

Personal Implications of Gang violence and Criminality on Security Service Providers in Mombasa County, Kenya

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Abstract: This paper utilizes data from an MA Thesis on the implications of gang violence and criminality on security service providers in Mombasa County. The present study was grounded in the assumption that while gang violence and criminality in Mombasa County had been acknowledged to have had detrimental effects on security service providers, the specific personal implications of gang violence and criminality on security service providers remained unexplored. This paper focused to on these personal implications. This descriptive survey study was guided by the contingency theory and the lifestyle exposure theory and involved 72 out of a target of 80 semi-structured interviews. The participants were selected using the non-probability method of stratified purposive sampling. Data was collected for one and a half months using semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. The study revealed that security providers faced significant personal implications due to exposure to gang violence and criminality in line with the life exposure theory. They faced significant physical and psychological risks. Specifically, police officers experienced more frequent physical attacks, mental stress such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and pressure to employ lethal force, in contrast, private security officers experienced chronic stress due to operational limitations. To address the implications, this study recommended institutionalized tailored, made mental health support systems for security providers, with trauma-focused care for police and stress management for private officers. The study recommended follow-up measures to sustain these gains be established.

Keywords: Gang Violence, Criminality, Security Service Providers, Livelihoods, Personal Implications, Mombasa County Kenya.

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I. INTRODUCTION

While gang violence and criminality in Mombasa County has been acknowledged to have had detrimental effects on security service providers, the specific personal implications of gang violence and criminality on security service providers remained unexplored.

For the past two decades gangs and gang violence has increasingly captured the attention of the media, the public, policymakers, and researchers. High-profile cases of seemingly haphazard, often public gang violence such as that experienced in Trinidad and Tobago, Salinas, California, or the 2009 spate of gang stabbings in London consistently make headline news (Decker and Pyrooz, 2010). In Europe the United Kingdom and Spain have for a longtime grappled with the problem of violent criminal gangs. In the United Kingdom, organized youth gangs have been carrying crimes mainly using knives mainly in London

and Manchester where the main drivers are territorial rivalries and drug trafficking (Home Office, 2019).

Gang violence is not confined to developed regions. Across African nations in the South African Countries of South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique, have an embedded gang problem in their urban environments. The gangs propagate violence, disrupt societal order, extortion, gang wars, murder drug trafficking and entrench themselves within political and economic institutions (Lessing, 2021; Muti & Saluki, 2024; Wahman & Goldring, 2020, as cited in Mangai & Ayodele, 2025). In East Africa, countries such as Tanzania have similarly witnessed the emergence of violent youth gangs such as Panya Road, Simba Mwituu and Ubaya Ubaya gangs responsible for robbery, burglary, and murder, particularly in urban centers (Mohamed & Mussa, 2019; *The Citizen*, 2020).

Criminal gang activity in Kenya has increased in the past two decades (National Crime Research Centre, 2019). The persistence of violent gangs since the early 1990s such as Mungiki, Chinkororo, Baghdad Boys, and Angola Msumbiji indicates the limited success of eradication efforts (National Cohesion and Integration Commission, 2018). The public perception increasingly reflects distrust in the state's capacity or willingness to effectively address gang-violence, allowing gangs to thrive (Wako & Collins, 2020). Thus, violence generated by criminal gangs resonates deeply with Kenyans.

It is important to note that gang violence has both direct and indirect consequences. The direct consequences, of course, include the security service providers themselves. But the indirect consequences include the broader circle of family, friends, and neighbors whose lives are also affected by gang violence. Gang violence has both tangible (such as physical and economic) and intangible (such as psychological and social) consequences for communities and security service providers in particular. For example, a broader fear of gang violence constrains individual behavior (such as travel or movement through a neighborhood). For example, violent confrontations between black and Latino gangs in Los Angeles resulted in territorial boundaries that could not be crossed by black or Latino residents, not just gang members (Decker and Pyrooz, 2010).

Gang presence in the country sparked interest in the study of gang criminality and violence. Existing research has focused the gangs themselves - The Research Directorate of the immigration board of Canada (2013) focused on the Mungiki sect establishing the sect's organizational structure, leadership, membership, recruitment, and activities; the relationship between the government and sects; Mutuku's (2014) focused on effects of criminal gangs on the livelihood of urban residents using a case study of the Gaza gang in Kayole. However, limited scholarly attention has been given to the implications of gang violence for security providers, including both public police and private security actors. This omission is significant, given Kenya's pluralized security environment where policing increasingly involves state and non-state actors.

In urban and sub-urban areas where gang violence and criminality have become a major preoccupation for security providers, it is imperative that security providers experience several implications as they interact directly violent criminal gangs. Therefore, in Mombasa County, security providers face a myriad of implications. The presence of criminal gangs such as Wakali Wao, Wakali Kwanza, Wajukuu wa Bibi, Nguruwe Boys (Shauri, 2018) among others in the county for almost half a decade have not only affected the civilians but also the security providers (Shauri, 2018).

Globally security service providers are considered as enemies by gangs (Knox 2018). Some responses by security providers to criminal gangs increase the hostility between the two thus putting security providers at a constant risk while dealing with the gangs. In El Salvador in 2014 the use

of "an iron fist approach" on the gangs led to increased threats towards police officers and actual targeting of police officers as well as their families by the gangs (Knox 2018). According to Lt-Col Andre Traut, criminal gangs want to intimidate the South African Police Service with violent behavior. (African News Agency [ANA], 2019). In Kenya, there are reports of police officers being hurt and sustaining serious injuries as was the case with an officer stationed at Ganjoni in Mombasa (Gongo and Mwawasi 2018). Dealing with criminal gangs is not safe since security providers come head-on with individuals that are not hesitant to maim or take life without a second thought. It was against this backdrop that the researcher conducted this study to examine the personal implications of violent criminal gangs for security providers in Mombasa County, Kenya.

➤ *Problem Analysis*

Security providers in Mombasa County have been at the forefront of combating violent criminal gangs, a primary driver of the region's insecurity for more than five years. Being constantly at the forefront and engaged in operations to suppress gang activities, security service providers are implicated in various ways. However, existing studies have focused on emergence of criminal gangs, resultant crimes, the general effects of crimes and violence to the public such; as increased fear of victimization, theft, robbery as well as ways to address gang violence and criminality in the County. Consequently, had been focused on the personal implications of violent and criminal gangs on public and private security service providers. Therefore, the extent of these implications on the public and private security service providers caused by the gangs was still unclear. Hence, this study investigated these implications.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was anchored on a descriptive survey design. Data were collected from respondents through their responses through interview questions (Ponto, 2025). This study involved 72 out of the targeted 80 participants. These participants were selected using the non-probability method of stratified purposive sampling. Data was collected for one and a half months using semi-structured interviews and analyzed thematically. Respondents provided answers to questions relating to their opinions, experiences, and behaviors (Odoh and Chinedum, 2014). This allowed the researcher to pre-plan and use structured or semi-structured interviews to answer the research questions.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study targeted 80 respondents from the population. However, the researcher successfully reached 71 respondents that included 8 key informants comprised of 4 Officers Commanding Police Station (OCSs) and 4 Senior managers from selected police station and private security firms respectively. This represented 88.75% of the target population.

Mugenda and Mugenda (2012) argue that 50% rate is adequate, 60% is good, and above 70% is very good.

Furthermore, qualitative inquiry scholarly literature widely acknowledges that sample sizes ranging between 5 and 50 participants are generally sufficient, while Bryman (2012) cautions that fewer than 60 interviews may limit a researcher’s ability to draw convincing conclusions. An 88.75% response rate therefore is thus satisfactory and robust enough for the purpose of this study.

➤ *Demographic Information*

This section presents demographic information of respondents, including the gender and tenure of the respondents at their current workstations. These distributions are shown in pie-chart below.

• *Gender of the Respondents*

The study determined the gender of the respondents recognising that gender is a fundamental variable in security-sector research and security sector services. Gender was fundamental as it helped ensure that the research findings reflected the experiences and perspectives of all segments of the population and demonstrated ethical research practices that respected participant autonomy and privacy. Moreover, accounting for gender diversity contributes to improving data quality by acknowledging the varied identities and lived realities of individuals engaged in handling violent criminal gangs in Mombasa County.

Out of the 71 respondents surveyed in the study, 53 of them (71.65%) were male while 17 respondents (23.94%) were female, and one (1.41%) respondent chose not to disclose their gender. This shows a substantial disparity on the gender of security personnel working in Mombasa County reflected in the predominance of male respondents in the study. This disproportion is however not unique as data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) showed that 82.9% of the police officers were male while 17.9%. Security guards and surveillance officers that according to this study comprised of the private security officers had a 75.0% male and 25.0% female. These parallels suggest that the gender disparity observed in Mombasa mirrors widely documented patterns in security sectors internationally. These distributions are shown in pie-chart below.

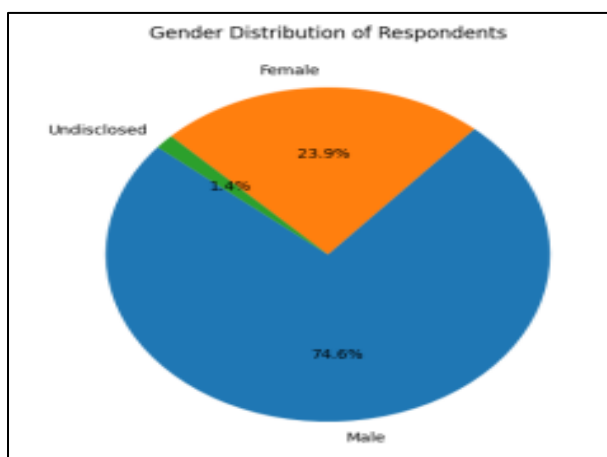


Fig 1 Gender Distribution of Respondents

• *Tenure of Respondents at Current Stations*

The study revealed considerable variation in the tenure durations reported by respondents across private security companies and police stations. The tenure ranged from short-term engagements lasting only a few hours to long-term service extending ten years. Despite this broad spread, the most frequently observed tenure periods clustered between one and three years. Specifically, 15 respondents (21.7%) had served for less than one year, 34 respondents (49.3%) reported between one and three years of service, 9 respondents (13%) had worked between three and five years, and 11 respondents (16%) indicated more than five years of experience within their current institutions.

This distribution reflected a workforce characterized of newly recruited personnel and seasoned staff. Shorter tenures particularly in hours or months were indicative of likely temporary deployments, probationary assignments, or shift-based contracts that are usually common within the security sector. In contrast, the respondents with more than two years of service may be understood to occupy more stable positions, with correspondingly deeper familiarity with the localized security environments, including patterns of gang activity and community-level threat dynamics.

The observed variation in tenure carries had impact on institutional performance and operational readiness of security officers. Longer-serving personnel were more likely to have accumulated significant situational awareness, institutional memory, and adaptive capacity, these attributes contributed to more effective decision-making in the complex, rapidly evolving violent criminal gang and security contexts in general. Newer recruits on the other hand exhibited lack of such experiential depth and thus required targeted forms of training, supervision, and mentorship to reach comparable levels of operational competence.

The coexistence of personnel with diverse levels of experience underscored the need for differentiated capacity-building strategies within security institutions. Thus, tailored training approaches that are responsive to the distinct needs and roles of both newly hired and long-tenured staff can enhance overall preparedness, strengthen institutional resilience, and improve the quality of security provision. These patterns are further illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Tenure of Respondents at Current Stations

Length of Service	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 year	15	21.7
1–3 years	34	49.3
3–5 years	9	13.0
More than 5 years	11	16.0
Total	69	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

➤ *Personal Implications*

• *How Security Service Providers Handle Threats from Violent Criminal Gangs.*

The respondents highlight how they handled threats from violent criminal gangs in Mombasa County. The Findings indicated that security service providers employed multiple strategies to mitigate, manage, and respond to gang-related treats and risks.

Reporting to authorities and institutional superiors emerged as the most frequently cited response to gang-related threats. Both police officers and private security personnel indicated that they reported threats to their offices or supervisors, in addition to this, the private security providers occasionally escalated severe threats to the nearest police station. This demonstrated that formal state authorities constituted the first line of response in addressing criminal gang-related incidents.

During field assignments such as patrols or responding to a gang related activity, both police and private security called for reinforcement and backup whenever they felt threatened by the gangs. Several private security companies had response teams or back up units that were usually dispatched to help manage the active threats. Some respondents from private companies were quoted saying:

- ✓ *“We have risks response team (backups response) who normally dispatch to ease the situation before proceeding to legal authority.”*
- ✓ *“We do have the response team that work 24/7.”*
- ✓ *“We used dialogue and police reinforcement.”*

The respondents quoted saying the above, were all male security officers stationed in Nyali and Mvita, Mombasa County, with work experience ranging from 4 years to over 5 years.

In the presence of these threats, respondents also emphasized the importance of heightened vigilance as a core component of risk management. In areas where gang activity was common, officers reported closely monitoring gang movements, adjusting their routines to avoid predictability, and exercising careful situational assessment and awareness. Some respondents further indicated that they would resort to self-defence when confronted with immediate physical threats. These measures reflect an adaptive approach based on vigilance and surveillance when operating in unpredictable and potentially violent criminal gang environments.

Community engagement emerged as an equally critical strategy in responding to violent gang-related threats, with several respondents noting their collaboration with village elders, chiefs, and other community leaders was instrumental to peacefully managing and de-escalating such threats.

This was important in substantiating the threats and preparing for them. For example, one male police officer from Kadzandani when asked how they responded to the threats from gangs, he said, “Sharing information among police officers on active patrol duties and other security stakeholders.” Sharing intelligence on threats was viewed as one way of keeping another officer safe.

Respondents also underscored the importance of consistently sharing threat intelligence with relevant stakeholders as part of their overall security response framework to threats by violent criminal gangs. The regular exchange of information was instrumental in verifying the credibility of gang-related threats and in ensuring that security personnel remained adequately prepared for potential incidents. In addition, this practice was regarded as a foundational element of coordinated security operations, contributing both to operational readiness and to the development of a collective understanding of emerging risks and threats in Mombasa County. A police officer based in Kadzandani offered a concrete illustration of this approach, explaining that their response strategy involved “*sharing information among police officers on active patrol duties and other security stakeholders.*” According to respondents, intelligence sharing not only enhanced situational awareness but also served as a protective measure, enabling officers to anticipate danger and support one another while working in volatile environments. As such, intelligence exchange was viewed as a critical mechanism for reinforcing officer safety and promoting cohesive action against violent criminal gangs.

Generally, Police officers’ responses to threats focused highly on community engagement, escalating threats to superiors, police internal support, patrols, community engagement; moderately on reinforcement, dialogue, surveillance self-defence and, backed by formal law enforcement structures. On the other hand, Private security service providers highly emphasized reporting/escalating to internal superiors, escalating issues to police and reinforcement, moderately on dialogue, patrols, community engagement and lowly on self-defence.

• *Attacks by Violent Criminal Gangs on Security Service Providers.*

The study sought to determine whether respondents had personally experienced attacks by violent criminal gangs or had colleagues who had been similarly attacked by gangs. Of the total respondents, 29 (42.6%) reported having

been attacked, while 39 (57.4%) indicated that they had not encountered such incidents. Although the majority had not been directly attacked, the findings nonetheless revealed that a substantial proportion of security personnel had faced direct violence from gang actors as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2 Experience of Attacks by Violent Criminal Gangs

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes (Personally Attacked)	29	42.6
No (Not Attacked)	39	57.4
Total	68	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

Further disaggregation of the data shows notable variation across the security providers. Among those who reported being attacked, 18 were police officers, whereas 11 were private security personnel. This suggests that police officers in Mombasa County are more frequently exposed to

gang-related attacks compared to their counterparts in the private security sector, thereby indicating a comparatively higher level of occupational risk among public security officers.

Table 3 Distribution of Respondents Attacked by Type of Security Personnel

Category of Security Personnel	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Police Officers	18	62.1
Private Security Personnel	11	37.9
Total	29	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

• *Frequency of Attacks*

Respondents indicated the frequency of attacks they had experienced from violent criminal gangs. As illustrated in Figure 6, the majority (64.8%) reported that such attacks occurred “not many times,” suggesting that incidents were

relatively infrequent for most security personnel. An additional 19.7% described the frequency as average, while only a small proportion (2.8%) indicated that they encountered gang attacks frequently. A further 12.7% of respondents did not provide a response.

Table 4 Frequency of Gang Attacks Experienced by Respondents

Frequency of Attacks	Percentage (%)	Remarks
Not many times	64.8	Majority of respondents
Average	19.7	Moderate occurrence
Frequently	2.8	Very few respondents
No response	12.7	Did not indicate frequency
Total	100.0	

Source: Field Data (2025)

Although gang-related violence remains a notable concern in Mombasa County, it does not manifest as daily or weekly occurrences for most security service providers. Instead, the pattern observed suggests that gang attacks on security service providers tend to be opportunistic rather than systematic, emerging sporadically rather than as part of a sustained or predictable pattern of violence directed at security personnel.

knives that were cited by 10.7% of respondents. In addition, stones and blunt weapons and the use of motorbikes for rapid escape attacks.

• *How Security Service Providers are Attacked*

The respondents were asked to describe the circumstances and methods by which they were attacked by the violent criminal gangs. Their responses illustrated three patterns in gang attack methodologies: the types of weapons used, attack patterns and the geographical concentration of the attacks. Machetes and pangas were the most prevalent, cited by 28.6% of respondents were the most frequently used, these were closely followed by crude weapons and

Patterns relating to the timing and context of attacks also emerged prominently from the responses. General robbery with violence of the security officers was reported by 25% of respondents. The attacks peaked up during night hours and during patrol duties and vulnerability increased when officers worked alone or in isolated areas. Officers were sometimes targeted and ambushed when off duty and out of uniform as reported by 14.3% of respondents. Phone theft emerged as the most common outcome during these attacks. Thus, the attacks had the dual intent of inflicting physical harm while also seizing personal belongings. The attacks also comprised of ambushes and surprise attacks that involved beatings and physical assault as cited by 21.4% of the respondents, tying victims with ropes and shock devices,

and shoving to the ground.

The respondents identified the following as high-risk locations for the attacks Kisauni village, Bamburi-particularly Bamburi Mwisho, the vicinity Kongowea market, Bondeni and Frere areas and Likoni. These hotspots were consistently cited as zones where violent criminal gang activity was concentrated and where security personnel faced an elevated likelihood of violent encounters.

• *Severity of the Attacks*

The assessment of the severity of attacks on security service providers showed variations in the respondents perceptions. 52.5% of them found the attacks to be “mildly serious”, 42.6 % indicated that the attacks were “not serious at all” and a small minority of 4.9% described them fatal as presented in Figure 7 below. Therefore, although violent encounters with gangs do occur, most are perceived as involving limited physical harm rather than severe or life-threatening outcomes.

Table 5 Severity of the Attacks

Severity of Attack	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Mildly serious	38	52.5
Not serious at all	31	42.6
Fatal	3	4.9
Total	72	100.0

Source: Field Data (2025)

A comparative analysis between the two categories of security providers showed that while the private security majorly interpreted that the attacks as not serious at all, most police officers rated attacks as mildly serious. The response by the private security providers might reflect their limited exposure to direct violence or reliance on reinforcement teams, avoidance strategies and structured reporting mechanisms.

These operational approaches may act as mitigating factors that reduce private security personnel’s vulnerability to severe confrontation. In contrast, the role of police officers: active patrols, direct confrontation with gang networks and intelligence gathering likely elevates their exposure to gang violence risk as police officers appeared to encounter gang threats and violence with greater regularity and intensity than their counterparts in the private security sector. This accounted for their more acute experience of gang-related violence hence experiencing the effects of the attacks mildly seriously.

• *Gang-Related Targeting of Police Officers for Firearms*

The study sought to determine if the police were targeted for their firearms, 76.9% the respondents in comparison to 23.1% indicated that gangs did occasionally target police for their arms. The high percentage suggested that some of the gangs are highly aggressive and brazen, willing to confront well-armed police officers. Firearms represented valuable assets for criminal gangs, significantly enhancing their capacity for violence. These results are represented in Figure 2 below.

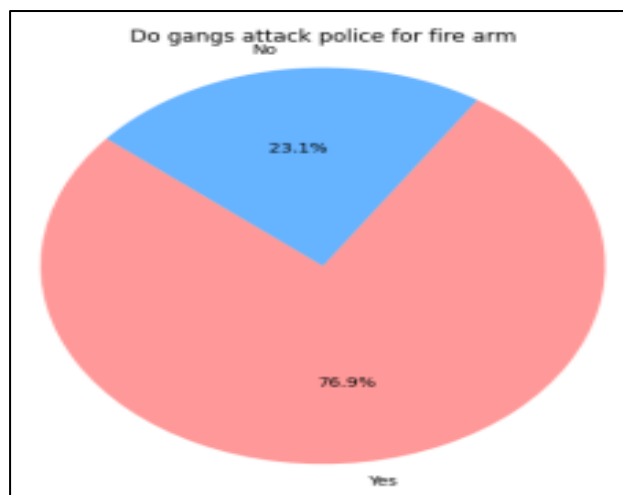


Fig 2 Gangs Attacking Police for Firearms.

While these responses were from both public police officers and private security providers, the greater concern was more especially pronounced among police officers 77.4% of them stationed in high-risk areas like Kisauni, Likoni, and Kadzandani. This suggested a real but localized threat rather than a widespread systematic targeting of police officers for their weapons across the entire county. The respondents mentioned the following specific instances when police officers were attacked for their firearms:

"It happened in Likoni where a police officer was doing patrol at night and end up being attacked by more than one gang member."

The respondents who referenced this incident were all male security officers working in stations such as Dean Security, JT Group Security, Group 4 Securicor (G4S) Security, Likoni Diani Hospital, and Central Police Station.

There is therefore a high-risk environment for police officers, who are not only defending public safety but are also themselves prime targets for violent attacks aimed at stealing their weapons. The findings therefore underscore

the dual exposure faced by police personnel: defending the community while simultaneously being prime targets of violent criminal gangs.

• *Fighting Gangs and Mental Stress*

Respondents were asked whether fighting gangs led to them experiencing mental stress and other mental health

issues. As shown in Table 6, the vast majority of security service providers including both private security guards and police officers reported that combating gang violence induces mental and emotional strain. at 87.7%, reported that combating gang violence leads to mental and emotional strain accounting for 87.7% of respondents. This stands in sharp contrast to the 12.3% who held the opposite view.

Table 6 Fighting Gangs and Mental Stress

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes (Leads to mental and emotional strain)	63	87.7
No (Does not lead to mental stress)	9	12.3
Total	72	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

Persistent stress and restlessness were the most common reported mental health issues affecting that the respondents. This was attributed to; chronic stress from constant vigilance activities, restlessness other hand was attributed to the need for heightened alertness and difficulty in relaxing even during off -duty hours.

Following closely was fear and anxiety that constituted another prominent set of psychological consequences. Respondents reported fearing the occurrence of attacks during working hours, anxiety about family safety, anticipatory anxiety before reporting to work and generalized anxiety that extended beyond the work context.

Depression and mood Changes characterized by depressive symptoms linked to job stress, emotional numbness from repeated trauma exposure, mood instability and irritability were reported by several respondents. These responses indicate the cumulative emotional burden associated with prolonged engagement in violent and unpredictable contexts.

At times the mental stress manifested physically through sleep related disturbances evidenced by insomnia and difficulty falling asleep, disrupted sleep patterns and nightmares related to work experiences. These symptoms highlighted the somatic expression of psychological stress within this occupational group.

Some of the respondents particularly police officers described severe psychological Conditions due to extensive exposure from dealing with violent criminal gangs. These conditions included Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), diminished self-esteem and reduced confidence, burn-out syndrome and behavioral changes that strained family relationships. From the responses, Police officers reported higher instances of PTSD, Anxiety, fear, and insomnia resulting from frequent direct engagement with violent criminal gangs and the high-stakes responsibility of their duty while private security providers more frequently reported restlessness, general stress and depression rooted more in perceived vulnerability and poor working conditions. This reflected the different of exposure patterns, responsibilities , risk levels and institutional roles that shape the mental health outcomes across the two groups, with police often facing more direct and violent confrontations that shape the mental health outcomes across the two groups.

• *Use of Lethal Force When Dealing with Gangs*

When asked of circumstances that provoked security officers to use lethal force when dealing with violent criminal gangs, 73.8 % of respondents acknowledged that certain gang-related situations could provoke the use of lethal force. 26.2 % did not find the use of lethal force necessary while dealing with violent criminal gangs as illustrated in Table 7 below.

Table 7 Use of Lethal Force When Dealing with Gangs

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes (Certain situations provoke use of lethal force)	53	73.8
No (Lethal force not necessary)	19	26.2
Total	72	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

Respondents identified several recurrent scenarios that they perceived potential triggers for the use of lethal force: Immediate life threatening situations such as in instances of robbery with violence when gangs attack with dangerous weapons and when a security officer’s life or that of a colleague is in danger; during armed confrontations with the gangs where gangs use dangerous materials that can cause

death or use crude weapons at close range or in the presence of a police officer; self-defense and the defense of others under deadly threat such as when under the attack by a group of gang members or when the life of fellow officer is threatened during an attack; Respondents also pointed out that the use of specific weapon by the gangs increased the threat threshold and prompted them to opt using lethal force.

For example, when the gang members approached the security service providers while armed with machetes or pangas or other deadly weapons.

The relatively high percentage of "Yes -73.8% responses underscores the perilous nature of security work in gang-affected environments and the difficult also reflects the rapid, high-stakes decision-making that officers may be compelled to undertake when confronting violent criminal gangs. However, while lethal force situations are recognized as possible, they are generally viewed as last-resort measures when facing immediate, life-threatening danger rather than routine responses to gang encounters.

Of the two sets of security service providers, variations emerged where the police were more likely to use lethal force as they cited legal provisions that authorized such actions under it was framed within the law for self-defense

or defending others against imminent deadly threat. In contrast, the private security personnel were less likely to resort to lethal force, largely because their operational mandates and company policies impose stringent restrictions on its use. did not have the options of using lethal force mostly because it was heavily restricted by company policy. For them, lethal force was viewed almost exclusively as an extreme self-defense option rather than an operational tool.

• *Pressure to Deal with Violent Criminal Gangs*

Respondents were whether they felt that they were under pressure to address of gang violence and criminality in Mombasa County and majority of them mentioned that addressing the problem puts them under immense pressure. Particularly, 67.2% of respondents claimed to feel the pressure while 22.8% reported not feeling any pressure. These patterns are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 8 Perceived Pressure to Address Gang Violence

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes (Feel under pressure)	48	67.2
No (Do not feel pressure)	16	22.8
Total	72	100.0

Source: Field Data 2025

The most commonly cited source of pressure was the sense of professional duty and responsibility to handle the gang-related insecurity as one police officer articulated this sentiment succinctly, stating: was quoted saying, "Yes, as a police officer it is my duty to combat crime." This sense of obligation reflects an institutional and normative expectation placed on law enforcement officers in their role as primary guardians of public safety.

The constant threat and risk to life due to being targeted by gangs highlighted the second source of pressure for the security service providers as it put them in pervasive dangers from attacks not only to them but also to their family members by extension creating fear for personal and family security and safety. This creates a state of constant psychological pressure rooted in concerns for personal and familial security.

Further, respondents, mentioned that community expectations put weight on them to handle the problem of gangs in Mombasa County and provide safety and security. Most male officers were quoted saying "Yes, the community expects us to protect them." Such expectations reinforce both moral and societal pressure on officers to produce visible results in combating gang activity.

Among the private security service providers, the lack of resources and the feeling of being underpowered (limited operational capacity) amplified the pressure as it made them ill-equipped to handle the threat of gang violence. Noting that insufficient training, equipment, and institutional backing heightened their sense of vulnerability and responsibility.

Both the police and private security service providers feel pressure to deal with gangs in Mombasa County. However, while the pressure experienced by the police is institutional and societal tied to the failure to perform a public duty, the pressure experienced by private security providers stemmed mainly from personal safety concerns and fulfilling contractual obligations to clients, rather than a duty to the public. This pressure compelled majority of the security service providers as per their responses to change their strategy for dealing with gang criminality and violence in Mombasa County.

Overall, the cumulative pressures described by respondents influenced operational decision-making and prompted many security personnel to adjust their strategies for responding to gang-related violence in Mombasa County. These adaptations highlight the complex interplay between institutional expectations, resource constraints, and the lived realities of frontline security work in high-risk environments.

IV. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

➤ *Gender of the Respondents*

The integration of a gendered analytical perspective revealed important differential experiences with gangs, variation in vulnerabilities and threat response, and gender-specific mental health impacts. This is essential to ensure policy efficacy, and to contribute to scholarly discourse on gender and security and violence in urban contexts.

The study established that there was differential exposure to violence where male security officers reported higher frequencies of direct attacks and more serious injuries, suggesting greater exposure to gang-related

confrontations which could be a result of being more frequently deployed to high-risk patrols or interventions than their female counterparts. This disparity appears linked to deployment patterns, as male officers were more often assigned to high-risk patrols and intervention operations than their female counterparts.

Although the primary response to threats from violent criminal gangs was escalation to their superiors, there were significant gender-based variations on how male and female officers responded to threats. Male security officers predominantly favored reinforcement and tactical responses such as physical engagement through self-defense, apprehension of criminals, arrest, and the use of lethal force when justified and proactive measures through intelligence collection, patrols, investigations, and liaising with other security stakeholders. Female security officers often prioritized reporting mechanisms and community collaboration as their core response strategy.

Male and female security officers reported experiencing mental health issues such as stress, restlessness, fear anxiety and depression. However, the female respondents more frequently reported stress, anxiety, and emotional fatigue, these responses were based on the constant state of alertness and the emotional toll because of constantly working in environments characterized by persistent gang violence and criminality. Male officers on the other hand had their mental stress stemming from job conditions and remuneration thus highlighted issues such as being fatigued, feeling pressure to deal with the gangs. The male security officers thus conceptualized the stress more in terms of job responsibilities and performance and economic pressures. This highlighted the need for gender-sensitive mental-health support to the security officers in Mombasa County.

These findings underscore the necessity of gender-sensitive mental health support mechanisms for security officers in Mombasa County. Tailored interventions that acknowledge the distinct pressures, sources and manifestations of psychological distress experienced by male and female personnel can enhance officer well-being and improve the effectiveness of security provision in gang-affected contexts.

➤ *Tenure and Psychological Impact*

Security officers with a tenure of less than one year and those with a tenure of between one year and three years, reported being acutely stressed and fear related to the novelty of the threat and specific incidents, they were also sad, anxious, constantly alert, and had difficulties sleeping. Experienced security officers, (4-9 years tenure) and veteran (10+ years) reported chronic, complex psychological conditions indicative of long-term exposure. They mentioned post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), burn out, a sense of numbness from continuous exposure to work chronic operational and institutional stress and pressure. From the above, it can be clearly seen that there is a progression from acute fear and stress in new security officers to chronic "PTSD" and "burnout" in veterans. This

means that the psychological toll of security work is not just incident-based but also results from relentless, low-grade stress from prolonged exposure to gang violence and criminality and institutional failure to manage the problem. This suggests that mental health interventions must be tailored to tenure. For example, stress management for newer officers and clinical support for chronic conditions among veterans.

➤ *Personal Implications*

The findings of the study showed that security service providers in Mombasa County operated in a high-risk environment where confronting violent criminal gangs exerted profound personal impacts. Security service providers in the county operate under threats that are often opportunistic yet violent. This aligns with the literature highlights that security providers are at high risk of attack when confronting criminal gangs (Jacobus ,2018) Personal implications were indeed rooted in their daily operational realities and psychological burdens due to the recurrent exposure to violence.

The study established that key implications of gang violence on the security service providers in Mombasa County included physical risks from attacks, mental health challenges, ethical dilemma, and institutional pressures. Security service providers responded to threats from violent criminal gangs by internally escalating them to their supervisors. Private security providers further mentioned that part escalation also involved reporting the severe cases and threats to the police. The existence of a structured reporting chain underscores the institutionalisation of threat-management processes within the security sector.

The finding that a significant 42.6 % of the respondents who reported attacks from violent criminal gangs in Mombasa County corroborated that dealing with criminal gangs put security providers at a high risk of attack. This mirrors FBI statistics in 2016 (as cited by Jacobus, 2018), where 57180 officers were assaulted while performing their duties, and 28.9% being injured as a result. In Mombasa County, the police faced more of these attacks as they were mostly at the frontlines of gang suppression. However, the infrequency in the nature of the attacks, suggested that gang violence was opportunistic and strategic with gangs attacking when they had a perceived tactical advantage. These attacks involve using machetes, pangas, crude weapons, these were the primary weapons and pointed to presence of brutal close quarter attacks on security officers. This pattern aligns with existing literature reviewed that suspect used physical force (hands, fists, and feet) in majority of the cases, 31.4%, followed by firearms 11.9%, knives 10.8% and other dangerous weapons 23.3% (Jacobus, 2018). The attacks also involved beatings, and tying up victims, indicating intimidation and a desire to dominate security officers. As a result of their greater exposure to gang violence and their active roles in gang suppression, police officers perceived the attacks as more serious than private security personnel. Important to note was that some attacks and targeting of security officers by gangs reflected the aggressiveness and strategic intent of the

gangs to enhance their firepower. This included the targeting of police for their firearms as was the case in Kisauni, Likoni and Kadzandani. Police officers tended to perceive attacks as more serious than private security personnel, likely due to their greater exposure to direct violence and their active roles in gang suppression. The enhancement of a gang's firepower and consequently its capacity for violence, is likely transforms a local security issue into a major national threat.

Mental health impacts emerged as a significant finding, with 87.7% of security personnel reporting stress or emotional strain linked to gang-related duties. Specifically, police officers in Mombasa faced severe psychological conditions (trauma-related), while private security personnel experience general stress and depression. This is generally supported by the literature reviewed which argues that repeated exposure to gang criminality and violence increases vulnerability and leads to severe mental and psychological stress, including an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Thus, the intensity and nature of this exposure shapes mental health outcomes amongst security service providers in Mombasa County. Garbarino, Elovaino, Nicola and Heponiemi, (2011) explicitly stated that gang violence and criminality exposed security providers to interactions with violent subjects and traumatic experiences and threats that caused for severe physical and psychological stress. Reported symptoms included chronic stress, fear, anxiety, depression, insomnia and sleepdisruption, burnout, and PTSD. These findings are consistent with Garbarino et al. (2011) and Walter (2012), who highlight the psychological toll of policing violent subjects. The differentiation that police suffer more from direct trauma (PTSD) resulting from violent confrontations and the high-stakes responsibility of their duty while private guards suffer from chronic stress due to perceived vulnerability, lack of resources, and poor working conditions perfectly illustrates the literature's point that the nature and intensity of the exposure dictate the psychological impact. This highlights that the mental health burden is not monolithic and requires tailored support programs for each group. Thus, Police officers may benefit from trauma-focused therapy, crisis debriefing, and resilience training, while private guards require stress management programs, improved working conditions, and access to basic mental health services. Together, these measures are essential for enhancing the wellbeing, effectiveness, and sustainability of security provision in high-risk contexts such as Mombasa County.

The entrenched gang problem in the county had security officers particularly private security officers being reliant on reinforcements and backups particularly in gang hot spots. This reliance on reinforcement and backup team was an indicator that both public and private security institutions had developed specialized, rapid-response units to manage crises, suggesting a professional adaptation to the levels of violent gang threat in Mombasa County.

The study established that security service providers employ proactive measures in addition to the reactive measures to handle violent criminal gangs and associated threats. Thus, basic counter-insurgency tactics adapted to an urban policing context were used to adapt the security officer's responses to the violent criminal gangs in Mombasa County. For example, the officers mentioned heightened vigilance, situational awareness, and routine adjustments to avoid predictability and reduce vulnerability of the security officers. In addition, community engagements and intelligence led policing were mentioned as some of the ways responding to threats from gangs, highlighting a sustainable solution to the gang problem in Mombasa County required building trust and information networks within the communities they serve.

Attacks and threats that lead to life-threatening danger created scenarios that could provoke the use of lethal force as illustrated by 73.8% of respondents. The police were more likely to use lethal force, citing legal mandates and duty obligations to do so. Private security officers on the other hand viewed the use of lethal force as a last resort being strictly constrained by company policies. This corresponds with Niewenhuys, Bruland and Oudejan (2012) who mentioned that actively threatening situations increases anxiety among police officers lowering their ability to make accurate judgment on the threat level experienced when dealing with gangs. An over estimation of danger or threat may cause police officers to overreact in their response and use more lethal force which may involve shooting down a suspect. Thus, there is therefore a need for clear protocols and accountability in the use of lethal force.

With 67.2% of security officers citing immense pressure to combat gang violence, the study finding concurs with the literature reviewed that gang violence and related crime increases workload, stress, and pressure on security providers (Carlie, 2002; Haugaard, 2018). Police officers cited professional duty and community/societal expectations as primary sources of pressure, while private security personnel pointed to resource limitations and contractual obligations. The limitations stemming from private contracts among private security agents means that they mostly operate with less institutional backing and legal protections afforded to police officers. This increases both operational pressure and vulnerability, sometimes prompting shortcuts that compromise procedural integrity particularly when incontact with violent criminal gangs hence, increasing the pressure to deliver measurable outcomes, sometimes at the expense of procedural fairness. Such deviations risk eroding public trust and undermining community-centred strategies essential for combating gang violence. Among the police particularly, this pressure can lead to shortcuts that compromise due process, including intimidation, use of excessive force, arbitrary arrests, and inhumane treatment (Haugaard, 2018). This is especially when the pressure is coupled with inadequate resources.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study's objective was to establish how security providers had been affected at an individual level by violent and criminal gangs in Mombasa County. The findings indicated that security service providers operated in a high-risk environment characterized by opportunistic yet violent attacks from criminal gangs. These attacks that often involved crude weapons like machetes and pangas resulted in significant personal implications for officers, including physical risks, severe mental health challenges (such as PTSD, chronic stress, and depression), and immense operational pressure and ethical dilemma. In response, security providers employed a combination of structured protocols such as internal escalation and requesting reinforcements as well as proactive measures like heightened vigilance, intelligence-led policing, and community engagement. The use of these tactics reflects institutional and individual attempts to mitigate vulnerabilities in an environment defined by unpredictable violence. A key distinction was observed between police and private security officers. Police by virtue of being on the frontlines with a legal mandate to confront violent criminal gangs and bearing the brunt of direct confrontations, faced more direct violence, perceived attacks as more serious, and are thus more likely to use lethal force due to their legal authority. Consequently, they suffered from severe psychological conditions like PTSD. Private security officers on the other hand, constrained by company policy, viewed lethal force as a measure of absolute last resort and their psychological distress tended to manifest as chronic stress stemming from resource limitations and perceived vulnerability and inadequate organizational protection. Both private and public security service providers, however, received limited institutional support for addressing their mental health problems related to gang violence. Therefore, the immense institutional pressure placed on all security service providers to deal with violent criminal gangs risked leading to procedural shortcuts that undermined principles of procedural justice, increasing the likelihood of excessive force, intimidation, or arbitrary arrests in high-stakes operational contexts such as excessive force or arbitrary arrests.

Security service providers operated under extreme personal risk from opportunistic violent criminal gangs, facing physical harm, ethical dilemma in enforcement and severe psychological stress. Police officers, being frontline responders, endure more direct violence and consequently chronic psychological trauma, while private security officers experience chronic stress due to operational constraints. Institutional support for mental health remains insufficient, and the pressure to respond effectively often leads to ethical compromises and risks compromising judicial procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study sought to establish the personal implications of gang violence and criminality on security service providers. The study established that not only did the security service providers feel pressured to deal with gangs

to the point using unethical practices in their jobs such using lethal force, but also security service providers also experienced severe mental and psychological stress while dealing with violent criminal gangs. The study recommends OCSs with the support of OCPDs, and Private security company's management institutionalized tailored mental health support systems offering mental health programs be developed for all security service provider. The tailored interventions should focus on trauma-focused therapy, critical incident debriefing, and resilience training to address PTSD and trauma from direct confrontations for police officers while those tailored for private officers implement stress management programs, counseling services, and initiatives to improve working conditions to alleviate chronic stress and perceived vulnerability. Also, the addition of tenure-specific support, such as stress management for new officers and clinical, long-term care for veterans suffering from burnout and complex PTSD greatly help. While the National Police Service (NPS) continually reviews and updates the police curricula's ethics and psychological resilience training, the Officers Commanding Police Divisions (OCPDs) should strengthen oversight to ensure ethical compliance and procedural integrity during anti-gang operations as the Officers Commanding Police Station (OCSs) foster a culture of ethical enforcement through supervision, mentorship, and accountability in high-pressure operations.

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