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# Protecting the protector : exploring work-related challenges experienced by contract security guards employed by a security company in Johannesburg.

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**Abstract**

The high levels of crimes in society have led people to seek assistance outside public law enforcement agencies such as police and the army, to private law enforcement agencies such as the private security industry. Security guards are involved in providing protection to people, properties and their valuables and in South Africa, they intervene in high crime and violence situations, resulting in their working environment being dangerous and unpredictable. The study aimed to understand some of the factors contributing to the work-related challenges encountered by contract security guard officers. The study utilised a qualitative research design in exploring the narrations of 14 contract security guards, identified and selected using a non-probability purposive sampling procedures. For triangulation purposes, two key informants namely: senior supervisor and a site manager were interviewed. Semi-structured interview schedules were conducted, where in-depth one-on-one interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed into verbatim and subsequently analysed using thematic content analysis.

The results revealed that economic factors such as poverty and unemployment contribute to one becoming a security guard officer. Furthermore, factors such as low wages, long working hours, lack of respect, safety, lack of water and sanitation facilities were identified as challenges encountered by security guard officer in the industry. The results also showed that the identified challenges impact on the work discipline and work motivation of security guards, their family responsibilities and to their occupational wellbeing. Recommendations emanating from the study included the involvement of occupational social workers in the private security industry, for the developing of interventional programmes in enhancing the effective use of coping strategies by security guards, and the collaboration between security companies and security guards within the contractual service negotiations process with clients.

**Keywords:** occupational experiences, occupational challenges, security-company, contract security guards.