the EAP on employee well-being and productivity

#### 4.3.5.1 Aim of the theme/question

This theme explored the nature of operational stressors experienced by EMPS employees and how these influenced their perceived need for psychological support.

#### 4.3.5.2 Results and descriptive analysis

The participants described exposure to traumatic incidents, violence, and high-risk situations as routine aspects of their work. These experiences were reported to have emotional and psychological effects, including stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. Several participants indicated that these stressors accumulated over time, which heightened the need for structured psychological support.

These observations are consistent with prior research highlighting the negative impact of operational stressors on police officers' mental health and the importance of structured psychological support such as EAPs (EAPA-SA, 2015; Song & Baicker, 2019).

Additionally, the participants reported limited opportunities for debriefing following critical incidents, particularly during periods of staff shortages and high operational demand.

#### 4.3.5.3 Sub-themes, frequency, and illustrative quotations

**Table 4.6: Observations based on Theme 5**

Sub-theme/observation	Frequency	Participants	Illustrative quotations
Exposure to trauma and violence	Common	P1, P4, P6, P9, and P12	<i>"You see a lot of things that stay with you."</i>
Emotional and psychological strain	Several participants	P2, P5, and P8	<i>"It affects you even when you go home."</i>
Limited debriefing opportunities	Common	P6, P10, and P14	<i>"After incidents, we just move on to the next shift."</i>
Need for ongoing support	Several participants	P3, P7, and P11	<i>"We need support, not just after big incidents."</i>

Additional participant perspectives highlight the perceived value and limitations of the EAP:

*"Employees who have used the EAP have mentioned that it helps them cope better with stress and personal challenges affecting their work."*

*“The programme has the potential to improve productivity, but its impact is limited because not many employees actually make use of it.”*

#### **4.3.6 Participant recommendations for enhancing EAP utilisation (Objective 4)**

During the interviews, the participants suggested ways the EAP could better meet EMPS employees’ needs:

- **Communication and awareness:** Regular reminders of the availability of the EAP via WhatsApp, internal portals, noticeboards, and induction programmes.
- **Confidentiality and trust:** Assurances of privacy and independence from line management to encourage uptake.
- **Accessibility:** Flexible delivery methods, including tele-counselling for night-shift officers, on-site debriefing, and extended service hours.
- **Leadership support:** Visible endorsement from supervisors or station commanders to enhance engagement.
- **Follow-up and continuity:** Structured post-counselling check-ins and clear referral pathways for sustained support.

These recommendations reflect the lived experiences of EMPS officers and provide contextually grounded, actionable insights without introducing new thematic content (Moore et al., 2023; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

### **4.4 RESEARCHER OBSERVATIONS AND FIELD NOTES**

#### **4.4.1 Introduction**

In addition to the interview data, the researcher systematically recorded observations during data collection to capture contextual and behavioural factors that could influence participation in the EAP (see Appendix G). The purpose of the field notes was to enhance contextual understanding, triangulate participant narratives, and support the validation of emergent themes without introducing new findings. This approach was consistent with the phenomenological approach that guided this study (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025).

These observations provide additional insight into organisational and operational dynamics. Such observations are consistent with previous research indicating that operational pressures, managerial support, and organisational culture can significantly influence employees’

engagement with workplace support services such as EAPs (Katema & Hapunda, 2024; EAPA-SA, 2015; Naidu & Olivier, 2025).

#### **4.4.2 Narrative summary**

During the data-collection process, several recurring patterns and behaviours were observed that provided contextual support for the participants' accounts of EAP awareness, access, and utilisation:

Limited knowledge of the EAP was evident among several officers. Some participants demonstrated uncertainty regarding the scope, purpose, and access points of the programme and required repeated clarification about the voluntary nature of both the interviews and the EAP itself. This observation reflected gaps in awareness and communication, which were also reported during the interviews.

A related observation involved the verification of voluntary participation. Several officers requested explicit confirmation from duty officers or supervisors that participation in the interviews was voluntary. This behaviour suggested caution and concern regarding potential workplace repercussions, which provided evidence of the participants' expressed fears related to trust, confidentiality, and victimisation.

Operational pressures were frequently observed during data collection. The interviews were occasionally interrupted due to urgent operational demands, temporary responsibilities, or participants' concerns that time spent in the interviews would not be recognised in performance expectations. These interruptions contributed to heightened stress and limited the participants' ability to engage fully with the research process.

In addition, procedural stress was observed in three cases where the participants withdrew from the interviews before completion due to competing operational responsibilities. This highlighted the impact of workload intensity, staffing constraints, and time pressures on both research participation and, by extension, the accessibility of support services such as the EAP.

Overall, these observations aligned closely with interview findings and reinforced themes related to limited awareness, trust and confidentiality concerns, managerial influence, and operational barriers to EAP utilisation. The field notes serve to contextualise the participants' narratives and strengthen the credibility of the findings without introducing new thematic content or interpretation.

### 4.4.3 Summary of observations

This section presents a summary of key observations recorded during the data-collection process. The observations were recorded to complement the interview findings and to provide additional contextual insight into employee behaviour, organisational dynamics, and engagement with the EAP. They reinforce the themes identified in the interviews and do not introduce new data.

**Table 4.7: Summary of researcher observations**

<b>Observation</b>	<b>Implication</b>	<b>Linked Theme</b>
Officers sought confirmation of voluntary participation	Indicates fear of reprisal and limited sense of autonomy	Trust and management
Operational interruptions (pulled from duties, temporary reassignment)	Reduced engagement and participation opportunities	Management and organisational influence
Limited knowledge of the EAP	Communication gaps and low awareness	Awareness and poor communication
Procedural stress and withdrawal of three officers	Barriers to participation; highlights operational challenges	Trust, operational pressure, and accessibility

*Note: This table provides a concise visual summary for the reader's convenience, while the narratives preserve full qualitative richness. These observations reinforce the interview themes by providing context, rather than introducing new data or interpretation.*

## 4.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented and analysed the qualitative data collected from 13 participants of the EMPS through interviews and researcher observations. Five major themes emerged, which were introduced with descriptive overviews and summarised quotations to illustrate the participants' perceptions of EAP awareness, trust, cultural and gender norms, management influence, and perceived impact on well-being and productivity.

The observations supported the interview findings by showing how operational pressures, communication gaps, and managerial practices affected participation. Data saturation was achieved after the 12<sup>th</sup> interview, when no new themes emerged, which reinforced the credibility of the findings.

The findings presented in this chapter are strictly descriptive. They highlight patterns in participant responses and serve as a foundation for discussion and interpretation in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides an in-depth discussion of the key findings presented in Chapter 4 by interpreting them within the context of existing literature on EAPs, employee well-being, and operational performance in municipal policing. Unlike Chapter 4, which focused on the presentation of the empirical findings, this chapter analytically engages with the results by linking them to relevant theoretical perspectives, the study's conceptual framework, and organisational practice in the EMPS.

The discussion is structured around the study's research objectives and the five key themes identified in Chapter 4, namely limited awareness and poor communication of EAP services; trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation; cultural and gender norms that influence help-seeking behaviour; management and organisational influence on EAP utilisation; and the perceived impact of EAP participation on employee well-being and productivity. These themes guided the interpretation of how EMPS employees' perceptions shape EAP utilisation and effectiveness.

The participants' experiences were interpreted through the lens of the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which illustrates how organisational, societal, and cultural factors interact to influence engagement with the EAP. The study's conceptual framework further demonstrates the pathways that link awareness, trust, leadership support, and operational accessibility to EAP utilisation and subsequent well-being and productivity outcomes. Guided by the phenomenological methodology outlined in Chapter 3, the discussion remains grounded in the participants' narratives and the researcher observations presented in Chapter 4 to ensure analytical coherence and alignment with the research objectives.

#### **5.2 SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS**

This study explored employee perceptions of the EAP in the EMPS by focusing on awareness, utilisation, perceived impact on well-being and productivity, and factors that influence programme effectiveness.

These findings extend the existing EAP literature by demonstrating that, within municipal policing contexts, awareness alone is insufficient to ensure utilisation. Instead, awareness must

be accompanied by organisational trust, leadership endorsement, and operational accessibility. This reinforces international evidence that the effectiveness of EAPs is highly context-dependent, particularly in high-risk, hierarchical public sector environments (Ahad et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2023).

The findings revealed that awareness of the EAP among EMPS employees was limited and inconsistent. While most participants were aware of the programme's existence, their understanding of the available services, access procedures, and referral processes was often unclear. Awareness was largely confined to induction or initial training, with minimal ongoing communication thereafter.

EAP utilisation was shaped by multiple interrelated factors. Concerns regarding confidentiality, fear of stigma, and perceptions that EAP use could negatively affect professional standing emerged as prominent barriers. Cultural and gender norms in the policing environment further discouraged help-seeking behaviour, particularly among male officers. Organisational dynamics, including inconsistent managerial support and operational demands such as shift work, also influenced engagement with EAP services.

Participants who had accessed the EAP reported perceived benefits, including improved emotional well-being, enhanced coping with operational stress, and improved concentration at work. However, these benefits were often constrained by limited accessibility, inconsistent follow-up, and the absence of structured continuity-of-care mechanisms in the EMPS.

Overall, the findings indicate that while EMPS employees recognise the value and relevance of the EAP, its effectiveness is primarily limited by organisational, cultural, and structural barriers rather than by a lack of need. Addressing these barriers is essential for improving utilisation and strengthening the contribution of the EAP to employee well-being and perceived productivity in the EMPS.

Viewed through the EST, these barriers operate across multiple system levels: individual perceptions (microsystem), supervisory practices and operational demands (exosystem), and the broader policing culture and stigma (macrosystem). The conceptual framework further clarifies how these interacting factors shape pathways from awareness to utilisation and, ultimately, to perceived well-being and productivity outcomes.

## **5.3 DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS**

### **5.3.1 Limited awareness and poor communication of EAP services**

The findings indicate that many EMPS employees had limited awareness of the EAP's scope, purpose, and operational procedures. Although some participants were aware of the EAP, uncertainty regarding the services offered, referral processes, and confidentiality protocols was common. This finding aligns with both international and South African literature that identifies inadequate awareness as a primary barrier to EAP utilisation (Ahad et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2023).

This finding supports South African public sector research that indicates that sporadic, one-off communication, often limited to induction, results in superficial awareness rather than a meaningful understanding of EAP services (Nyambose, 2024; Silinda & Mpungose, 2025). This study adds qualitative depth by illustrating how officers experience this gap in real operational settings.

In the EMPS, limited awareness appears closely linked to communication gaps and the prioritisation of operational duties over wellness initiatives. Shift work and demanding operational schedules reduce opportunities for engagement with wellness-related information. The participants suggested that digital communication platforms, such as WhatsApp groups, internal portals, and station-based messaging, could improve the consistent dissemination of EAP information (P7 and P11).

From an EST perspective, these challenges reflect exosystem constraints, including organisational communication practices and structural priorities that indirectly shape employee engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the conceptual framework, awareness functions as a foundational precursor to engagement that influences trust, utilisation, and subsequent well-being and productivity outcomes.

Accordingly, within the conceptual framework, awareness is positioned as the entry point for EAP engagement. When communication is inconsistent or operationally inaccessible, this entry point is weakened, which limits the development of trust and subsequent utilisation. This explains why the awareness gaps observed in the EMPS translate into low engagement, despite the recognised need.

### **5.3.2 Trust, confidentiality, and fear of victimisation**

Concerns regarding confidentiality emerged as a central factor that influences EAP engagement. The participants expressed apprehension that disclosures made during counselling would be shared with management, which could potentially affect their career progression or professional reputation. Stigma associated with mental health challenges and informal workplace gossip further undermined trust in the EAP. Female officers highlighted fears of being perceived as emotionally weak, which reflect the intersection of gendered expectations and confidentiality concerns (P14, P1, and P13).

These findings are consistent with prior studies in policing and the public sector, which identified confidentiality concerns and fear of organisational surveillance as persistent deterrents to help-seeking behaviour (Dagar & Sisodia, 2023; Makhanya, 2021; Zondi, 2017). This study advances the literature by demonstrating how these concerns are subjectively experienced and internalised by municipal police officers.

These findings reflect macrosystem influences, such as broader societal stigma surrounding mental health, as well as exosystem-level organisational constraints related to perceived gaps in confidentiality safeguards (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Importantly, the study addressed a research gap by illuminating how trust and stigma operate in hierarchical public sector policing environments, where confidentiality concerns are intensified by organisational power dynamics.

From the perspective of this study's conceptual framework, weakened trust disrupts the progression from awareness to utilisation, which limits the potential well-being and productivity gains associated with EAP engagement.

### **5.3.3 Cultural and gender norms that influence help-seeking behaviour**

Cultural expectations and gender norms significantly shaped the participants' willingness to engage with the EAP. Male officers, in particular, expressed reluctance to seek counselling due to perceptions that seeking help signified weakness or could compromise their professional identity. Some participants also cited cultural beliefs that discourage discussions of personal or emotional challenges outside family structures.

These findings highlight macrosystem influences in Bronfenbrenner's framework, where deeply embedded societal and cultural norms shape individual behaviour. In the study's

conceptual framework, cultural and gender norms interact with awareness, trust, and leadership support to either enable or constrain EAP utilisation and associated well-being outcomes (Berry et al., 2010).

### **5.3.4 Management and organisational influence on EAP utilisation**

Leadership practices play a pivotal role in shaping EAP engagement. The participants reported varied experiences; some supervisors actively encouraged EAP use, while others acted as gatekeepers, which restricted access and undermined trust (P5 and P12). Visible managerial endorsement, operational flexibility, and supportive supervisory practices were identified as critical enablers of utilisation.

These findings underscore leadership's role as a culture-shaping mechanism in the organisation. Consistent with the conceptual framework, leadership practices directly influence pathways that link awareness and trust to engagement, well-being, and perceived productivity outcomes (Moore et al., 2023).

### **5.3.5 Perceived impact of the EAP on employee well-being and productivity**

EMPS employees who accessed EAP services reported improvements in stress management, emotional coping, workplace concentration, and task engagement. Structured follow-ups and continuity of care were critical for sustaining these benefits. However, structural limitations, inconsistent managerial support, and accessibility constraints moderated the overall impact.

These findings support the GST by highlighting the interdependence between individual well-being outcomes and organisational systems. The conceptual framework confirms that engagement translates into well-being and productivity improvements only when awareness, trust, leadership support, and operational accessibility function synergistically (Mattke et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2023; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

## **5.4 FINDINGS IN RELATION TO THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

### **5.4.1 Objective 1: Identify factors that promote effective EAP implementation**

The EMPS officers acknowledged the EAP's potential to support emotional well-being and manage operational stress. However, engagement was constrained by limited awareness, inconsistent communication, and operational pressures, which indicate that recognition of the EAP's benefits alone does not guarantee utilisation. These findings align with literature that

highlights that awareness and clarity are prerequisites for effective engagement with EAPs in policing contexts (Ahad et al., 2023; Moore et al., 2023). In this study's conceptual framework, awareness serves as a critical precursor to trust and subsequent engagement, which directly influences well-being and perceived productivity outcomes among EMPS personnel.

#### **5.4.2 Objective 2: Explore barriers that hinder EAP effectiveness**

EAP utilisation in the EMPS was influenced by various enablers and barriers. Enablers included visible leadership endorsement, observable benefits of counselling, trust in confidentiality, digital awareness tools, and structured follow-ups. Barriers comprised limited awareness, stigma, cultural and gender norms, operational and shift work constraints, and inconsistent managerial support. These findings reflect Bronfenbrenner's EST by showing how organisational, societal, and cultural factors interact to shape employee engagement (Berry et al., 2010; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025). Understanding these context-specific enablers and barriers is crucial for enhancing EAP uptake and effectiveness in the EMPS.

#### **5.4.3 Objective 3: Assess employees' perceptions of the impact of the EAP on their well-being and productivity**

EMPS employees who engaged with the EAP reported improvements in stress management, emotional coping, concentration, and task focus. The benefits were the strongest when counselling included structured follow-ups and continuity of care. However, operational pressures, inconsistent managerial support, and accessibility constraints moderated these positive outcomes. This aligns with literature that demonstrates that improvements in subjective well-being depend on supportive organisational structures and operational feasibility (Mattke et al., 2013; Moore et al., 2023). The conceptual framework indicates that engagement translates into well-being and productivity outcomes only when awareness, trust, leadership support, and operational accessibility function synergistically in the EMPS.

#### **5.4.4 Objective 4: Recommend strategies to improve the effectiveness and utilisation of EAP services**

During the interviews, the participants shared insights into how the EAP could better support their needs in the EMPS. Their suggestions focused on five areas: communication and awareness, confidentiality and trust, accessibility, leadership support, and follow-up and continuity mechanisms:

- **Communication and awareness:** Several participants highlighted the need for regular reminders about the EAP and suggested that information be shared through digital platforms such as WhatsApp groups, internal portals, and station noticeboards. They emphasised including EAP information during the induction of new recruits to ensure consistent awareness.
- **Confidentiality and trust:** Officers frequently expressed concerns regarding the confidentiality of counselling sessions. Some participants indicated that assurances of privacy and independence from line management would increase their willingness to access the EAP.
- **Accessibility:** The participants noted that operational pressures, shift work, and high workloads limited opportunities to attend counselling sessions. Suggestions included flexible delivery methods such as tele-counselling for night-shift officers, on-site debriefing after critical incidents, and extended service hours to accommodate operational demands.
- **Leadership support:** Several participants reported that visible endorsement of the EAP by supervisors or station commanders would encourage engagement. They described instances where managerial support, or lack thereof, influenced their comfort in accessing services.
- **Follow-up and continuity:** Some participants emphasised the importance of structured follow-ups after counselling sessions, including check-ins and clear referral pathways, to ensure sustained support and ongoing engagement with the EAP.

These observations reflect the lived experiences of EMPS officers and provide context for understanding the challenges and enablers of EAP engagement. No new thematic content was introduced; rather, these descriptions highlight the participants' perspectives and suggestions as reported during the interviews.

## **5.5 IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE / RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EMPS**

Based on the findings and researcher observations presented in Chapter 4, several practical implications emerged that can increase participation in and enhance the effectiveness of the EAP services in the EMPS. These recommendations align with the EMPS's operational realities, organisational culture, and the unique challenges faced by municipal policing officers.

To enhance implementation, these strategies can be introduced incrementally. Short-term strategies should prioritise improving communication channels and reinforcing confidentiality to build trust and awareness. Medium-term strategies should focus on improving accessibility through flexible service delivery and leadership training. Long-term strategies should embed structured monitoring and evaluation, continuity-of-care procedures, and feedback loops to sustain programme effectiveness and operational impact. This phased approach will ensure that interventions are contextually feasible, address immediate barriers, and create a foundation for long-term engagement with the EAP.

### **5.5.1 Strengthen continuity-of-care and follow-up mechanisms**

The EMPS should implement structured follow-up mechanisms, including post-counselling check-ins and clearly defined referral pathways. This will address the accessibility and continuity gaps identified by the participants (P5 and P12) and ensure sustained engagement with the EAP. The human resources department, in collaboration with EAP providers, should monitor engagement and feedback to reinforce officer confidence. This recommendation aligns with the conceptual framework by strengthening the pathway from engagement to sustained well-being and productivity outcomes.

- **Short-term implementation:** Initiate post-counselling check-ins and feedback monitoring.
- **Long-term implementation:** Institutionalise structured referral and follow-up procedures across precincts.

### **5.5.2 Improve the accessibility of EAP services in operational contexts**

Flexible delivery models are recommended to overcome operational and shift work constraints:

- Tele-counselling for night-shift officers.
- On-site post-incident debriefing.
- Extended service hours that are aligned with operational duties.

Piloting these measures will enhance accessibility, strengthen the link between awareness and engagement, and ensure that well-being and productivity outcomes are operationally achievable in the EMPS.

- **Medium-term implementation:** Launch pilot accessibility initiatives and make adjustments based on officer feedback.

### 5.5.3 Enhance communication and awareness of EAP benefits

Ongoing awareness initiatives should use specific channels that are relevant to EMPS operations:

- Monthly briefings at stations.
- Station noticeboards.
- WhatsApp broadcasts for immediate reach.
- Integration into induction programmes for new recruits.

Clear, culturally and operationally sensitive messaging will improve understanding and uptake of EAP services, which will address the low awareness and communication gaps identified in this study.

- **Short-term implementation:** Launch awareness campaigns using multiple internal channels.

### 5.5.4 Reinforce confidentiality and build employee trust

Confidentiality should be formalised in writing and communicated independently from line management to reduce stigma and build trust. Emphasising the independence of EAP providers will strengthen the officers' confidence in using the EAP without fear of career repercussions.

- **Short-term implementation:** Communicate written confidentiality assurances and ethical protocols.

### 5.5.5 Strengthen leadership support and organisational commitment

Leadership, including supervisors and station commanders, should receive compulsory training on mental health awareness and appropriate referral processes. Leaders should actively model help-seeking behaviour and promote the EAP as a preventative resource that supports operational readiness.

These actions will translate awareness and trust into sustained engagement and well-being outcomes, as indicated by the conceptual framework, and demonstrate leadership's pivotal role in shaping EMPS organisational culture.

- **Medium-term implementation:** Deliver leadership training programmes and establish accountability measures.

### **5.5.6 Integrate EAP outcomes into organisational monitoring and evaluation**

The EMPS should integrate EAP outcomes into organisational performance monitoring and tracking:

- Utilisation rates and repeat visits.
- Absenteeism trends.
- Anonymous officer satisfaction feedback.

This recommendation aligns with the conceptual framework by establishing feedback loops to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions, which will enable continuous improvement and strategic sustainability of the EAP in the EMPS.

- **Long-term implementation:** Embed EAP metrics into organisational monitoring systems to inform decision making and refine interventions.

## **5.6 PRIORITISATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations should be prioritised as follows:

- Short term: Communication improvements and confidentiality reinforcement.
- Medium term: Leadership training and accessibility pilots.
- Long term: Monitoring integration and continuity-of-care mechanisms.

## **5.7 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION**

This study provided EMPS-specific insights into municipal policing employees' perceptions of EAP services. It demonstrated how communication practices, trust and confidentiality concerns, leadership engagement, and socio-cultural factors collectively shape EAP utilisation within the operational realities of the EMPS.

By employing qualitative, phenomenological methods, the research captured the lived experiences of municipal police officers by offering detailed, context-rich insights that cannot be obtained through surveys or generic workplace studies. This approach fills a critical gap in municipal policing research by linking operational constraints, leadership practices, and socio-cultural norms to EAP engagement and employee well-being outcomes.

Furthermore, integrating the EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) with the study's conceptual framework strengthened its contribution by providing a structured explanation of how organisational, societal, and individual factors interact to influence EAP engagement and effectiveness. The findings offer practical, actionable insights that can guide EMPS management in designing targeted interventions to enhance employee well-being, productivity, and overall organisational resilience (Moore et al., 2023; Psychology and Mediation Services, 2025).

## **5.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Despite its contributions, this study had certain limitations that must be acknowledged:

- While the study involved 13 participants from a single EMPS station, this sample size aligns with phenomenological methodology, which prioritises depth and richness of lived experiences over breadth. Each participant's narrative was explored in detail, which enabled data saturation after 12 interviews. This approach ensured credible and meaningful insights that are transferable to similar municipal policing contexts, even though generalisation across the entire EMPS is limited. The deliberate focus on a single station allowed for an in-depth understanding of the organisational, cultural, and operational factors that affect EAP utilisation, which is consistent with phenomenological research principles (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
- The small sample size, while appropriate for in-depth qualitative research, might not capture all perspectives in the EMPS.
- Field observations were limited to the interview context, which might not fully reflect day-to-day operational dynamics and informal workplace interactions.

These limitations did not detract from the credibility or depth of the findings but defined the scope within which the results should be interpreted. Acknowledging these boundaries helps to guide future research directions and reinforces the contextual specificity of EMPS-focused insights.

## 5.9 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Building on the insights generated in this study, several avenues for future research are recommended to further strengthen the understanding of EAP implementation and effectiveness within municipal policing contexts.

Given that this study was confined to a single EMPS station, future research could expand the scope to include multiple police stations or municipalities in the EMM or other municipal policing environments. Comparative studies of this nature would provide a broader understanding of EAP utilisation patterns, common barriers, and contextual differences across policing units, which will enhance the transferability and generalisability of the findings.

In addition, future studies could examine the long-term effects of EAP participation on key organisational outcomes such as absenteeism, job performance, and mental health indicators among municipal policing employees. Longitudinal research designs would be particularly valuable in assessing whether the short-term benefits of counselling and support services translate into sustained improvements in employee well-being, operational readiness, and productivity over time.

Further research is also recommended to explore targeted interventions aimed at addressing cultural and gender-based barriers to EAP utilisation in policing environments. Given the strong influence of policing culture, masculinity norms, and stigma identified in this study, future research could evaluate the effectiveness of tailored awareness programmes, leadership-driven initiatives, or peer-support models in reducing resistance to help-seeking behaviour among municipal police officers.

Finally, future research could investigate how systematic monitoring, evaluation, and feedback mechanisms may enhance EAP engagement and effectiveness. Examining how employee feedback, utilisation trends, and well-being indicators are integrated into organisational decision-making processes could provide valuable insights into strengthening the strategic role, sustainability, and operational impact of EAP services within municipal policing contexts.

Collectively, these avenues for future research would build on this study's contributions, thereby supporting evidence-based strategies for improving EAP implementation, employee well-being, and productivity in the South African municipal policing sector.

## 5.10 CONCLUSION

Limited awareness, insufficient communication, concerns about confidentiality, cultural and gender norms, and management practices continue to act as barriers to EAP engagement among EMPS employees. Conversely, supportive leadership, operational flexibility, and observable benefits of counselling emerged as key enablers. Recommendations tailored to EMPS operational realities, including enhanced communication, reinforcement of confidentiality, leadership training, flexible service delivery, and structured continuity-of-care mechanisms, provide actionable strategies to improve EAP effectiveness, sustain employee well-being, and enhance operational readiness.

Integrating the study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks demonstrates that individual experiences of well-being and productivity are shaped by broader organisational systems, leadership practices, and cultural norms. This highlights the value of adopting a systems-oriented perspective when evaluating EAP implementation in policing environments.

The findings illustrate how awareness, trust, leadership support, and operational accessibility interact to influence engagement, well-being, and productivity outcomes in the EMPS. Together with the practical recommendations, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms that drive EAP effectiveness in municipal policing and provides both evidence-based guidance for EMPS management and a foundation for future research in similar public sector contexts.

## REFERENCES

- Abdul Aziz, A. F., & Ong, T. (2025). Access to employee assistance programs and employee wellbeing: A cross-sectional study of employees in Southeast Asia. *BMC Public Health*, 25(1), 398. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-21358-7>
- Ahad, A., Gonzalez, M., & Junquera, P. (2023). Understanding and addressing mental health stigma across cultures for improving psychiatric care: A narrative review. *Cureus*, 15(5), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.39549>
- Ahmed, A. M. (2025). Employee Well-being and Productivity: The Role of Mental Health Programs in the Workplace. *Eurasian Journal of Humanities and Education Research (EJHER)*, 1(1), 1–15. <https://eurasian-journals.com/index.php/ejher/article/view/3>
- Allen, L., & Bosworth, D. (2022). *Tailoring wellness programs to meet growing demand and drive engagement*. <https://www.rgare.com/knowledge-center/article/tailoring-wellness-programs-to-meet-growing-demand-and-drive-engagement>
- Altman, J., Firebaugh, C. M., Morgan, S., & Epstein, M. (2023). Perceived workplace support for employee participation in workplace wellness programs: A brief report. *Merits*, 3(3), 494–503. <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3030029>
- Arjmand, H. A., O'Donnell, M. L., Sadler, N., Nursey, J., Peck, T., & Varker, T. (2025). Improving mental health service and practice for police: A qualitative assessment. *Traumatology*, 31(2), 252–261. <https://doi.org/10.1037/trm0000517>
- Arul Senthil, B. (2021). Impact of employee well being on organizational performance in workplace. *Wesleyan Journal of Research*, 14(30), 27–38.
- Attridge, M. (2019). A global perspective on promoting workplace mental health and the role of employee assistance programs. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 33(4), 622–629. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117119838101c>
- Attridge, M. (2023). The current state of employee assistance programs in the United States: A research-based commentary item type article. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 13(8), 74–91.
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands–resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285.
- Berry, L. L., Mirabito, A. M., & Baun, W. B. (2010). What's the hard return on employee wellness programs? *Harvard Business Review*, 88(12), 104–112.

- Botha, J. (2025). *The silent epidemic: Mental wellbeing in South African workplaces*. <https://www.globalbusiness.co.za/post/the-silent-epidemic-mental-wellbeing-in-south-african-workplaces>
- Boyce, N., & Frankish, H. (2025). *Mental health statistics*. Global Mental Health Commission. <https://globalmentalhealthcommission.org/mental-health-statistics/>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.
- Brown, B. (2025). *Behind the badge: Understanding the psychological challenges faced by law enforcement*. <https://psyforu.com/behind-the-badge-understanding-the-psychological-challenges-faced-by-law-enforcement/>
- Brown Merriwether, C. (2021, July 21). *The rise of workplace wellness: A history*. BenefitsPRO. <https://www.benefitspro.com/2021/07/21/the-rise-of-workplace-wellness-a-history/>
- Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2, 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>
- Cape Business News (CBN). (2023, October 22). “Struck by” accidents account for >32% of SA’s total – FEM. *CBN*. <https://cbn.co.za/industry-news/personal-protection-equipment-clothing-news/struck-by-accidents-account-for-32-of-sas-total-fem/>
- Cleveland, J. N., & Shore, L. M. (2007). Work and employment: Individual. *Encyclopedia of Gerontology*, 1(9780123708700), 683–694.
- Coffelt, T. A. (2024). *Confidentiality and anonymity of participants*. <https://methods.sagepub.com/ency/edvol/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-communication-research-methods/chpt/confidentiality-anonymity-participants>
- Coppens, E., Hogg, B., Greiner, B. A., Paterson, C., De Winter, L., Mathieu, S., Cresswell-Smith, J., Aust, B., Leduc, C., Van Audenhove, C., Pashoja, A. C., Kim, D., Reich, H., Fanaj, N., Dushaj, A., Thomson, K., O’Connor, C., Moreno-Alcázar, A., Amann, B. L., & Arensman, E. (2023). Promoting employee wellbeing and preventing non-clinical mental health problems in the workplace: A preparatory consultation survey. *Journal of Occupational Medicine and Toxicology*, 18, 17. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12995-023-00378-2>
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Csiernik, R., Cavell, M., & Csiernik, B. (2021). EAP evaluation 2010–2019: What do we now know? *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 36(2), 105–124. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2021.1902336>
- Dagar, R., & Sisodia, S. (2023). Navigating crises: Leadership’s role in fostering employee well-being and resilience. *Seybold Report*, 8(6), 721–738. <https://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/n5hpm>
- Daniel, C. O. (2019). Effects of job stress on employee’s performance. *International Journal of Business Management and Social Research*, 6(2), 375–382. <https://doi.org/10.18801/ijbmsr.060219.40>
- Dawood, Z. (2025). *Durban metro police battling severe mental health challenges, study finds*. <https://iol.co.za/news/south-africa/2025-03-18-durban-metro-police-battling-severe-mental-health-challenges-study-finds/>
- De Jesus, K., & O’Neil, S. (2024). A supervisor perspective on mental illness in the South African workspace. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22, a2237. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2237>
- DeJonckheere, M., & Vaughn, L. M. (2019). Semistructured interviewing in primary care research: A balance of relationship and rigour. *Family Medicine and Community Health*, 7(2), e000057. <https://doi.org/10.1136/fmch-2018-000057>
- Deloitte. (2020). *Mental health and employers*. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/uk/Documents/consultancy/deloitte-uk-mental-health-and-employers.pdf>
- De Oliveira, C., Saka, M., Bone, L., & Jacobs, R. (2022). The role of mental health on workplace productivity: A critical review of the literature. *Applied Health Economics and Health Policy*, 21(2), 167–193. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40258-022-00761-w>
- Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA). (2024). *Annual report 2023–2024 financial year*. <https://www.dpsa.gov.za/dpsa2g/documents/annualreports/DPSA%20Annual%20report%202023-2024.pdf>
- De San José, C. A. (2020). *World Mental Health Day: Why mental health at work matters*. <https://allwork.space/2020/10/world-mental-health-day-why-mental-health-at-work-matters/>

- Dhanpat, N., Makhubele, B., & De Braine, R. (2025). Contextualising workplace mental health in post-pandemic South Africa: A systematic review. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 51, a2225. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v51i0.2225>
- Dipela, M. P., & Mgwanya, A. N. (2025). Evaluating employee assistance programmes: Social workers' perspectives on their effectiveness. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science (2147-4478)*, 14(6), 30–40. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v14i6.4153>
- Dipela, M. P., & Sithole, S. (2021). Under-utilisation of internal employee assistance programme (EAP) services by the South African Police Service in Lephalale, Limpopo province. *Social Work / Maatskaplike Werk*, 57(4), 486. <https://doi.org/10.15270/57-4-972>
- Du Plessis, M., & Rabie, C. (2025). Workplace wellness initiatives and service quality in customer-facing industries: A systematic review. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 28(1), 13. <https://sajems.org/index.php/sajems/article/view/6428/3669>
- Elliott, R. (2020). *Probability and non-probability samples*. [https://www.geopoll.com/blog/probability-and-non-probability-samples/#Probability\\_Sample\\_vs\\_Non-Probability\\_Sample](https://www.geopoll.com/blog/probability-and-non-probability-samples/#Probability_Sample_vs_Non-Probability_Sample)
- Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa (EAPA-SA). (2015). *Standards for employee assistance programmes in South Africa* (4th ed.). <https://www.eapasa.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EAPA-SA-Standards-4th-edition-2015.pdf>
- Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa (EAPA-SA). (2024). *Assessing the effectiveness of EAPs in the workplace*. <https://www.eapasa.co.za/assessing-the-effectiveness-of-eaps-in-the-workplace/>
- Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa (EAPA-SA). (2025). *What is an EAP? | EAPA-SA*. [www.eapasa.co.za. https://www.eapasa.co.za/about-eapasa/what-is-an-employee-assistance-programme/](https://www.eapasa.co.za/about-eapasa/what-is-an-employee-assistance-programme/)
- eThekweni Municipality. (2018). *About eThekweni*. <https://www.durban.gov.za/page/about-ethekwini>
- Flick, U. (2022). *An introduction to qualitative research* (7th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Fox, J. (2016). Being a service user and a social work academic: balancing expert identities. *Social Work Education*, 35(8), 960–969. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2016.1227315>

- Franco, D. D. (2025). *Employee assistance programs statistics and utilization rates*. <https://meditopia.com/en/forwork/articles/eap-statistics-and-utilization-rates>
- Garfield, S., Ruma Bhargawa, Kostegan, E., & World Economic Forum. (2024, May 30). *Workers' mental health and well-being need a holistic approach*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/05/how-to-transform-workplace-mental-health-through-a-holistic-approach-to-employee-health-and-well-being/>
- Global Wellness Institute. (2025, March 28). Workplace wellbeing initiative trends for 2025. *Global Wellness Institute*. <https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/global-wellness-institute-blog/2025/03/28/workplace-wellbeing-initiative-trends-for-2025/>
- Google Maps. (2026). *eThekwini police station*. <https://www.google.com/maps/search/thekwini+police+station/@-29.9104012>
- Grobler, A., & Joubert, Y. (2026). Expectations, perceptions and experience of EAP services in the SAPS. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 9(1), 150–171. [https://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S181574402012000100008&script=sci\\_art\\_ext](https://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?pid=S181574402012000100008&script=sci_art_ext)
- Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3(1), 1–25. <http://hdl.handle.net/10500/2573>
- Gupta, A., & Moid, S. (2025). The role of employee assistance programs in reducing workplace stress and enhancing productivity. *International Journal for Research Trends and Innovation*, 10(3), 123–126. <https://ijrti.org/papers/IJRTI2503117.pdf>
- Hahn, S. D. (2023). *Employee wellness programmes*. <https://global.sacap.edu.za/blog/people-management/employee-wellness-programmes/>
- Hanley-Dafoe, R., & Wells, G. (2024, May 3). Why employees aren't accessing employee assistance programs. *Psychology Today South Africa*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/za/blog/everyday-resilience/202405/why-employees-arent-accessing-employee-assistance-programs>
- Hargrave, G. E., Hiatt, D., Alexander, R., & Shaffer, I. A. (2008). EAP treatment impact on presenteeism and absenteeism: Implications for return on investment. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 23(3), 283–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240802242999>

- Hassan, M. (2025, February 19). Data collection – Methods, types and examples. *ResearchMethodology.org*.  
[https://researchmethodology.org/datacollection/#What\\_Is\\_Data\\_Collection](https://researchmethodology.org/datacollection/#What_Is_Data_Collection)
- Hayes, J. (2025, January 12). 5 unconventional wellness trends that will shape the workforce in 2025. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/julianhayesii/2025/01/12/5-unconventional-wellness-trends-that-will-shape-the-workforce-in-2025/>
- Hengboriboon, L., & Yukongdi, V. (2024). Enhancing employee assistance programs for stress management in Thailand: Employees' perspectives. *SAGE Open*, 14(4).  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241274582>
- Himani, D. (2023). *Employee assistance program: Components, benefits and tips*.  
<https://mantra.care/eap/about-employee-assistance-program/>
- Hreha, J. (2023, November 20). Work-life balance: Why it's important and how to achieve it. *Persona*.  
<https://www.personalent.com/productivity/how-to-achieve-work-life-balance/>
- Huzefa, A., Hr, R., & Mahindra Bank, K. (2024). The impact of poor mental health on productivity and suitable remedies. *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research*, 6(4), 1–8. <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2024/4/25410.pdf>
- International Labour Organization. (2019). Safety and health at work at the heart of the future of work. In *International Labour Organization*. International Labour Organization.  
[https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed\\_protect/%40prot\\_rav/%40safework/documents/publication/wcms\\_687610.pdf?](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/%40ed_protect/%40prot_rav/%40safework/documents/publication/wcms_687610.pdf?)
- Johnson, D. (2021). *What is data analysis? Research, types & example*.  
<https://www.guru99.com/what-is-data-analysis.html>
- Joseph, B., Walker, A., & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, M. (2017). Evaluating the effectiveness of employee assistance programmes: A systematic review. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 27(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2017.1374245>
- Juba, O. O. (2024). Impact of workplace safety, health, and wellness programs on employee engagement and productivity. *International Journal of Health, Medicine and Nursing Practice*, 6(4), 12–27. <https://doi.org/10.47941/ijhmnp.1819>
- Kankousky, M. (2022). *Care for your people: When life stressors and work collide*.  
<https://www.insperity.com/blog/life-stressors-2/?>

- Katema, R., & Hapunda, G. (2024). Factors Affecting Utilization of Employee Assistance Program: A Case Study of ABSA Bank Zambia. *African Journal of Commercial Studies*, 4(4), 278–288. <https://doi.org/10.59413/ajocs/v4.i4.3>
- Kenton, W. (2020 [Updated January 6, 2025]). Presenteeism. *Investopedia*. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/presenteeism.asp>
- Kumar, Y. (2023, June 23). Employees' mental health and well-being initiatives. *Linked In*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/employees-mental-health-well-being-initiatives-yogesh-kumar-dgm-hr/>
- Kuvaas, B., Buch, R., & Dysvik, A. (2018). Individual variable pay for performance, incentive effects, and employee motivation. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2018(1), 12393. <https://doi.org/10.5465/ambpp.2018.12393abstract>
- Latha, M. (2024, September 3). What is corporate wellness? The ultimate guide to employee health and well-being. *Wellness360 Blog*. <https://blog.wellness360.co/what-is-corporate-wellness-the-ultimate-guide-to-employee-health-and-well-being/>
- Leist, S. (2021). *Research guides: Health & wellness: Physical health*. <https://guides.vwu.edu/c.php?g=20994&p=122669>
- Long, T., & Cooke, F. L. (2023). Advancing the field of employee assistance programs research and practice: A systematic review of quantitative studies and future research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review*, 33(2), 100941. ScienceDirect. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2022.100941>
- Luyten, J., & Knapp, M. (2017). Economic evaluation of mental health promotion and mental illness prevention. In S. Bährer-Kohler & F. Carod-Artal (Eds.), *Global mental health* (pp. 207–222). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59123-0\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59123-0_18)
- Magubane, T. (2021, June 28). Concerns over eThekweni Metro cops' access to mental health care. *IOL*. [https://iol.co.za/mercury/news/2021-06-28-concerns-over-ethekwini-metro-cops-access-to-mental-health-care/#google\\_vignette](https://iol.co.za/mercury/news/2021-06-28-concerns-over-ethekwini-metro-cops-access-to-mental-health-care/#google_vignette)
- Makhanya, B. R. (2021). *The impact of employee wellness programme on employee wellness and performance: A KwaZulu-Natal municipality case study* (Doctoral dissertation). University of South Africa.
- Makola, Z., & Tabane, R. (2022). South African employees' perceptions of the inclusion of traditional health practitioners' services in workplace employee assistance programmes. *Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health*, 37(4), 286–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15555240.2022.2130347>

- Manandhar, N., & Joshi, S. K. (2020). Importance of consent in the research. *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Health*, 10(2), 89–91. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijosh.v10i2.33284>
- MantraCare Corporation. (2022). *Employee wellness in South Africa*. <https://eapemployee.wellness.com/south-africa/employee-wellness-south-africa/>
- Masuku, N., Esterhuyzen, E., & Ramajoe, M. (2025). Determinants of employee engagement and job satisfaction in a local municipality. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23, a2988. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2988>
- Mathaphuna, M. L., Roestenburg, W., & Mokwele, R. M. (2024). Indicators for the ROI of employee wellness programmes in South African water utility organisations. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22, a2679. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v22i0.2679>
- Mattke, S., Liu, H. H., Caloyeras, J. P., Huang, C. Y., Busum, V., Khodyakov, D., & Shier, V. (2013). *Workplace wellness programs study*. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR254.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR254.html)
- Mavuso, G. S. (2023). *Exploring the influence of COVID-19 on the utilisation of the employee assistance programme within a private medical laboratory in South Africa* (Master's research report). University of the Witwatersrand. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/40603>
- Meier, L. L., & Spector, P. E. (2015). Job satisfaction. *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management*, 5(050093), 1–3. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118785317.weom050093>
- Monroe, S. (2021). *What is health and wellness? Similarities & important differences*. [https://iawpwellnesscoach.com/wellness-coaching/health-and-wellness/#elementor-toc\\_heading-anchor-3](https://iawpwellnesscoach.com/wellness-coaching/health-and-wellness/#elementor-toc_heading-anchor-3)
- Moore, J. T., Wigington, C., Green, J., Horter, L., Kone, A., Lopes-Cardozo, B., Byrkit, R., & Rao, C. Y. (2023). Understanding low utilization of employee assistance programs and time off by US public health workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Public Health Reports*, 138(4), 003335492311652-003335492311652. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00333549231165287>
- Muchnick, M. (2023, February 3). Feature: South Africa's mental health crisis: An urgent need for corporate intervention. *Accountancy SA*. <https://www.accountancysa.org.za/feature-south-africas-mental-health-crisis-an-urgent-need-for-corporate-intervention/>
- Mushwana, M. R. V., Govender, I., & Nel, K. (2019). Stress and coping mechanisms of officers of the South African Police Service based in Tzaneen, Limpopo province, South Africa.

- South African Journal of Psychiatry*, 25(25), a1342. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajpsychiatry.v25i0.1342>
- Naidu, S., & Olivier, B. H. (2025). Employee assistance programmes: A study on stress reduction in trainee accountants. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23, 2971. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v23i0.2971>
- Ncube, L. (2022). *Perceptions of employee assistance practitioners of South Africa on the factors that influence professional ethics in employee assistance programmes* (Master's thesis). University of the Witwatersrand. <https://hdl.handle.net/10539/44560>
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., & Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspectives on Medical Education*, 8(2), 90–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2>
- Noble, H., & Smith, J. (2015). Issues of validity and reliability in qualitative research. *Evidence-Based Nursing*, 18(2), 34–35. <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2015-102054>
- Nyambose, N. B. (2024). *The utilisation of an employee wellness programme and factors determining its usage in a South African organisation*. University of South Africa (Doctoral dissertation). <https://ir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/31643>
- OECD (2022), *Promoting Health and Well-being at Work: Policy and Practices*, OECD Health Policy Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/e179b2a5-en>.
- Ong, A. (2025, March 28). Why prioritizing employee well-being is good for business. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/03/prioritizing-employee-wellbeing-good-for-business/>
- Papazoglou, K., & Tuttle, B. M. (2018). Fighting police trauma: Practical approaches to addressing psychological needs of officers. *SAGE Open*, 8(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018794794>
- Perry, E. (2023). *What is productivity? A complete guide for improving yours*. <https://www.betterup.com/blog/what-is-productivity>
- Peter, E. (2015). The Ethics in Qualitative Health research: Special Considerations. *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva*, 20(9), 2625–2630. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1413->
- Psychology and Mediation Services. (2025). *Employee assistance programs: Is EAP confidential?* <https://psychologyandmediationservices.com.au/is-eap-confidential/>
- Queirós, C., Passos, F., Bártolo, A., Faria, S., Fonseca, S. M., Marques, A. J., Silva, C. F., & Pereira, A. (2020). Job stress, burnout and coping in police officers: Relationships and psychometric properties of the organizational police stress questionnaire. *International*

- Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(18), 6718. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186718>
- Robbins, S. P., & Judge, T. (2016). *Organizational behavior* (17th ed.). Pearson.
- Rothmann, S., & Cooper, C. L. (2015). *Work and organizational psychology*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.
- Salgar, R. B., & Nizamuddin, M. (2025). Work-life balance among police personnel: A comprehensive evaluation of existing research. *International Journal of Innovations & Research Analysis (IJIRA)*, 48(01), 48–52. <https://www.inspirajournals.com/uploads/Issues/1211968253.pdf>
- Sandhya, D. S. (2024). *A conceptual framework for the work–life balance of police officers: A post-COVID-19 perspective*. *Cogent Business & Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2304429>
- Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2013). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (6th ed.). Wiley.
- Sieberhagen, C., Pienaar, J., & Els, C. (2011). Management of employee wellness in South Africa: Employer, service provider and union perspectives. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 9(1), a305. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v9i1.305>
- Silinda, M., & Mpungose, S. (2025). Exploring workplace wellness programmes and their influence on employee productivity: A case of the public accident sector. *International Journal of Applied Research in Business and Management*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.51137/wrp.ijarbm.319>
- Silverman, D. (2025). *Qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Song, Z., & Baicker, K. (2019). Workplace wellness programs and health outcomes—Reply. *JAMA*, 322(9), 893. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.9829
- South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG). (2025). *South African Depression and Anxiety Group*. [https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2391:new-research-on-depression-in-the-workplace&catid=11&Itemid=101](https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2391:new-research-on-depression-in-the-workplace&catid=11&Itemid=101)
- South African Government. (1995). *South African Police Service Act 68 of 1995* | South African Government. [Www.gov.za. https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-police-service-act](https://www.gov.za/documents/south-african-police-service-act)
- Subramaniam, M. (2024). Stigma and mental health: Overcoming barriers. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 65(10), 533–535. <https://doi.org/10.4103/singaporemedj.smj-2024-166>

- Sundler, A. J., Lindberg, E., Nilsson, C., & Palmér, L. (2019). *Qualitative thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology*. *Nursing Open*, 6(3), 733–739. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.275>
- Tahir, H. B. (2024, November 18). What's a wellness program? Definition, examples, and benefits. *Occupational Health and Safety Blog*. <https://www.hseblog.com/wellness-program/>
- Taute, F., & Manzini, K. (2014). Factors that hinder the utilisation of the employee assistance programme in the Department of Labour. *Social Work / Maatskaplike Werk*, 45(4). <https://doi.org/10.15270/45-4-190>
- Terblanche, L. S. (1992). The state of the art of EAPs in South Africa: A critical analysis. In R. P. Maiden (Ed.), *Employee assistance programmes in South Africa* (pp. 17–28). Hawthorn Press.
- United Nations Global Compact. (2021). *Occupational Safety and Health | UN Global Compact*. [Unglobalcompact.org; United Nations Global Compact. https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/safety-andhealth?](https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/safety-andhealth?)
- Veldsman, D., & Van Aarde, N. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on an employee assistance programme in a multinational insurance organisation: Considerations for the future. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, 47, a1863. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v47i0.1863>
- Wagner, C., Kawulich, B. B., & Garner, M. (2012). *Doing social research: A global context*. McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
- Wells, G., Bowden, J., Colyer, D., Kay, E., Lukeman, S., Newett, L., & Eckstein, L. (2024). Exploratory interviews with Australian clinical research staff on how they communicate with participants. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 24, 319. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-024-02417-w>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2019). *Burn-out an occupational phenomenon: International classification of diseases*. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- World Health Organization. (2020). *Global spending on health 2020 : Weathering the storm*. World Health Organization.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021). *Ensuring ethical standards and procedures for research with human beings*. <https://www.who.int/activities/ensuring-ethical-standards-and-procedures-for-research-with-human-beings>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022a). *WHO guidelines on mental health at work*. <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/363177/9789240053052-eng.pdf>

- World Health Organization (WHO). (2022b). *WHO World mental health today Latest data..* <https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/31714489-1345-4439-8b37-6cbdc52e15ca/content>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2023). *Stress.* <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2024). *Mental health at work.* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>
- Xulu, L. S. (2024). *Work motivation and employee engagement at a state-owned enterprise in Richards Bay* (Master's thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/bfb6c21f-2a8a-412f-aa4c-98ad2396c089>
- Zhu, J. (2023, March 7). Mental health: A nation's wealth. *Emory Economics Review.* <https://emoryeconomicsreview.org/articles/2024/12/7/42pyedbvfxtuzqyrp23m7b7wtp9yof>
- Zieringer, R. C., & Zapf, D. (2024). The effects of an employee assistance program on productivity at work, workability, absenteeism, and smartphone measures of heart rate and heart rate variability. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 29*(4), 280–298. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000380>
- Zondi, P. T. (2017). *Employees' perceptions of the employee health and wellness programme at the Southern region in the Department of Public Works in KwaZulu-Natal* (Master's thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/da082885-177f-4bea-8f26-de3707b2a9d0>
- Zondi, T. M. (2023). *Exploring the utilisation of employee assistance programme (EAP) services in the Department of Transport KwaZulu-Natal: The perceptions of traffic officers* (Master's thesis). University of KwaZulu-Natal. <https://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/items/418a544a-06cb-479f-96fe-ab23706315a0>

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Ethical Clearance From the University of KwaZulu-Natal



31 October 2025

Philile Sissy Mhlongo (219023027)  
Grad School of Bus & Leadership  
Westville Campus

Dear PS Mhlongo,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00009326/2025

**Project title:** Employee Perceptions on the Employee Assistance Programme to Boost Productivity in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality.

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 10 September 2025 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.

This approval is valid until 31 October 2026.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,

Doctor Shamila Naidoo (Interim Chair)

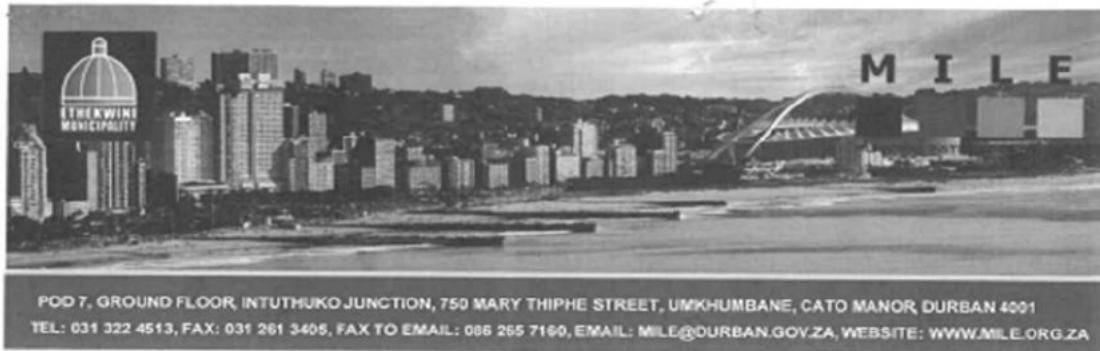
/nng

**Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee**

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 31 260 8350/4552/3587. Email: [hssrec@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:hssrec@ukzn.ac.za). Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/research-Ethics>

## Appendix B: eThekwini Metropolitan Police Services Gatekeepers' Letter



For attention:  
Chair of Research Ethics Committee  
University of KwaZulu-Natal  
College of Law and Management Studies  
Durban  
4001

13 October 2025

**RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT TO P.S MHLONGO STUDENT NO: 219023027 - GRANTING PERMISSION TO USE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY AS A STUDY SITE**

The Metro Police Directorate and Municipal Institute of Learning (MILE) in eThekwini Municipality, have considered a request from **Phille Sissy Mhlongo** to use eThekwini Municipality as a research study site for the purposes of undertaking a research study entitled: " **Employees perceptions on the Employee Assistance Programme to boost productivity in the eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality**" - leading to the awarding of a **Masters degree**.

We wish to inform you of the acceptance of this request and hereby assure the student of our utmost cooperation towards achieving his/ her academic goals; the outcome which we believe may help this municipality improve its evidence-base on **productivity and employees perceptions on the employee assistance programme**. The student is reminded of the ethical considerations for responsible research and current health regulations when conducting this research. The student must take all necessary measures to ensure his/ her personal safety during the research period as eThekwini Municipality indemnifies itself from any incidental claims that may arise. In return, we stipulate as mandatory that **the student contacts [sthabile.mboniswa@durban.gov.za](mailto:sthabile.mboniswa@durban.gov.za) to present the preliminary results and recommendations of this study to the related unit/s.**

Wishing the student all the best in his studies.

Mr Sisonelo Mchunu  
Director: Metro Police  
eThekwini Municipality

Dr. Collin Pillay  
Program Manager: MILE  
eThekwini Municipality

I, Phille Sissy Mhlongo.....hereby accept as mandatory that I will comply fully as per the conditions stipulated above.

Signed: .. Date: 13 October 2025

## Appendix C: Research Interview Guide

The interview schedule is structured into five sections to address the research objectives and corresponding research questions. The sections cover demographic information, factors that promote EAP implementation, barriers that hinder its effectiveness, employees' perceptions of the EAP, and recommendations for improving the programme.

---

### Research Interview Schedule eThekwini Metropolitan Police Service (EMPS) Participant

Interview Date : \_\_\_\_\_ Interview Number : \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Number : \_\_\_\_\_ Signature : \_\_\_\_\_

---

#### Section A: - Demographic Information

##### A1 - Gender

a.	Male	b.	Female
----	------	----	--------

##### A2 - Age

a.	Below 25 years
b.	25-30 years
c.	31-40 years
d.	41-50 years
e.	51 year and above

##### A3 - Designation

a.	Authorised Officer
b.	Constable (Const)
c.	Sergeant (Sgt)
d.	Inspector

##### A4 – Years of work service /experience

a.	1 – 5 years	b.	6 – 10 year	c.	11 years and above
----	-------------	----	-------------	----	--------------------

---

**Section B: Identify Factors That Promote Effective EAP Implementation**

*[Section B: Aligned with Objective 1 / Research Question 1]*

---

**B5: What factors support effective EAP implementation?**

- 1) Can you describe any experiences you have had using EAP services and explain how these have influenced your ability to cope and perform effectively at work?
  - 2) In your view, how are EAP services communicated or promoted in the EMPS, and how effective are these strategies in encouraging employees to use the programme?
  - 3) Based on your experience, what factors would make you recommend (or not recommend) the EAP to a colleague? How do these factors influence your level of trust and confidence in the service?
- 

**Section C: Explore Barriers That Hinder EAP Effectiveness**

*[Section C: Aligned with Objective 2 / Research Question 2]*

---

**C6: What barriers hinder the EAP from achieving its strategic goals?**

- 1) Describe in your own words what are some of the factors that pose a barrier to effective implementation of the EAP at the EMPS and why.
  - 2) Describe some of the challenges that are experienced while using the EAP services at the EMPS.
- 

**Section D: Assess Employees' Perceptions of the Impact of the EAP on Their Well-Being and Productivity**

*[Section D: Aligned with Objective 3 / Research Question 3]*

---

**D7: How do employees perceive the impact of the EAP on their well-being and productivity?**

- 1) To what extent do you believe that EAP serves as mediation for employee mental health?

- 2) How do you perceive the EAP services in terms of confidentiality, trustworthiness, and accessibility?
  - 3) In what ways do cultural or religious beliefs influence your perceptions and utilisation of the EAP services?
  - 4) How supported do you feel by leadership and management when engaging with the EAP? How does this support (or lack of it) affect your work performance and productivity?
  - 5) In your experience, how have the EAP services influenced your productivity or ability to carry out your duties?
- 

**Section E: Recommend Strategies to Improve the Effectiveness and Utilisation of EAP Services**

*[Section F: Aligned with Objective 4 / Research Question 4]*

---

**E8: What strategies can improve the effectiveness and utilisation of the EAP?**

- 1) What challenges or obstacles do you think prevent employees from fully participating in mandatory debriefing sessions after critical incidents or stressful events, or from carrying a firearm as required? Please explain your views.
- 2) What strategies could encourage more employees to use self-referral or peer referral as pathways to access EAP services?
- 3) Based on your experience, what recommendations would you propose to enhance the effectiveness and utilisation of the EAP and its impact on productivity at the EMPS?

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Letter 3C
----------------------------

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

Dear Respondent,

**MCLS Research Project**

**Researcher:** Ms Philile Sissy Mhlongo, [219023027@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:219023027@stu.ukzn.ac.za) [REDACTED]  
**Supervisor:** Dr Xoliswa Majola, [Majolax@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Majolax@ukzn.ac.za) (031 260 7680)  
**Research Office:** [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za), (0312604557/8350/3587)

I, **Philile Sissy Mhlongo**, am an **MCLS student** at the Graduate School of Business and Leadership of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “**Employee perceptions on the employee assistance programme to boost productivity in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality**”. The aim of this study is to **explore employee perceptions of the employee assistance programme (EAP) in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, focusing on the Durban Metro Police.**

Your participation will help examine how employees’ **perceptions influence the effective implementation and utilisation of the EAP and its role in enhancing productivity in the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality.** The findings from these interviews are intended to **provide evidence-based insights to enhance EAP services and contribute to the academic body of knowledge on employee support and organisational performance.**

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time with no negative consequences. There will be no monetary gain from participating in this interview. Confidentiality and anonymity of records identifying you as a participant will be maintained by the Graduate School of Business and Leadership, UKZN.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about participating in this study, you may contact me or my supervisor at the numbers listed above.

The interview should take you about **30 to 60** minutes to complete. I hope you will take the time to participate in this interview.

Sincerely

Investigator’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**This page is to be retained by participant.**

## Appendix E: Permission to Audio-Record Interview

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LEADERSHIP

### MCLS Research Project

Researcher: Ms. Philile Sissy Mhlongo, [219023027@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:219023027@stu.ukzn.ac.za) [REDACTED]

Supervisor: Dr Xoliswa Majola, [Majolax@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Majolax@ukzn.ac.za) (031 260 7680)

Research Office: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za), (0312604557/8350/3587)

### CONSENT

I ..... (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

### **Audio-Recording of Interviews**

I understand that the interview may be audio-recorded for research purposes. I acknowledge that

- Recordings will be used solely for academic research.
- My identity will remain confidential.
- Recordings will be securely stored and destroyed after transcription and completion of the study.
- I may withdraw my consent to recording at any time without affecting my participation.

I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

I do not consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**This page is to be retained by researcher**

## Appendix F: Participant Biographic Data

<b>Number</b>	<b>Participant code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Number of years at the EMPS</b>	<b>Current position</b>
1	001	Female	41 to 50	6 - 10	Constable
2	002	Female	41 to 50	11 and above	Constable
3	003	Male	41 to 50	11 and above	Constable
4	004	Male	31 to 40	11 and above	Inspector
5	005	Male	41 to 50	11 and above	Inspector
6	006	Male	51 and above	11 and above	Inspector
7	007	Male	31 to 40	1 to 5	Authorised Officer
8	008	Male	25 to 30	1 to 5	Authorised Officer
9	009	Male	31 to 40	6 to 10	Authorised Officer
10	010	Female	31 to 40	1 to 5	Authorised Officer
11	011	Female	31 to 40	1 to 5	Authorised Officer
12	012	Female	25 to 30	1 to 5	Authorised Officer
13	013	Female	31 to 40	1 to 5	Authorised Officer

## Appendix G: Field Notes – Researcher Observations During the Interview Stage

No.	Observation	Context / details	Researcher reflection
1.	Officers demonstrated limited knowledge of EAP services.	During the introduction phase, the principal investigator explained the purpose of the project and its intended objectives.	Low awareness suggests limited engagement with organisational support initiatives.
2.	Informed consent form was explained.	Clarified that participation was voluntary.	Ensures ethical compliance and informs participants of their rights.
3.	Officers expressed initial reluctance to participate.	Observed at the outset of the interviews.	Indicates potential mistrust or apprehension about engagement in organisational initiatives.
4.	Officers requested to speak with the duty officer.	Sought confirmation that he was aware of the voluntary nature of participation.	Highlights communication gaps between staff and management.
5.	Questions raised regarding impact on roadwork duties.	Officers were concerned that attending interviews could affect meeting daily operational targets.	Operational pressures may act as barriers to participation in voluntary initiatives like the EAP.
6.	Reduced time due to delays; vehicles temporarily withheld; instructed to perform foot patrol.	A few officers were pulled from duties and given limited time for interviews.	Procedural handling and reassignment create perceptions of coercion, which increases resistance.
7.	Officers highlighted that interview time would not be considered in end-of-day evaluations.	Concerns about overtime, redeployment, or operational consequences.	Fear of punitive measures reduces willingness to engage in voluntary programmes.
8.	Three officers withdrew from the interviews.	Operational pressures, time constraints, and procedural handling.	Withdrawal reflects barriers to participation, including workload pressures, perceptions of coercion, and organisational processes affecting engagement.

## Appendix H: Editing Letter



04 February 2026

To whom it may concern

Re: Proofreading and academic editing: Ms P.S. Mhlongo

I, Ms Jeanne-Louise van Aswegen, hereby confirm proofreading and academic editing of the master's thesis entitled *Employee perceptions on employee assistance programme (EAP) to boost productivity: A case study of the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality* by Phillile Sissy Mhlongo (student number 219023027) in February 2026. The editor is not liable for post-editing changes made by the researcher.

Please contact me on [REDACTED] or at [jeanne@grammarguardians.co.za](mailto:jeanne@grammarguardians.co.za) regarding any queries that may arise.

Kind regards,

J.L. van Aswegen

Grammar Guardians

## **Appendix I: Originality Report (Turnitin)**