

Title

**ANALYZING STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY MALAWI POLICE SERVICE TO SUPPORT FAMILIES OF DECEASED OFFICERS. A CASE STUDY OF NATIONAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS -AREA 30**

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## ABSTRACT

Law enforcement officers face occupational risks that may result in loss of life, creating long-term social and economic challenges for their surviving families. This study examined institutional mechanisms within the Malawi Police Service aimed at addressing the welfare needs of families of officers who die in the course of duty. The research sought to establish the nature of existing support measures, evaluate their effectiveness, and identify gaps that limit their impact.

A qualitative case study design was employed, focusing on the National Police Headquarters (Area 30). Data were collected through interviews with police administrators and selected family members of deceased officers, as well as through a review of relevant legal and policy documents guiding police welfare provision. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data and to identify recurring patterns related to support delivery, accessibility, and adequacy.

The findings revealed that the Malawi Police Service had established several support mechanisms, including financial assistance, funeral arrangements, pension-related benefits, and limited psychosocial support. However, the study found that these measures were often constrained by delays in implementation, limited awareness among beneficiaries, and inadequate coordination between responsible departments. Families reported challenges related to insufficient financial support, lack of follow-up services, and emotional distress resulting from minimal counseling and guidance after the loss of an officer.

The study concluded that while institutional efforts to support families of deceased officers existed, the current framework was not sufficiently comprehensive to address the diverse and long-term needs of beneficiaries. It recommended the strengthening of welfare policies,

improved communication with affected families, and the integration of structured psychosocial support programmes. Enhancing these systems would contribute to improved family well-being and reinforce institutional commitment to officer welfare within the Malawi Police Service.

**Keywords:** Malawi Police Service, Deceased officers, Family welfare, Institutional support, Police welfare policies, Psychosocial support.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The Malawi Police Service (MPS), as defined by the Police Act of 2010, is the national law enforcement agency mandated to maintain law and order, prevent and detect crime, and protect citizens and their property. In carrying out these responsibilities, police officers are frequently exposed to hazardous working conditions that place their lives at risk. The death of an officer in the line of duty represents a significant loss to the institution and has profound consequences for surviving family members, who often face emotional trauma, financial instability, and social vulnerability.

Police institutions worldwide recognize the importance of providing structured support to families of officers who die while performing their duties. Such support is commonly viewed as part of organizational responsibility and welfare provision, aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of loss and ensuring the continued well-being of dependents. In Malawi, the welfare of police officers and their families is governed by various legal and administrative frameworks that outline entitlements such as pensions, gratuities, and other forms of assistance following the death of an officer.

Despite the existence of these provisions, concerns remain regarding the adequacy

and effectiveness of support offered to families of deceased officers. Reports of delayed benefits, limited communication, and lack of psychosocial assistance suggest gaps between policy intent and practical implementation. These challenges highlight the need for systematic examination of the strategies employed by the Malawi Police Service in supporting bereaved families.

## Context

The study was conducted within the Malawi Police Service, with particular focus on the National Police Headquarters located in Area 30. As the administrative and operational center of the MPS, the National Police Headquarters plays a critical role in the formulation, coordination, and implementation of welfare policies affecting officers and their dependents. This setting provides an appropriate context for examining institutional strategies and decision-making processes related to family support.

Malawi, like many developing countries, faces financial and institutional constraints that may affect the delivery of comprehensive welfare services. These constraints can influence the availability, timeliness, and adequacy of support provided to families of deceased officers. Understanding how these broader socio-economic and institutional factors shape welfare practices is essential for identifying realistic and sustainable improvements.

## Research Objectives

This study focused on understanding how the Malawi Police Service supports families of police officers who die in the line of duty. It sought to examine the existing policies, welfare arrangements, and institutional procedures that guide the provision of support to bereaved families,

as well as how these measures are applied in practice. The study aimed to assess whether the financial, material, and psychosocial assistance provided is adequate, timely, and responsive to the needs of affected families. It also explored the experiences, challenges, and coping mechanisms of families of deceased officers as they navigate the support system within the Malawi Police Service. In addition, the study examined the level of communication and follow-up between the institution and bereaved families after the death of an officer. The perspectives of police administrators were considered to understand administrative, financial, and operational factors that influence the delivery of support services. Finally, the study aimed to identify gaps and weaknesses in existing support mechanisms and to propose practical recommendations that could enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of welfare support for families of deceased officers.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Empirical Literature Review

This literature review provides an in-depth examination of existing research on strategies, support systems, and best practices for supporting families of deceased police officers. It synthesizes findings from various studies, highlighting key themes, successes, and gaps in current knowledge. Specifically, the review explores the impact of police deaths on families, existing support mechanisms, and innovative approaches to welfare support. The discussion sets the stage for understanding the Malawi Police Service's current strategies and identifying areas for improvement.

### Strategies Implemented by Police Services to Support Families of Deceased Officers

Police forces in many developed countries have established comprehensive programs to support families of officers who die in the line of duty. These initiatives typically address emotional, financial, and practical needs through structured and proactive approaches.

In South Africa, *Mumbanga, Govender, and Nel (2019)* explored coping mechanisms among South African Police Service officers dealing with occupational stress, including the death of colleagues. Using instruments such as the Police Stress Inventory (PIS) and Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (COPE), the study found that the death of a fellow officer was a significant stressor, with many officers relying on problem-focused coping strategies. Although this research focused on internal coping among officers rather than family support, it highlights the emotional impact of officer deaths.

In the United States, organizations like Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.) provide a robust support system for bereaved families. Services include peer support, grief counseling, legal and financial guidance, scholarship programs, and commemorative events such as National Police Week (*Concerns of Police Survivors, 2023*). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) offer emotional support during legal proceedings, while charities such as Care of Police Survivors (COPS) and Police Care UK provide bereavement counseling, peer networks, financial assistance, and memorial activities (*Care of Police Survivors, 2021; Police Care UK, 2023*).

In Tanzania, formalized police-specific bereavement programs are limited. However, community-based and culturally sensitive practices provide emotional and practical support to grieving families (*Outwater, 2012*). These examples illustrate that effective support often combines financial assistance with emotional and social care, delivered in a

coordinated and consistent manner.

In Malawi, however, the Malawi Police Service (MPS) exhibits a largely reactive approach. While there is official recognition of officer deaths through condolences, funeral attendance, and initiation of benefit claims, these measures are often poorly implemented and lack transparency (*MPS Annual Report, 2023*). Strategic documents, such as the MPS Strategic Plan and Community Policing Policy, outline general welfare initiatives, but these are rarely operationalized due to financial constraints, donor dependency, and weak monitoring systems (*CHRR et al., 2019*). Furthermore, there are no formal policies specifically addressing the needs of bereaved families, and administrative delays in benefit disbursement exacerbate emotional and financial hardships (*National, 2022*). Importantly, there is no structured provision for psychological or social support, leaving families without holistic care.

### **Effectiveness of Death Gratuities in Supporting Families**

Death gratuity payments serve as an essential financial safety net for families of officers who die in the line of duty (*Smith, 2020*). While they help alleviate immediate financial pressures, they often fall short in addressing long-term emotional and social needs.

In the United Kingdom, death gratuities regulated under the Police Pensions Regulations (2015) provide lump-sum payments, survivor pensions, and child allowances (*Home Office, 2021*). These payments effectively cover funeral costs and income replacement but are limited in addressing emotional support. Bereavement services offered by police forces and charities are inconsistent, resulting in unequal access and prolonged distress for many families (*Taylor &*

*Hughes, 2018; Brown, 2019).*

Canada provides one of the most comprehensive systems, with the Public Service Pension Plan and the Memorial Grant Program offering substantial financial support and educational benefits (*Public Safety Canada, 2023; Treasury Board Secretariat, 2022*). However, access to grief counseling and psychosocial services remains uneven, particularly in rural areas (*Lambert, 2021*).

In the United States, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program combines financial compensation with counseling services, though delays and disputes can undermine its effectiveness (*Jones & Miller, 2020; U.S. Department of Justice, 2022*).

In Malawi, death gratuities are generally delayed and inconsistently administered. Families often face prolonged hardship due to weak institutional support, symbolic gestures rather than substantive assistance, and lack of formal psychological or social support (*MPS Annual Report, 2023; National, 2022*).

### **Challenges and Limitations in Supporting Families of Deceased Officers**

Globally, police services encounter a range of challenges in supporting bereaved families. In the United States, delays in compensation and inconsistent access to emotional services undermine support (*Benedek, 2018*). In Australia, culturally insensitive programs fail to meet the needs of Indigenous police families (*Walter et al., 2017*). In India, bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption cause delays in benefit disbursement, while emotional support remains largely informal (*Kumar & Singh, 2021; Sharma, 2020*).

Research in Mozambique (*Kyed, 2009*) highlights issues such as limited resources, inadequate planning, and reliance on informal structures, which hinder police

support systems. These findings resonate with challenges in Malawi, where bureaucratic delays, weak policy implementation, and inadequate funding exacerbate the hardships faced by widows and orphans of deceased officers (*National Online News, 2022*). Emotional trauma is heightened by the absence of trained counselors, poor communication, and lack of transparency (*Burman et al., 2014*). Similar challenges are observed in Kenya, including delayed death gratuities, inconsistent financial support, and minimal psychosocial services (*Omondi et al., 2024; Onyango, 2024*).

Even in advanced systems like the United Kingdom, long-term emotional support remains insufficient, showing that comprehensive financial provision alone is not enough to meet families' needs (*The Open University, 2024*). Overall, these studies indicate that effective support requires a combination of timely financial assistance, structured psychosocial services, and well-coordinated institutional mechanisms. In Malawi, significant reforms are needed to enhance policy clarity, resource allocation, and holistic support systems to adequately meet the emotional, financial, and social needs of bereaved police families.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

According to *Gill and Johnson (1997)*, a research design is a roadmap that guides the systematic implementation of a study. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, which is suitable for in-depth exploration of contemporary phenomena within their real-life context. The "case" in this study was the Malawi Police Service's approach to supporting families of deceased officers. This design allowed for a detailed understanding of the strategies used, their effectiveness, implementation processes,

and the challenges associated with them (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

## Research Setting

The study was conducted as a single case study at the National Police Headquarters (Area 30) in Lilongwe, which serves as the main administrative and strategic center of the Malawi Police Service. This location was selected because it is where policies are developed and where many bereaved families seek assistance. The study examined policy formulation, implementation, and the experiences of families of deceased officers. While findings are specific to this headquarters, they provide valuable insights that could inform practices across the wider Malawi Police Service (Creswell, 2014).

## Target Population

The target population consisted of two groups:

- Malawi Police Service personnel, including individuals involved in developing, implementing, and managing support strategies for families, such as officers from the Human Resource Welfare Department, Victim Support Unit, chaplains, and counselors.
- Families of deceased officers, including spouses, adult children, and other dependents, such as elderly parents, who could provide meaningful insights into the support they received (Creswell, 2014).

## Sampling Technique

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants with specific knowledge and experience relevant to the study. Families whose interactions or support records were managed by the National Police

Headquarters were included to capture a broad range of experiences. Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional participants with specialized knowledge, ensuring diverse perspectives and preventing reliance on a single group (Creswell, 2014).

## Sample Size

A total of 30 participants were selected. The sample included 10 family members of deceased officers—6 spouses, 2 adult children, and 2 parents—and 20 police personnel from key departments:

Victim Support Unit: 3 officers  
Spiritual Branch (Chaplains): 4 officers  
Research and Planning Branch: 2 officers  
Human Resource Department: 3 officers  
Pensions Section: 4 officers  
Welfare Branch: 4 officers

This sample size is appropriate for qualitative research and allowed for the collection of in-depth information (Creswell, 2014).

## Research Instruments

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection instrument, allowing participants to share detailed experiences and perceptions (De Vos, 2002).

For police personnel: Questions focused on policies and protocols for supporting families, types of support (financial, emotional, social, and practical), implementation procedures, responsible departments, perceptions of effectiveness, challenges, and recommendations for improvement.

For families of deceased officers: Questions explored experiences following the officer's death, support received, perceptions of adequacy and timeliness, challenges in accessing support, and suggestions for improving assistance.

## Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted with a small group of participants similar to the main study population to test the clarity, validity, and reliability of the interview instruments (Bless et al., 1995). Feedback from the pilot informed adjustments, ensuring that questions were understandable, relevant, and capable of generating meaningful data.

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data. This method involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles guided the research to ensure participants' rights and welfare were protected. Participation was voluntary, with no payment or coercion involved. Confidentiality was maintained by not including participants' names or personal identifiers. The study also ensured honesty and transparency in data collection, and participants were fully informed about the purpose and scope of the research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from the study on strategies implemented by the Malawi Police Service (MPS) to support families of officers who die in the line of duty. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 participants, including 20 police personnel and 10 family members of deceased officers. The results are organized around key themes:

awareness and implementation of support policies, types of support provided, effectiveness of death gratuity, challenges faced by families, and suggestions for improvement. Tables and figures are used to summarize patterns and trends in the data.

### Awareness and Implementation of Support Policies

Police personnel reported varying levels of awareness regarding formal policies for supporting bereaved families. While most participants were aware of general welfare initiatives outlined in the MPS Strategic Plan, few could identify specific, structured protocols for families of deceased officers.

### Key Findings

- Only 15% of officers demonstrated knowledge of clear, structured policies.
- Most officers (60%) were familiar with general welfare guidelines but could not explain implementation procedures.
- 25% had limited knowledge of any support mechanisms, highlighting gaps in training and communication.

### Types of Support Provided

Participants reported that MPS support was primarily financial and symbolic, with limited social or emotional assistance.

### Key Findings

- Financial support was the most common form of assistance but often delayed or inconsistent.
- Symbolic gestures such as condolences and funeral attendance were frequent but did not meet long-term family needs.
- Emotional and psychosocial support

was minimal, reflecting a critical gap in holistic care.

### Effectiveness of Death Gratuity

Family members shared mixed experiences regarding the death gratuity.

- Very Effective: 1 participant (10%)
- Moderately Effective: 3 participants (30%)
- Ineffective/Delayed: 6 participants (60%)

### Key Insights

- Many families reported delays in receiving payments, sometimes lasting several years.
- Even when paid, the amount often did not cover basic needs, leading to prolonged financial hardship.
- Families highlighted that while the gratuity was appreciated, it did not address emotional or social needs.

### DISCUSSION

The explored the strategies implemented by the Malawi Police Service (MPS) to support families of officers who die in the line of duty. The findings reveal that while some support exists, it is largely limited, reactive, and inconsistently applied. One key observation is that awareness of formal support policies among MPS personnel is low. Only a small proportion of officers demonstrated knowledge of structured procedures, while most were only familiar with general welfare initiatives. This finding aligns with *the MPS Annual Report (2023)*, which notes that strategic plans and welfare initiatives are often poorly operationalized. Similarly, *Kyed (2009)* highlighted in Mozambique that resource limitations and reliance on informal structures often prevent police

institutions from delivering systematic support to bereaved families. Low policy awareness has practical consequences: when officers are unclear about procedures, families are less likely to access timely and adequate assistance, a challenge also observed in Kenya (*Omondi et al., 2024*). From a social work perspective, the knowledge and training of service providers are critical in ensuring that vulnerable populations receive the care they need.

The study further revealed that the support provided by MPS is primarily financial and symbolic, with limited attention to emotional, social, or practical needs. Financial assistance, such as death gratuity and pensions, was frequently delayed or insufficient, while symbolic gestures like attending funerals were common but did not address long-term needs. This pattern is consistent with findings in the UK, where even structured financial benefits often fail to provide adequate emotional and social support (*Smith, 2020; Brown, 2019*). In comparison, countries like the United States and Canada provide more holistic assistance that combines financial compensation with counseling, peer support networks, and educational benefits for children (*Public Safety Canada, 2023; U.S. Department of Justice, 2022*). In Tanzania, community-based approaches provide emotional and social support even in the absence of formalized police programs (*Outwater, 2012*). These contrasts suggest that MPS support remains largely reactive, addressing immediate financial concerns rather than long-term holistic needs.

Families of deceased officers identified several significant challenges, including bureaucratic delays, inadequate funding, lack of emotional support, and poor communication. These challenges are not unique to Malawi. Research in India (*Sharma, 2020; Kumar & Singh, 2021*) and Kenya (*Omondi et al., 2024*) also highlights that administrative inefficiencies, lack of transparency, and

limited psychosocial services prolong hardship for bereaved families. The absence of structured emotional support in Malawi exacerbates trauma and grief, reinforcing *Burman et al.'s (2014)* argument that emotional neglect in institutional support can significantly affect the well-being of survivors. From a social work perspective, integrated approaches combining financial, emotional, and practical assistance are essential for addressing the multidimensional needs of bereaved families.

The findings have important policy implications. MPS requires comprehensive reforms to improve policy clarity, allocate resources effectively, and implement integrated support mechanisms. Lessons can be drawn from countries like the UK and US, where holistic support models combine financial assistance with counseling, peer networks, and educational benefits. Introducing formal policies, timely disbursement of benefits, trained psychosocial personnel, and enhanced communication with families would help align MPS practices with global best practices. Leveraging community networks, similar to the Tanzanian model, could also provide cost-effective emotional and social support while complementing formal programs.

In conclusion, the discussion demonstrates that while MPS provides basic financial and symbolic support, the system is largely fragmented, reactive, and inadequate for addressing long-term emotional and social needs. The challenges identified—bureaucratic delays, insufficient funding, poor communication, and minimal psychosocial support—mirror patterns observed in regional and international contexts, underscoring the systemic nature of the issue. Social work frameworks emphasize the importance of holistic care that integrates financial relief, emotional support, and practical assistance. Addressing these gaps is critical to

developing policies and interventions that more effectively support families of officers who die in the line of duty, ultimately promoting resilience and well-being among bereaved households.

## CONCLUSION

The strategies employed by the Malawi Police Service (MPS) to support families of officers who die in the line of duty, focusing on the National Police Headquarters (Area 30). The findings indicate that while the MPS provides basic financial assistance and symbolic support, such as attending funerals, its efforts are largely reactive, inconsistent, and insufficient to meet the long-term needs of bereaved families. Awareness of formal policies among personnel is limited, resulting in gaps in the implementation of support initiatives. Financial support, particularly through death gratuity and pensions, is frequently delayed, inadequately communicated, and sometimes insufficient to cover essential needs. Emotional and psychosocial support is largely absent, leaving families to cope with grief and trauma without structured assistance. Practical support, such as housing, education, and social welfare, is minimal and often dependent on ad hoc measures.

These findings highlight several systemic challenges, including bureaucratic delays, inadequate funding, poor communication, and the absence of trained personnel to provide psychosocial care. The experiences of families underscore the human impact of these institutional shortcomings, revealing prolonged financial hardship, emotional distress, and social isolation. When compared to practices in other countries, such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Tanzania, it is evident that Malawi's approach is less comprehensive, with limited attention to holistic support encompassing financial, emotional, and

social dimensions.

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