

PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF MATE POACHING WITHIN POLICE PERSONALS: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The qualitative research explored the lived experiences of Punjab police officers regarding mate poaching within their professional environment and examined its interpersonal, cultural, and organizational dimensions. A purposive sample of six participants, including both male and female officers, was recruited from different ranks. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted, and the data were analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (Smith & Osborn, 2014). The analysis resulted in ten main themes and multiple subthemes, including interpersonal relationships, prevalence, motivations, power and hierarchy, cultural influences, consequences, and responses. The findings revealed that mate poaching is often normalized within police culture and linked to power dynamics, emotional stressors, and workplace hierarchies. These behaviors have significant implications for interpersonal trust, team cohesion, and psychological well-being. The study provides valuable insights for policy development, mental health interventions, and organizational reforms to address interpersonal misconduct within police institutions.

Keywords: mate poaching, police personnel, interpersonal dynamics, qualitative research, interpretative phenomenological analysis, workplace culture, power hierarchy.

INTRODUCTION

Romantic and sexual relationships form a core aspect of human social life, often serving functions such as emotional security, companionship, and reproductive success. However, various psychological, social, and cultural factors can influence and sometimes disrupt these relationships. One such phenomenon is mate poaching, which refers to the act of trying to attract someone who is already in a romantic (Schmitt & Buss, 2001).

Importantly, mate poaching is not limited to casual encounters (Fisher & Wade, 2019). It can also take place within institutional and workplace settings, where power hierarchies, gender dynamics, and organizational cultures shape interpersonal behaviors. Globally, research has highlighted various motivations for mate poaching, including thrill-seeking tendencies, sociosexuality, narcissism, marital dissatisfaction, and desires for emotional or

material gain (Schmitt, 2004; Pléh, 2014). In patriarchal or collectivist cultures, gender norms and power disparities often influence both the prevalence of mate poaching and the ways in which it is justified, perceived, or silenced (Khalid & Nyborg, 2022). Additionally, the male-dominated culture of policing in Pakistan often reinforces gendered power dynamics and creates environments where informal gossip, rumor culture, and normalized boundary violations thrive (Pakistan, 2022b)

Despite the significance of these dynamics, mate poaching remains an under-researched topic in the Pakistani policing context. Most existing studies on police culture in Pakistan give little attention to interpersonal and romantic behaviors within the force. This gap is critical because mate poaching can have far-reaching consequences such as damaging trust, undermining team morale, fostering unsafe environments especially for women (Zhang et al., 2022). This study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Punjab Police personnel regarding mate poaching.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored the relationship between perceived mate value and contextual factors. A total of 4,104 participants (63% women) completed the questionnaire; however, due to incomplete data, the current analysis relied on 3,895 participants. The results showed that being in a relationship can boost self-esteem, as individuals in committed relationships reported higher self-perceived desirability than those who were single. (Csajbók et al., 2023). Kardum et al. (2022) examined how personality traits predict mate poaching behaviors and experiences. Using a dyadic analysis of 187 heterosexual couples in Croatia, they found that individuals—especially men—with higher levels of Machiavellianism and psychopathy were more likely to engage in or be targeted for mate poaching. Lower agreeableness and, in men, lower conscientiousness also predicted poaching behavior, while narcissism showed no consistent effects. These traits suggest manipulative and thrill-seeking tendencies as key motivators. The study aimed to identify the types of stressors experienced by police

personnel in South India and to understand their coping strategies in relation to both personal and professional life. The sample consisted of 84 police personnel from different ranks in South India. Participants were selected through convenience sampling and completed semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The study found that work-related stressors were the most prominent, including excessive workload, irregular and long working hours, and pressure from superiors. Family-related stressors were also significant such as being away from family, inability to spend time with children, and missing family functions. These stressors led to emotional exhaustion, reduced work performance, and strained interpersonal relationships within the department. (Savarimalai et al., 2023)

RATIONALE

Mate poaching within police stations has a wide range of adverse consequences.

Griffin et al. (2019) emphasized that cheating in private life predicts unethical behavior at work, reinforcing the idea that personal ethics often spill over into professional contexts. Research also indicates that between 30% and 40% of police officers report having cheated on their spouse, compared to 20%–25% in the general population, highlighting the higher prevalence of infidelity in policing.

Despite its frequency and serious consequences, mate poaching remains an understudied phenomenon within police institutions. Existing research has primarily focused on personality traits and their relationship to mate poaching; however, there is limited work exploring how mate poaching unfolds in high-risk, hierarchical workplaces through the lived experiences of police personnel. This study seeks to fill that gap by using a qualitative approach to examine how police officers perceive, experience, and respond to mate poaching within their professional environment.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What are the primary determinants of poaching behavior?

METHOD

The current portion includes the design of research, strategy of collecting the sample, interview guide, procedure for conducting study and interpretative phenomenological analysis

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research method using thematic analysis was employed to explore mate poaching behaviors among police officers in Pakistan. The study focused on understanding the motivations, including social and cultural factors, the consequences of such acts, and recommendations to address them. The researcher maintained reflexivity to reduce bias and ensure participants' perspectives guided the analysis. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of officers who have experienced and lived the reality of mate poaching.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

Data were collected from a sample of six police officers, comprising four males and two females. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, targeting individuals who were currently serving as police officers. Only those with a minimum rank of Sub-Inspector were included, to allow for generalization in the subsequent study. Five participants were from Lahore, while one was from Quetta. This small, focused sample was selected to gain in-depth insights into participants' experiences, motivations, and perspectives related to mate poaching within the police force.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

First, a conversational interview was conducted, followed by a semi-structured interview with 40 questions. Based on the initial responses and further development of themes, the interview was then changed into a structured format, with fewer and more focused questions. A structured interview approach was finally used to understand mate poaching among police officers. Although the questions were mostly fixed, the interviewer still had some flexibility to ask follow-up or clarifying questions based on what participants said.

This helped keep the interviews consistent while also allowing for detailed and meaningful answers. The final interview guide had 29 questions, grouped into key areas: relationships within the police force, mate poaching behavior, reasons behind it, cultural and social influences, its effects and ethical concerns, and participants' thoughts and suggestions. This structure helped explore the topic in a thorough and organized way.

PROCEDURE

Following the development of the interview protocol, participants were recruited based on their voluntary willingness to participate. Informed consent was obtained prior to the commencement of each interview. Participants were asked whether they consented to audio recording; in cases where consent was not granted, key points were documented manually. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without providing a reason. Strict measures were taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. All interviews were conducted in private settings to maintain participant comfort and data integrity. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English from the native languages of Punjabi and Urdu.

Anonymization of data occurred at the point of transcription, and relevant non-verbal cues were also recorded during data collection.

INTERPRETATIVE

PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which is a qualitative approach that helps researchers understand how people make sense of their personal and lived experiences. (Eatough & Smith, 2017). The process began with reading and re-reading each interview transcript to become fully familiar with the participant's responses. During this stage, detailed notes were made to highlight important points, language use, and possible meanings.

Based on these notes, key themes were identified that reflected the main ideas shared by each officer. These themes were then grouped and connected to form a clearer picture of their experiences. Each new interview was analyzed individually, without being influenced by earlier findings, to ensure that every participant's perspective was treated fairly.

After all interviews were examined, common themes were identified across the participants.

Finally, the themes were interpreted more deeply by exploring the meanings behind participant's words and relating them to broader psychological and social concepts.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. They were informed

y	4.3 Perceived Entitlement 4.4 Marital Dissatisfaction 4.5 Luxury Lifestyle Desire 4.6 Innate Desire for More	They don't care if she's married." P4 (Male): "A lot of us don't get to go home for days. Emotional needs build up, and some seek shortcuts." P2 (Female): "Some do it to assert dominance... it's a power play more than affection." P5 (Male): "Officers in unhappy or forced marriages may turn to mate poaching as a way to cope with emotional or relational dissatisfaction." P5 (Male): "This desire for a luxury lifestyle can lead individuals to seek relationships with financially stable officers" P5 (Male): "Some officers engage in mate poaching due to an inherent desire for multiple partners, driven by self-interest and the belief that more relationships equate to greater satisfaction."
5. Power and Hierarchy	5.1 Seniority 5.2 Manipulation under Authority 5.3 Gendered Power Abuse 5.4 Implicit Coercion 5.5 Power's Enabling Role 5.6 Status and Power Assertion	P1 (Female): "When a senior officer flirts, it's hard to say no without fearing consequences." P2 (Female): "They never directly coerce, but there's an unsaid threat—like transfers or bad postings." P4 (Male): "It's easier for seniors to target junior females. Their rank gives them invisible permission." P5 (Male): "It's not the sole motivator; other factors must be present. Many high-ranking officers avoid such behavior, prioritizing their career development instead."
6. Patterns and Means of Initiation	6.1 Duty-Time Interactions 6.2 Use of Social Media and Private Channels 6.3 Targeting the Vulnerable 6.4 Repeated Offenders. 6.5 Off-Duty Social Engagements	P3 (Female): "Facebook, WhatsApp... they start casual chats which turn inappropriate soon." P1 (Female): "Most often, the target is someone new or going through a tough time personally." P4 (Male): "Some officers are known for this behavior. It's not a one-time slip, it's a pattern." P5 (Male): "Such behavior occurs mainly in informal spaces, as officers avoid it within stations due to accountability and career concerns."
7. Cultural and Social Influences	7.1 Masculinity and Honor Codes 7.2 Polygamy Justification 7.3 Peer Validation	P2 (Female): "Some justify it by saying Islam allows four wives. But this isn't marriage—it's manipulation." P4 (Male): "In locker rooms, poaching is sometimes seen as a

	7.4 Social Tolerance for Extramarital Affairs 7.5 Moral Double Standards 7.6 Media Influence 7.7 Modest Dressing	symbol of manhood." P4(Male): "When women come wearing a chaddar or dress modestly, there's no urge or romantic interest." P3 (Female): "Even if a woman says no, colleagues will tease her about having a 'relationship'." P5 (Male): "Despite male involvement in mate poaching, women, especially wives, are more often questioned or blamed." P5 (Male): "Watching shows like Crime Patrol can unknowingly trigger mate poaching through exposure to romantic scenes"
8. Consequences	8.1 Personal Stress & Relationship Breakdown 8.2 Workplace Conflict and Distrust 8.3 Undermining Team Morale 8.4 Lack of Accountability 8.5 Rare cases of accountability	P1 (Female): "One colleague attempted suicide after her affair with a senior was exposed." P2 (Female): "The work environment becomes toxic. People stop trusting each other." P4 (Male): "Nobody is held accountable unless it becomes a public scandal." P5 (Male): "A junior officer was demoted for inappropriate behavior toward a senior during duty".
9. Responses	9.1 Consent vs. Coercion Spectrum 9.2 Gendered Vulnerabilities 9.3 Silent Endurance 9.4 Peer Pressure to Comply or Ignore 9.5 Formal investigation.	P3 (Female): "Some women give in to avoid harassment or transfers." P2 (Female): "Even if you resist, it's hard to raise a voice. HR won't take action unless it's extreme." P1 (Female): "Women are blamed. They say, 'She must've encouraged it.' Even when she was a victim." P6 (Male): "Punishment is given on the basis of investigations."
10. Preventive Suggestions	10.1 Clear Ethical Boundaries 10.2 Training & Counseling on Relationships 10.3 Safe Reporting Mechanisms 10.4 Culture Change Initiatives 10.5 Family Counseling 10.6 Restoring Trust	P4 (Male): "We need workshops on professional boundaries— not just sexual harassment laws." P2 (Female): "There should be anonymous reporting systems. No one feels safe reporting these issues openly." P1 (Female): "Counseling and support groups can help officers who feel emotionally isolated." P5 (Male): "Counseling should be provided to police officers who are working long hours or facing family issues, and it should also extend to their families."
		P6 (Male): "Tools like QR codes, the 1787 whistleblowing number, and IG contact have improved accountability and helped rebuild the police's image after past misconduct."

Following an interpretative phenomenological analysis, The data from six participants revealed ten main themes fifty sub-theme: Nature of Interpersonal Relationships in Police Force, Visibility and Prevalence of Mate Poaching, Motivations for Mate Poaching, Role of Power and Hierarchy, Patterns and Means of Initiation, Cultural and Social Influences, Impact and Consequences, Responses and Resistance, Policy and Preventive Suggestions.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The nature of interpersonal relationships within the police force emerged as a complex interplay between professional boundaries and informal social dynamics.

Female participants reported that friendships with male officers sometimes began to feel flirtatious, particularly during long working hours. Even small, innocent interactions were often misinterpreted, leading to gossip and rumors about romantic involvement.

This persistent rumor culture was further intensified by hierarchical misuse of power. Some participants mentioned that senior officers were perceived to take undue liberties during interactions with female colleagues, blurring the line between professional behavior and personal interest. Such dynamics contributed to a tense and uncomfortable environment, especially for women officers.

One participant shared the situation of women especially in backward areas: "In some backward areas the environment is conservative for women as they feel unsafe." [P5]

VISIBILITY AND PREVALENCE

Mate poaching was described by participants as a common yet discreet occurrence within the police force. Participants indicated that officers approaching married individuals outside and inside the department.

A participant who worked in different cities, reported that he has observed mate poaching incidents in urban centers: "Mate poaching is more common in larger cities like Lahore due to more opportunities and cheaper, widely available and affordable venues like hotels." [P5]

Although one participant noted that romantic misconduct had declined in recent years.

Romantic misconduct has significantly declined in recent years particularly following the posting of Usman Anwar, though an estimated 10% of cases persist. [P6]

NORMALIZATION

Normalization refers to how mate poaching becomes accepted as part of everyday behavior, rather than being treated as a serious issue. One way this happens is through humor. One

participant shared that: "It's joked about in our circles. Like, 'Oh, he's hunting again.' It's disturbing but normalized." [P1]

While this might seem harmless, it actually hides the seriousness of the behavior and makes it easier for people to ignore. Joking turns something inappropriate into something amusing, making it less likely that anyone will speak up or take action.

Another way mate poaching is normalized is through informal coverups. One participant reported that: "it's treated as a 'personal matter' even if it affects work..". Both humor and avoidance contribute to a culture where mate poaching is quietly accepted, rather than openly challenged

MOTIVATIONS

Participants highlighted several psychological, emotional, and situational reasons behind mate poaching within the police force. A major theme was emotional loneliness caused by the stressful and demanding nature of police work. One participant shared that: "The duty involves a tough schedule. There are protests throughout the month, so they experience psychological and emotional damage. Don't go to your family for days. Thus, they are involved in romantic relationships." [P6]

This emotional void sometimes pushes individuals toward extramarital or inappropriate relationships as a source of temporary relief or pleasure. Power and control also played a role. Some officers used mate poaching as a way to assert dominance rather than seek genuine connection. Another motivation was thrill-seeking behavior. As described: "Some male officers see it as a challenge or thrill. They don't care if she's married." [P3]

Marital dissatisfaction, especially in cases of forced or unhappy marriages, was also a key factor, reported by the participants. Officers in such relationships sometimes seek emotional fulfillment elsewhere. One male participant stated: "Officers in unhappy or forced marriages may turn to mate poaching as a way to cope with emotional or relational dissatisfaction." [P5]

Financial motivations were also discussed. One participant explained: "This desire for a

luxury lifestyle can lead individuals to pursue relationships with financially stable police officers who can fulfill these needs such as getting expensive gifts, new phones, and eating in restaurants. Even after marrying others, these relationships may continue through dates." [P5]

He further mentioned an innate desire for multiple partners. As noted: "Individuals always have an inherent desire for multiple partners, they have this belief that multiple partners will lead to greater satisfaction. So whenever there is an opportunity, they use that to satisfy their needs." [P5]

ROLE OF POWER AND HIERARCHY

Participants explained that power and hierarchy in the police force play a role in mate poaching. Senior officers were seen to have more control over junior staff, which made it easier for them to approach or influence them. One male participant shared: "It's easier for seniors to target junior females. Their rank gives them invisible permission." [P4]

Many also mentioned that higher-ranking officers may not say anything directly, but their position creates pressure. One female participant stated, "They never directly coerce, but there's an unsaid threat such as transfers or bad postings." [P4]

However, not all participants saw power as the only cause. One male officer said: "Power itself is not a sole motivator. Other factors such as forced marriage, family issues, on-duty stress all combine together to cause such actions." [P6]

PATTERNS AND MEANS OF INITIATION.

Participants described various ways in which mate poaching begins.

As one female officer explained, "Facebook, WhatsApp... they start casual chats which turn inappropriate soon." [P6]

It was also expressed that officers also seemed to target individuals who appeared emotionally vulnerable or new to the environment. One participant noted: "Most often, the target is someone new or going through a tough time personally." [P1]

However, one participant reported that such behaviors were said to happen mostly in off-

duty spaces: "It occurs mainly in informal spaces such as hotels, parks, as officers avoid it within stations due to accountability and career concerns." [P5]

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL INFLUENCES

Participants shared that cultural and social beliefs play a big role in how mate poaching is seen in the police force. Some officers use religion to justify their actions. One participant said: "Men can and should end up marrying multiple partners." [P6]

Furthermore, peer pressure and gossip also affected both genders, but especially women.

As one female officer shared: "Even if a woman says no, colleagues will tease her about having a relationship." [P3]

Media influence was another factor. A participant mentioned that watching romantic or bold scenes in shows like Crime Patrol can impact behavior without officers even realizing it: "Watching shows like Crime Patrol influences mate poaching. Such romantic scenes can trigger them, and they don't even know when or how they're being influenced." [P3]

CONSEQUENCES

Participants shared several negative effects of mate poaching within the police force. On a personal level, emotional stress and broken relationships were reported. One female officer recalled a serious case: "One colleague attempted suicide after her affair with a senior was exposed." [P1]

At the workplace, mate poaching led to tension and broken trust. As one female participant noted, "The work environment becomes toxic. People stop trusting each other." [P2]

Participants stated that there were also a few examples of accountability. In rare cases, action was taken. A case was reported by a participant that: "A junior male officer who flirted with a senior female officer during duty and was later demoted." [P5]

RESPONSES

Participants shared that responses to mate poaching often fall on a spectrum between consent and pressure. As reported, some women gave in just to avoid harassment or bad postings. Many found it hard to report such

behavior, as formal complaints were rarely taken seriously. As said by one participant: "Even if you resist, it's hard to raise your voice. HR won't take action unless it's extreme." [P2] However, some participants reported that once the complaint is filed a serious action is taken, "Punishment is given on the basis of investigations." [P6] **Preventive Suggestions**

Participants shared different ideas to prevent mate poaching and make the workplace safer. Many said that officers should be trained on professional boundaries, not just legal rules. They also highlighted the need for safe and anonymous ways to report such issues. As one female officer said, "There should be anonymous reporting systems. No one feels safe reporting these issues openly." [P2]

Emotional support was also seen as important. Counseling should not only be for officers but also for their families, as they are affected too. One participant said, "Counseling should be provided to police officers suffering from various issues and also to their family members, as they are suffering with them." [P5] However, one officer pointed out that some helpful tools already exist, which further improve the already damaged image of police stations: "Tools like QR codes, the 1787 number, and IG contact have improved reporting and police accountability." [P6]

DISCUSSION

The present study sheds light on mate poaching behaviors among Punjab police officers. The data from six participants revealed nine main themes, fifty sub-themes: Nature of Interpersonal Relationships in Police Force, Visibility and Prevalence of Mate Poaching, Motivations for Mate Poaching, Role of Power and Hierarchy, Patterns and Means of Initiation, Cultural and Social Influences, Impact and Consequences, Responses and Resistance, Policy and Preventive Suggestions.

The nature of Interpersonal Relationships in the Police Force emerged as a key theme. Participants discussed patterns of communication within police stations, highlighting that informal conversations between male and female officers can sometimes lead to flirtatious behavior or be misinterpreted by others. Overall, the findings

revealed that police stations are generally not perceived as a friendly

or comfortable environment for female officers. This theme was more prominent in our study, likely due to the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society, where male-dominated workplaces, such as the police force, are generally not female-friendly.

This aligns with a study of Rostami et al. (2025), which highlights issues of harassment, discrimination, and a prevailing culture of silence within police environments, all of which contribute to an uncomfortable or hostile atmosphere for women. It also notes that routine conversations among male officers can sometimes take a flirtatious turn when interacting with female colleagues.

Due to the nature of interpersonal engagements within the police force, the visibility of mate poaching is present. However, the seriousness and extent of the issue

remain debated, as participant responses varied. While some emphasized that such behavior has significantly declined in recent years due to stricter rules and regulations. On the other hand, some described mate poaching as a common and ongoing concern, particularly in urban areas, where it's often expressed in subtle, unspoken ways or treated as a joke among colleagues due to the male-dominated and authority-driven environment. This is supported by reports from Human Rights Watch and other organizations, which show that police often fail to take women's complaints seriously, especially in cases of harassment or abuse. Complaints are sometimes delayed, ignored, or not properly investigated. (Khalid & Nyborg, 2022).

Several motivating factors for mate poaching were identified, including thrill-seeking, desire for multiple partners, forced marriages, and loneliness. Participants shared that the police work environment, with long hours and time away from family, can lead to emotional exhaustion and increase thrill-seeking behavior. This is supported by (Pléh, 2014), who found that individuals high in sensation seeking and sociosexuality are more likely to engage in mate poaching.

Power was also seen as one of the determinants of mate poaching. Participants revealed that senior officers do engage in such acts,

especially with someone junior, as they fear no consequence for it. In the context of Pakistan's hierarchical and patriarchal culture, where authority is highly respected, power imbalances may further enable such actions, with subordinates feeling constrained from resisting or reporting due to social and organizational norms. This aligns with research by Lammers et al. (2011), who analyzed data from 1,561 professionals and found that elevated organizational power is positively associated with infidelity.

On the other hand, culture and social influence were identified as a main theme, as infidelity was reported as a sign of manhood among police officers in Pakistan. As literature suggests, men exhibiting sexist beliefs are more likely to cheat, often valuing power in their intimate relationships as a justification for such behavior. (Huang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, mate poaching within the police environment was not viewed as a one-time slip. In Pakistan's collectivist, close-knit culture, overlapping personal and professional networks and the widespread use of platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook make it easier for casual exchanges to develop into ongoing, boundary-crossing interactions. This is supported by Sharabi et al. (2021), who found that individuals' attitudes toward online infidelity predicted repeated mate-poaching intentions, which often led to offline encounters, indicating that mate poaching is typically a stable behavioral pattern rather than an isolated incident.

The impact and consequences of mate poaching also emerged as a major theme. Participants shared how such behavior affects not only the individuals involved but also the overall work environment. One female participant reported that a colleague died by suicide after her affair with a senior officer was exposed. Others stated that these incidents harmed team cohesion and created a toxic atmosphere within the workplace. This is supported by existing literature, which highlights that workplace affairs can undermine mutual trust, lower morale and productivity, and damage collaborative dynamics—ultimately creating a hostile and dysfunctional work environment. (Zhang et al., 2022)

Finally, several policy and prevention suggestions were reported.

Participants highlighted that an anonymous reporting system is one of the most effective tools for addressing misconduct. They also emphasized the need for counseling not only for police officers but for their families as well. Interventions like Congruence Couple Therapy (CCT) have been shown to improve couple adjustment and employment outcomes (Lee & Merali, 2022). However, some participants noted that mechanisms such as the 1787 whistleblowing hotline are already in place to reduce misconduct within police stations.

CONCLUSION

This study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of six Punjab police officers regarding mate poaching in their professional environment. The findings highlight how interpersonal dynamics, power hierarchies, cultural norms, and emotional stressors intersect to shape mate poaching, which is often normalized within police culture. These behaviors are recurring rather than isolated, leading to interpersonal conflict, reduced team cohesion, and mental health challenges. The study emphasizes the need for systemic reforms, anonymous reporting mechanisms, and psychological support for officers and their families.

IMPLICATIONS

This study provides valuable insights into the psychological, social, and organizational aspects of mate poaching within the Punjab police force. By identifying motivations, patterns, and impacts, it offers guidance for mental health professionals and policymakers to develop targeted interventions. Approaches like Congruence Couple Therapy (CCT) can help address relationship strains and support officers' well-being. The findings also highlight institutional gaps, stressing the need for stronger accountability, anonymous reporting, and sensitivity training on gender and power issues. Overall, the study encourages collaborative efforts to create safer, more inclusive police environments that protect the dignity and mental health of all

personnel, especially women.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study's qualitative design, based on a small sample, limits generalizability to the wider police population. However, future mixed-method research can address this by providing broader statistical analysis. The study focused only on police officers' perspectives; including spouses or partners could offer a more complete view of mate poaching's interpersonal impact. Future research should also test organizational and psychological interventions to identify effective strategies for reducing such behaviors and improving police workplace culture.

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