

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS OF RECRUITERS WHEN HIRING PERSONS  
WITH CRIMINAL RECORD**

by

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Supervisor: Professor Nisha Harry

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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## **ABSTRACT**

The intention of this study was to explore recruiters' perceptions when hiring persons with a criminal record. Recruiters are the gatekeepers and champions of the recruitment process and therefore play an integral part in ensuring open entry into employment for persons with a criminal record. The premise of the study is that individuals with criminal records are not employed, mainly because of the recruiters' perceptions of holders of criminal records, regardless of the nature of the crime, and this influences their recruitment undertakings.

In order to explore the above, a grounded theory approach was adopted, using corresponding qualitative measures in this regard. Further, a focus group method, involving five (5) participants, was employed in gathering data. The sample comprised HR professionals who are tasked with the recruitment function within their respective organisations. The Johannesburg Region was used, as Johannesburg is one of the most prominent cities in South Africa; in addition, the participants were based in the Johannesburg area.

The study found that recruiters are receptive to people with criminal records and believe in reintegrating them into the job market. However, these ideals are obstructed by management as well as anticipated stigma from colleagues. The study therefore concluded that the stigma in play here is indirect, thus contributing to barriers to entry for persons with criminal records.

**Key words:** recruiters, perception, stigma, criminal record

## OPSOMMING

Die bedoeling van hierdie studie was om die persepsie van die werwer te ondersoek wanneer hy 'n persoon met 'n kriminele rekord aanstel. Werwers is die poortwagters en kampvegters van die werwingsproses en speel daarom 'n integrale rol in die verskaffing van oop toegang vir persone met 'n kriminele rekord tot hul werk. Die uitgangspunt van die studie is dat werwers Individue met kriminele rekords nie in diens is nie, hoofsaaklik as gevolg van die persone se persepsie van houers van kriminele rekords, ongeag die aard van die misdaad, en dit beïnvloed hul werwingsondernemings.

Ten einde bogenoemde te ondersoek, is 'n grondige teorie-benadering gevolg met behulp van ooreenstemmende kwalitatiewe maatstawwe in hierdie verband. Die fokusgroepmetode is gebruik om data te versamel, waar vyf (5) deelnemers aan die sessie was. Die steekproef bestaan uit MH-personeel wat die werwingsfunksie binne hul onderskeie organisasies het. Die Johannesburg-streek is gebruik as een van die mees prominente stede in Suid-Afrika. Daarbenewens is die deelnemers in die Johannesburg-omgewing gevestig.

Die studie het bevind dat werwers ontvanklik is vir mense met kriminele rekords en glo dat hulle weer in die arbeidsmark geïntegreer word. Hierdie ideale word belemmer deur bestuur sowel as verwagte brandmerk van medekollegas. Die studie het dus tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat die brandmerk wat hier gevorm word, indirek is en sodoende bydra tot die persone met 'n strafregtelike hindernis tot toegang.

**Sleutelwoorde:** werwer, persepsie, skandmerk, kriminele record

## TSHOBOKANYO

Maikalesetso a thuto eno ke go batlisisa ka ga ponelo ya mobatla badiri ka motho yo o nnang le rekoto ya bosenyi. Ba batla badiri balebeledi le bagaka ba tsela ya go batla badiri, mme batshameka karolo e tona direng gore tsela ya go tsena e bulegile go motho yo nnang le rekoto ya bosenyi, mo tirong ga e bonolo.

Ntlha phisego ya thuto ke gore ba batla tiro ba nnang le rekoto ya bosenyi ga ba bone tiro, segolo ka ntlha ya rekoto ya bone ya bosenyi, go sa kgathelesege mofuta wa bosenyi.

Go tswellets se fa godimo, patlisiso fa ene gwa tswelediwa go dirisiwa mokgwa boleng mo patlisisong eno. Mokgwa wa setlhopha yo o dirisitsweng dipalo, go dirisitswe ba tsaya karolo ba le batlhano mo karolong eno. Batsaya karolo ba ne ba dirwa ba diri ba profeshenale (bo mmakgontshe) ba di karolo tsa badiri mo ditirong tsa bone. Kantoro ya bogareng ya Gauteng ene ya dirisiwa jaaka nngwe ya ditoropo tse di bothokwa mo Afrika Borwa, go tlaleletsa, ba tsaya karolo ka gore bodulo ba bone, bo mo Gauteng.

Di patlisiso di fitlheletswe gore ba batli ba badiri ba amogela batho ba di rekoto tsa bosenyi, le dumela go ba busetsa mo marakeng a ditiro. Ditlhaloganyo tseno di thibelelwa ke batsamaisi le go tshwenyega ga badiri mmogo, a iphetlhele seso se dirang maparego go tsena ga batho bao ba nnang le direkoto tsa bosenyi.

**Lefokopatio:** mobatla-badiri, ponelo, rekoto ya bosenyi

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY**

The focus of the study was to explore organisations' recruitment processes, mainly through the recruiters' lenses, in order to determine their attitudes and perceptions towards candidates with criminal records. In addition, the study sought to determine whether thorough investigations are conducted when background checks are done; in other words, to ascertain how recruitment and selection processes are used when hiring candidates with criminal records. The significance of this study is to potentially advocate for the re-evaluation of these processes within the organisation by providing insight into the main role players' perceptions of these particular individuals/candidates. This study refers particularly to white collar criminals with criminal records for minor offences. The study specifically focused on the recruiters' perceptions, attitudes and thought process, as they are the champions of the recruitment process in the organisation, building on the premise that (1) individuals with criminal records are not employed mainly because of the recruiter's perceptions of criminal record holders, regardless of the nature of the crime, and (2) the negative perceptions held by the recruiters influence the way they use the recruitment and selection process.

The selection of employees is part of the recruitment process which decides which applicants or candidates should be appointed to jobs (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). At times, a firm must look beyond its own borders to find employees, particularly when expanding its workforce (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016). What is more, external recruitment is needed to (1) fill entry-level jobs; (2) acquire skills not possessed by current employees; and (3) obtain employees with different backgrounds to provide a diversity of ideas (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016). The recruitment process can be extensive, especially because, with the war for talent phenomenon and the shortage of available talent, the recruitment process can be challenging. According to the 2018 Talent Shortage Survey, 32% of employers are finding it challenging to fill jobs in South Africa (Manpower Group, 2018). The survey further indicates that scarce skills include skilled traders, office support, drivers, management/executives, to mention a few. According to the survey, the reasons for the talent shortage include a lack of applicants, a lack of experience, applicants lack required hard and soft skills, and applicants expect higher pay than offered. The talent pool is likely to decrease even further when we include talent with criminal records. Trost (2014) believes that most businesses today that complain about the talent shortage have great potential to improve in the area of talent acquisition, and filling select positions requires more work (Trost, 2014).

Today's business environment has forced organisations to change their perspectives about the recruitment process because of the influence of a number of constraints on recruitment activities (Shammot, 2014). The business world is now witnessing a race between organisations, whether local or global, to acquire the talent, skills and the distinctive competencies required from the human resource departments in various sectors to search seriously for such people (Shammot, 2014). Besides acquiring employees with the abilities and skills required by the organisation, it is of the utmost importance – due to the lack of employees – to retain talented, trained and proven employees (Héder et al., 2018). As a result of our aging society, the number of potential employees is decreasing; this reduction is also intensified by the migration of the able workforce (Héder et al., 2018).

The preceding discussion serves as a motivating factor for organisations to pay as much attention to candidates with a criminal history as they would any other candidates, as this increases the chances of finding the most suitable candidate for a role.

## **1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

From the above, research seemingly emphasises that persons with criminal records are less likely to be considered for jobs, with most studies investigating how a criminal record has affected the individual who bears it. This opens up the gap to looking into the employer at the micro level (individual), namely the recruiter's (HR managers, recruitment specialists and HR officers) outlook, as one of the key role players in the Recruitment & Selection &S practices, particularly in Gauteng. It also further emphasises persons with criminal records' social reality within communities, from a South African perspective – by elevating the value that their skills could bring to the job market. As persons who are vulnerable, it is often overlooked that these individuals are skilled, despite the criminal record. Recruiters have a great influence in terms of the individual who is hired, because they are the ones who select the candidates who may ultimately reach the offer stage.

To the knowledge of the researcher, recruiter biases in terms of their influence in the Recruitment and Selection of criminal record holders are often overlooked. Providing an example of biases in recruitment in their study, Hotho et al. (2020) theorise that in a communal setting, recruiters are able to obtain significant information about the social cues that inform the values of that community, such as expectations of favouritism in recruitment. However, the typical view is closely related to organisational policies as opposed to the developers and/or the implementers of those policies regarding the hiring of persons with a criminal record

and the criminal record holder's perspective (Chanakira & Chikadzi, 2017; Mngwazi, 2017), thus creating the gap in the perspectives of recruiters. In support of this notion, Crawford and McBride-Owens (2014) state that much research is extended to the challenges and consequences arising from lack of employment for criminal record holders however, the actual experiences of decision-makers in the hiring of criminal record holders are unknown (Obatusin & Ritter-Williams, 2018). In their study, Obatusin and Ritter-Williams (2018) mainly focused on the employers who were in favour of employing or considered to employ persons with a criminal record in Maryland, United States of America. In addition, challenges relating to finding relevant information regarding biases and recruiter perspectives in South Africa (toward criminal record holders) indicate a gap in research.

According to Pager and Western (2009), employers have a vital role to play in the process of reintegrating persons with criminal records back into society because employment outcomes ultimately depend upon employers' hiring decisions. Employment provides persons with a criminal record an opportunity to tend to their daily needs, such as transportation, food, and other daily expenses; it also helps to repair broken relationships with friends and family, and to rebuild a stable structure. (Obatusin & Ritter-Williams, 2018). Regulations, Legislation, and policies that require conducting a criminal background are not necessarily clear on the offences that may lead to exclusion to particular roles and jobs (Heydon & Naylor, 2018), therefore an individual applying may not be aware of the reasoning behind their job application outcome. Due to the significant role that employers play in the hiring process, with respect to persons with criminal records, additional research is required in providing more information about their Recruitment and Selection process (Reich, 2017).

### *Significance of the Study*

The findings of this study will provide insight into recruiters' cognitive processes, adding to the knowledge gap that exists within this context. The study also opens up a dialogue that may cause a shift in how employers view criminal record holders as there has not been extensive discussion on the aspect, thus improving their R&S processes in the field of Human Resources (HR) and Industrial Psychology.

### **1.3 AIMS OF THE STUDY**

Primarily, the general aim is to explore and understand the attitudes and perceptions within recruitment. Secondary to that, is to determine how recruiters (HR managers, HR officers and recruitment specialists) use the Recruitment and Selection processes in hiring criminal record holders. This supports an understanding of how these perceptions influence them to [not]

conduct proper and thorough investigation when candidates with a criminal record are in question in Gauteng, South Africa.

### **1.3.1 Aims**

The following aims were identified for this study:

- To provide a view of the perceptions of recruiters and actions taken in hiring individuals with criminal records in Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa.
- To determine whether socio-demographic factors such as race, gender and education level affect the recruitment and selection of individuals with criminal records.
- To understand how the perception of criminal record holders influences the conception of stigma.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

These following questions were formulated to investigate the core premises of this study:

### **1.4.1 Research Questions**

- What are the perceptions of recruiters in hiring persons with criminal records?
- What is the impact of the internal processes on hiring persons with criminal records?

### **1.4.2 Theoretical Research Questions**

- What did previous scholars write about the cognitive thinking, perception, or action taken by employers and recruiters in the recruitment and selection of people with a criminal record?
- What are the impact of the socio-demographic factors that affect persons with criminal records?
- 

### **1.4.3 Empirical Research Questions**

- What challenges do recruiters face in organisations?

## **1.5 PARADIGM PERSPECTIVE**

“A paradigm defines a researcher’s philosophical stance to the study; it anchors the decisions made throughout the entire research such as the research design and methodology. Furthermore, it defines the researcher’s view and orientation toward determining the data analysis and interpretation (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Research authors have distinguished various paradigms that direct the methodology and the decisions made during the research process, these are (among others): the positivist research philosophy, interpretivist research philosophy, pragmatist research philosophy, and realistic research philosophy (Creswell, 2007; Žukauskas et al., 2018; Cohen, et al., 2007). The following section will briefly discuss the paradigm selected as best suited for the purposes of this study.

### **1.5.1 Interpretivist-Constructivist Paradigm**

The research paradigm/philosophy selected for this study is an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. Constructivism is often combined with interpretivism (Mertens, 1998) because the two paradigms share similar ideologies in terms of subjectivity. An interpretivist research philosophy states that subjective interpretation can be assigned to the social world understanding how people experience the social world is the main focus of this approach (Žukauskas et al., 2018).

In an effort to be as objective as possible, this study would like to use the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm to explore the aims of the study. The problem and research questions explored in an interpretivist paradigm are aimed at understanding specific issues or topics, empathetically. This assertion is based on the constructivist’s epistemology that seeks to explore the conditions that discriminate the disadvantaged and exclude individuals based on various factors such as cultures, hierarchy, racism, unequal power relations, identity or inequalities in our society (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The common representatives of an interpretive research are generally marginalised participants from groups that are underrepresented in terms of gender, race, class and religion (Ladsin-Billings and Donner, 2005) or a multiple of these categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). While the interpretivist paradigm leans on interpreting the world through one’s lenses and experiences, the constructivist paradigm views reality from a socially constructed perspective.

In the interpretivist paradigm, emphasis is placed on understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). “Interpretivism assumes that the researcher and their subjects are engaged in interactive processes in which they intermingle, dialogue, question, listen, read, write and record research” data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Greater meaning is given to how individuals interact with their environment and draw perspective from those interactions and experiences. This philosophical point of views allows

the researcher an opportunity to consider the impact of their views and values on the research questions posed (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008).

Constructivism can also be deemed “Social Constructivism” since its epistemology is founded on social construction (Given, 2008), a term also used in Management Research (Žukauskas et al., 2018). Constructivism researchers often address the processes of interaction among individuals (Creswell, 2007), and also focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the perceptions (Creswell, 2007).

As is the case with all other forms of qualitative inquiry, interpretive-constructivist inquiry focuses on understanding (interpreting) the meanings, purposes and intentions (interpretations) people give to their own actions and interactions with others (Given, 2008).

This paradigm compelled the researcher to source the most suitable methodology to follow from among a few that are consistent with an interpretive-constructivist paradigm; namely phenomenology, grounded theory, naturalist methodology and ethnography, among a few. Since this study focuses on the interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, Constructivist Grounded Theory was best suited to closely achieve the aims of the research. Below is a description of Constructivist Grounded Theory.

### *1.5.1 Grounded Theory*

Grounded theory enables the demonstration of how inequities and discriminatory practices are displayed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Thus, this method can produce insight into how structural inequality can influence individuals’ behaviours and the part that these play in the societal setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). According to Given (2008), the grounded theory method consists of guidelines that direct the categorization of data to construct a theory. This method mainly focuses on the analysis aspect of research, however it can inform data collection and analysis synonymously (Given, 2008), as with this research study. Grounded Theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand these worlds (Charmaz, 2006).

Denzin and Lincoln (2017) state that although grounded theory has evolved over the years, its fundamental principles have remained unchanged. It is inductive in nature, where data collection and analysis are simultaneously conducted, and it also involves comparative analysis throughout the study (Denzin & Lincoln 2017). The constructivist version of grounded theory emphasizes the relationship between the researcher and the data, where the



researcher immerse themselves in the data, to develop codes and categories that result in the development of a grounded theory. (Given, 2008). The researcher immerse themselves in the data by constantly analysing the research process. This affirms the ontology of the paradigm selected.

## **1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

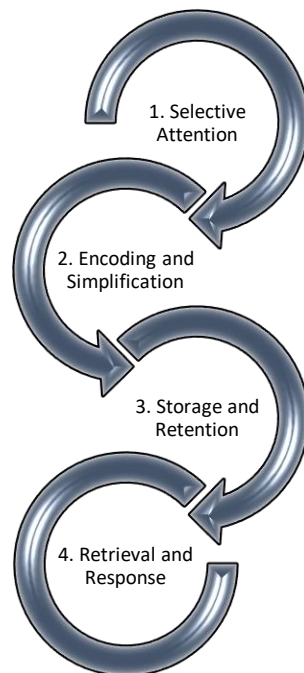
Adom et al. (2018) describes a theoretical framework as a blueprint that is often “borrowed” by the researcher to build his or her own house or research inquiry. This study’s predominant focus is on perception; therefore, the theory of perception will be discussed, through an information-processing model and social stigma theory, to better understand what stigma entails.

### **1.6.1 Model of the Perception Process**

Perception is at the root of organisational behaviour; any situation can be analysed in terms of its perceptual connotations (Mullins, 2016). To improve our insights into other people's behaviour we need to understand how perceptions operate (Aswathappa, 2016). In order to provide a brief description of perception, this study used the information-processing model. Three of the stages in this model – selective attention/comprehension, encoding and simplification, and storage and retention – describe how specific social information is observed and stored in memory (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). The fourth and final stage, retrieval and response, involves turning mental representations into real-world judgements and decisions (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). Mullins and Christy (2016) advise that this model provides a simplified version, and that it should be noted that other complex elements otherwise not mentioned, are considered in the formation of perceptions such as environmental stimuli. Figure 1.1 indicates the sensory attributes that are embedded to the perception process. This model is retrieved from Sinding and Waldstrom (2014), although other references will be used.

## Figure 2.1

### *Perception Process*



Note: This model depicts four basic stages of the perception process as described by Sinding and Waldstrom (2014).

#### **Stage 1: Selective attention**

Information can be distinguished by importance, and results in a more urgent or immediate response, while in other instances, however, the information may be put aside or used at a later stage to fit into other ideas and thoughts (Mullins & Christy, 2016). When multiple stimuli is presented to us, we tend to select one stimuli and block out the rest (Singh, 2020), more so, salient stimuli (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). They further explain that multiple stimuli can be deemed salient, such as novelty in physical appearance or unexpected behaviour (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). However, when we become accustomed to the stimuli, we tend to assign cues to that stimuli, so when that stimuli is presented again, we use less energy in response to it (Broadbent, 1958). Subsequently, we rely on already existent perceptions. Perceptions can be understood in order to improve the (hampering) practices that exist in organisation, focusing more on the individual level.

#### **Stage 2: Encoding and simplification.**

Encoding refers to the interpretation and translation of new or raw information, into usable information that is categorized in the perceiver's cognition (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014).

Categorical thinking is a non-conscious process of simplifying objects or persons into predetermined categories (McShane et al., 2016). Sinding and Waldstrom (2014) state that the encoding process is used to assess the external environment, even so, the interpretation of the same person, situation or can yield different interpretation (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). In addition, the inherent aspects of a perceiver may be the reason different interpretations are given to the same object or event. (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014).

### **Stage 3: Storage and retention**

This stage describes the storage of information in long-term memory, which consists of varied and separate categories. These categories or groups are connected, according to Sinding and Waldstrom (2014); they contain different types of information, and this information also passes between these categories. As these categories sit in our long-term memory, they are compartmentalized based on the information stored, such as events, people and general information about the environment and experiences encountered (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). These are mental models that are created, and which serve as knowledge structures that we develop to describe, explain and predict the world around us (McShane et al., 2016).

### **Stage 4: Retrieval and response**

Our ultimate judgements and decisions are either based on the process of drawing on, interpreting and integrating categorical information stored in long-term memory or on retrieving a summary judgement that was already made (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014).

## **1.6.2 The Perceiver**

The characteristics of the perceiver are also important, as a perceiver's mood can influence the impression formed about others. Perception is also influenced when people have implicit personality theories about which physical characteristics, personality traits and behaviours are related to others, for instance, knowing that someone has one trait leads us to infer that they have other traits as well (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). Past experience and general knowledge can play a role in how a perceiver forms a particular perception, and when one stands firmly to the learned idea or perception about an event or object, it can result in resistance to 'opposing' information (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014).

According to literature on perception, when information is received through the senses, our brain quickly and non-consciously assesses whether it is relevant or irrelevant to us and then attaches emotional indicators (worry, happiness, boredom) to the retained information

(McShane et al., 2016). Emotional markers help us to store information in our memory; those emotions are later reproduced when recalling the perceived information (McShane et al., 2016). This relates to perception errors. Below are examples of perception errors in relation to R&S processes:

### *1.6.3 The Primacy Effect*

The primacy effect is the effect by which the information first received often continues to colour later perceptions of individuals (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). This explains why, at first glance of a curriculum vitae that mentions a criminal record or should a potential candidate with a criminal record get to the interview stage, the perception that the recruiter may have pertaining to criminal records, which as mentioned is commonly negative, will continue throughout the process, subsequently leading to an unsuccessful outcome for the potential candidate.

### *1.6.4 Affect Heuristics*

Affect heuristics occur when the recruiter uses minimal mental effort in assessing and making a judgement about a candidate's credentials without carefully examining all of the evidence first (Alexandra Johnson, n.d.). An affective attitude toward a person is affected by how much the person making the judgment likes the person he or she judges (Zimmerman et al., 2017). Zimmerman et al. (2017) propose that in order to increase the likelihood of providing accurate judgement of others, a perceiver may turn to embracing a positive attitude toward the target persons. This speaks to the notion that recruiters will, for instance, not consider the minimum requirements of the job when an individual with a criminal record is in question; instead, they look to this one characteristic of a potential candidate's profile and reach a conclusion, without the in-depth effort to investigate the criminal record further.

### *1.6.5 Confirmation Bias*

According to Sinding and Waldstrom (2014), previous learning and experience might influence the impressions formed about objects, people or events. They further explain that sometimes we see what we expect to see based on previous learning and experience and, as a consequence, formed perceptions are very powerful and resistant to non-corroborating information. Thus, people tend to seek and interpret information that verifies existing beliefs (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014).

### *Relevance to this Study*

The perception information-processing model focuses on how we make sense of our world by explaining the concepts that drive the way we respond to our environment. It is important in this study as the aim is to determine how recruiters view and respond to individuals with criminal records (stimuli) when the latter apply for a job within the former's organisation, irrespective of the nature and severity of the crime. This is linked to the inherent requirements of the job. This theory expands on people's general need to hold on to certain perceptions that form the basis for their realities, thus affecting decisions made in their world. In this regard, this study seeks to highlight these and add to knowledge that may assist in improving R&S processes.

Perception theory is also of the view that we do not exist in a vacuum; that is, the way in which we make sense of our world affects our responses to our environment, which directly affect others. This indicates that a relationship exists between the two main features of this study, this being perception in relation to the criminal record.

The brain functions differently depending on whether familiar or unfamiliar objects are perceived. From the Psychology literature, Gregory describes perception as a process that begins with a hypothesis that one develops from prior knowledge. As Jachim (2015) states, Gregory's concept is that perception consists of hypothesis generation; that is, predictions based on the interaction of experiential knowledge and sensory data. Jachim (2015) further adds that Gregory makes a distinction between conceptual and perceptual knowledge.

What you perceive is shaped, at some level, by what you know and what you think (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). The knowledge that one uses as a response to a stimulus is stored in your brain as memory, allowing us to store information about the world so that we can understand and deal with future situations on the basis of past experience (Groome, 2014). We tend to use the stored information in forming a perception, as described by the top-down perceptual process. In this regard, forming a perception about an individual with a criminal record fundamentally influences how we respond to them (Stolier & Freeman, 2016).

With reference to Sternberg and Sternberg's (2012) statement, what you know suggests an element of familiarity – meaning that perception possesses some conscious decision-making in response to stimuli. This suggests that perception is not merely a function of the brain, operating without the consent of the perceiver; rather our brain functions in categorical form, so that, according to McShane et al. (2016), we will still be able to make a conscious effort in shaping our perception.

With cognitive processes in mind, the criminal record can become the focal point of judgement on whether one would like to associate with this individual or not. This is where attention plays a role in forming perception. As explained by Eysenck and Keane (2015), attention involves the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought; basically, focalisation and the concentration of consciousness are in essence what makes up attention. It is also said that attention creates a memory; when we are conscious of something, that information is held in the short-term working memory (Styles, 2014). Both perception and reflection are inherently selective, requiring mechanisms of attention – modulating, sustaining and manipulating the information that is most relevant for current and/or future behaviour (Chun & Johnson, 2011).

## **1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is a procedural plan that is adopted by the researcher to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately and economically (Kumar, 2011).

### **1.7.1 Research Approach**

A research approach represents the direction that this study will take. As such, this study will use a qualitative research approach as discussed below.

#### *1.7.2 Qualitative Research Approach*

The main focus in qualitative research is to understand, explain, explore, discover and clarify the situations, feelings, perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and experiences of a group of people (Kumar, 2011). This research approach was selected to ascertain the different dynamics within the process of recruiting individuals with a criminal record. The attitudes, thoughts and perceptions of recruiters were in focus in an effort to determine how they effectively use the R&S process in instances pertaining to individuals with a criminal record.

### **1.7.2 Sampling**

This study used a non-probability sampling method, more specifically, purposive sampling, in exploring the subject matter. As the name implies, in purposive sampling people or other units are chosen for a particular purpose (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The rationale for selecting purposive sampling was to promote accuracy, as the data were not readily and straightforwardly accessible, and a high number of responses could not be guaranteed.

Participants consisted of (1) a group of eight participants, who were a general combination of (2) HR managers, HR officers and recruitment specialists, each from separate organisations, with (3) three or more years in HR, working in (4) a private-sector organisation within the City of Johannesburg Municipality, and (5) who actively recruit white collar individuals across different industries. Education level will be pointed out in an effort to unpack their total experience in recruitment. Diverse racial backgrounds will be included, such as Black (African), Indian, and White individuals as described with the context of South Africa.

### **1.7.3 Data Collection**

The data collection method employed for the study was focus groups. The motive for selecting this method as that, according to Lune and Berg (2017), the approach is most appropriate for investigating motivations, decisions and priorities. Another motive was that focus groups are low cost and are a popular method for finding information in almost every professional area and academic field (Kumar, 2011). An independent moderator will be used to facilitate the flow of conversation throughout the session.

### **1.7.4 Data Analysis**

Grounded theory developed from the codification of the methods that its originators, sociologists Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967), used in their study of the social organisation of dying in hospitals (Given, 2008). This study analysed data by codifying them, as this is a fundamental aspect of grounded theory. By adopting grounded theory methods, allow the researcher to closely manage the data in order to construct a new and unique analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2006). She also adds that a new perspective or thinking in terms of the data can be developed through coding (Charmaz, 2006).

Grounded theory strategies such as memo writing allow researchers a streamlined process for analysing and sorting data, as it provides readily available information (Given, 2008). Focus groups provide diverse views and due to the arguable nature of the research study, this form of statistical analysis enabled the researcher to convert the data into meaningful information without complicating the process. By categorising the data into themes, the data are simplified, eliminating an information overload.

### 1.7.5 Definition of Keywords

- **Talent pool.** A talent pool is “a database of potential job candidates; the workers included in the database are typically both highly qualified and have previously expressed interest, in some form, of joining the organisation” (Smart Recruiters, n.d.).
- **R&S process.** R&S involves the integrated activities and undertakings of recruiting and selecting an individual for a vacancy from a pool of applicants. (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).
- **Criminal record.** A criminal record is “where all a person’s criminal convictions are listed; a conviction will remain on a person’s criminal record for a period of 10 years” (Legal Wise, 2017).
- **Minor offence** (referred to as a misdemeanour in the United States of America).” A type of criminal offence that is more serious than a citation but less serious than a felony” (LaMance, 2019).
- **Background checks (background screening).**” The process of checking and verifying various pieces of personal and confidential information; this information is used to verify whether an individual or organisation is being truthful and transparent about their credentials” (Management Integrity Evaluation, 2018).

## 1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The confidentiality and anonymity of those providing the data will be adhered to by way of informed consent. The concept of confidentiality is closely connected with anonymity in that anonymity is one way in which confidentiality is operationalised (Wiles et al., 2008). Confidentiality, according to King et al. (2014), means that the researcher can identify the participant but access to this information will not go beyond the researcher. King et al. (2014) add that anonymity means that the participant cannot be identified by anyone, including the researcher, and the researcher does not collect identifying information pertaining to individual subjects, such as name, address, email address among others, or the researcher cannot link individual responses to participants’ identities (King et al., 2014).

### 1.8.1 Ethical Clearance Process

- Ethical clearance to conduct the study with human participants was requested from the University.
- The study was conducted with the permission of the participants and/or the organisations to which they belong, according to the organisations’ requirements.



### 1.8.2 Trustworthiness

Criteria used to validate research located within the interpretivist paradigm (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017):

- a) *Criterion of credibility.* This criterion should be applied in research located within the interpretivist paradigm in preference to the criterion of internal validity in the positivist paradigm.
- b) *Criterion of dependability.* At best, the researcher can make inferences which in themselves are influenced by the researcher's own construction of meaning. Those inferences and interpretations are dependable depending on the researcher's ability and skills to make sure that the findings truly emerge from the data gathered and analysed for the research. This paradigm is susceptible to subjectivity, with the immersion of the researcher in the data; therefore, to ensure the dependability of the data collected and how they are analysed, the researcher is aware of the limits to expertise, and will seek the expertise of a more experienced individual to confirm the analysis.
- c) *Criterion of confirmability.* The overriding goal of this criterion is to ensure that one's biases are minimised, and preferably eliminated, to avoid contaminating the results of the data analysis. Shenton (2004) explains that for the research to achieve this criterion, "steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher".

Credibility was achieved by assessing various research studies relating to this research topic and selecting the most suitable to use as reference for the data analysis. This assisted in the extent to which the items in the measuring instrument truly summed up that which the study sought to measure; that is, perception.

However, as Guba (1981) argues that an interpretivist approach delves into human behaviour, which can be complex, dynamic and can change continuously, as subject to multiple realities that embody the interpretivist paradigm – therefore interpretivist cannot offer the exact same results.

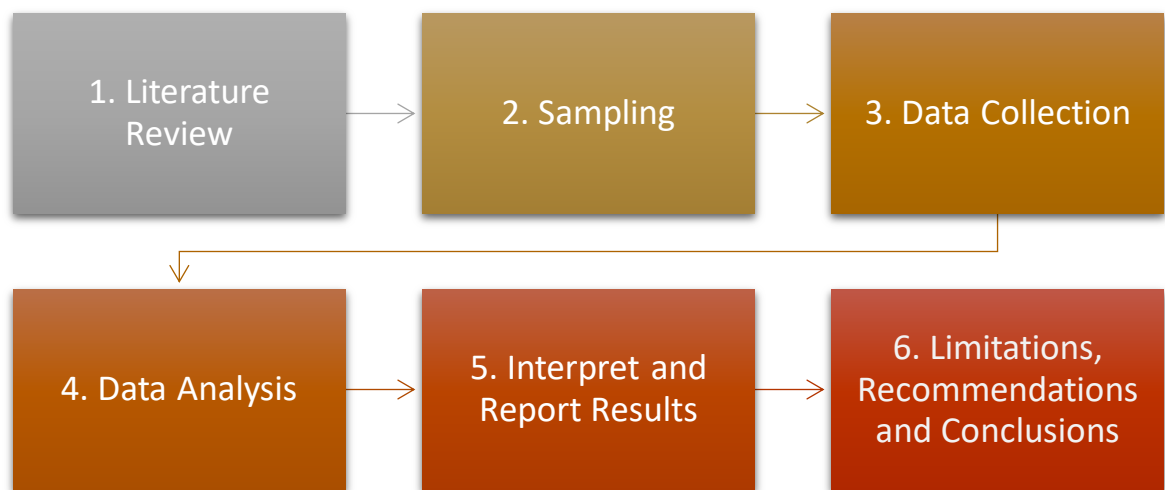
## 1.9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Methodology is the theory of organisation of an activity; an activity is the active behaviour of a human being (Novikov & Novikov, 2013).

### 1.9.1 Research Method

**Figure 1.3**

*Research Method*



## 1.10 ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Research proposal

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4: Analysis and report on findings

Chapter 5: Limitations, concluding remarks and recommendations.

## 1.11 CONCLUSION

R&S is a process that provides individuals with an opportunity to access employment, as the process that enables entry into forefront of organisations. When individuals in the organisation's external environment search for jobs, they may have certain characteristics that are perceived to be a threat to the organisation, such as a criminal history.

This study proposes that recruiters' perceptions and attitudes toward individuals with criminal records are negative and thus negatively influence the R&S practices of the organisation, leading to individuals with criminal records not being employed. In this study, the researcher used grounded theory to assess this dynamic. The data that emerged highlighted an additional or a newer view.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The Effects of a Criminal Record and Minor Offences on Candidate Employment Prospects and on Recruitment and Selection Processes**

This literature review unpacks the adverse effects that a criminal record has on one's employment prospects, as well as how the recruitment and selection processes perpetuate the disadvantages that already exist when being in possession of one. Limited literature was found on this topic; however, this literature review looks at: (1) elementary aspects of the adverse effects of a criminal record on the employment prospects of individuals and the stigma that holding one carries, (2) perceptions, particularly relating to the recruiter during the recruitment process and (3) a brief discussion on the socio-demographic factors related to criminal records.

#### **2.1.1 Effects of Criminal Record on Employment Prospects**

It is common knowledge that recruitment and selection processes and policies in an organisation are regulated by law. Within the South African legal context, laws have been put in place to protect the rights of both the organisation and individuals who possess criminal records. In relation to the latter, these include the expungement rule that has been put in place to clear a person's criminal record. This is a procedure which results in the lawful clearance and removal of a person's criminal record from the National Criminal Register, especially for minor crimes for which there were minor charges (South African Police Service, n.d.). It is argued that having a criminal record is an attribute that has the potential to impair a person's fundamental human dignity and to affect him or her adversely (Mujuzi & Tsweledi, 2014). Therefore, this rule was introduced by the Department of Justice to mitigate the adverse effects that having a criminal record has on the person's quality of life, such as the employment challenges that contribute to poverty.

Individuals with criminal records are unemployable. The official unemployment rate increased by 1.4 percentage point to 27,6% in the first quarter of 2019 to 29% in the second quarter of the year, as stated by Statistics South Africa (Smit, 2019). From my perspective, these statistics are likely to include persons with criminal records. As Mujuzi and Tsweledi (2014) state, a person may not even be shortlisted for an interview if he or she has a criminal record. According to Andiorio (2018), being unemployed is hard, but adding a criminal record into the mix – wrongfully convicted or not – makes finding a job close to impossible. Accordingly, in

view of the fact that an individual can acquire a criminal record whether they have been convicted or not, the question that follows is “how does one acquire a criminal record in the first place?”

### **2.1.2 How does a Person get a Criminal Record?**

In South African law, there are three situations in which a person may get a criminal record – when he enters a plea of guilty, when he is prosecuted after a plea of not guilty and he is convicted, and when he pays an admission of guilt fine (Mujuzi & Tsweledi, 2014). Accordingly, individuals with criminal records may not be aware of their criminal record status because of the method used by the system to pin one with a criminal record. In one example mentioned by Mamacos (n.d.), an individual was involved in an argument that escalated into a fight, consequently leading to a verbal assault charge, for which he had to pay a fine. However, this particular individual had no idea that this payment was, in essence, an admission of guilt. The Management Integrity Evaluation Background Screening Index (2018) indicates that 777 319 criminal checks were conducted and 7% of people whose criminal records were checked either lied about having one or did not know that they had a criminal record. Seemingly, most employers lack the investigative effort to conduct thorough background checks and/or to hire according to one’s qualifications and skillsets, while considering the nature of the job when a person with a criminal record is in question. Mamacos (n.d.) mentions another example: a certain individual was never tried or convicted in a court of law or served time but could not secure a job because he was caught selling liquor without a licence. Even though his crime was deemed “not too serious”, companies were reluctant to hire him due to his record. Therefore, the severity of the offence is seemingly not a mitigating factor when attempting to obtain employment.

There are limited circumstances in which a person’s criminal record may be expunged and this may only happen after 10 years from the date of conviction. This is especially in cases where the person was convicted of a minor offence and the court imposes a non-custodial sentence or a very short prison sentence (Mujuzi & Tsweledi, 2014). In one instance, an individual who has had challenges related to his criminal record was charged with theft and violence almost 20 years ago, but his case is still running, and he cannot apply to have his record cleared (Mamacos, n.d.).

According to Phahlane (2018), a criminal record is a record of our criminal history and is used by potential employers, lenders and others to assess your trustworthiness. In other countries,

it also includes arrests, charges dismissed, charges pending and charges of which an individual has been acquitted (Phahlane, 2018).

### **2.1.3 Socioeconomic Issues in Relation to Possessing a Criminal Record**

In this section, the sociodemographic factors in relation to (possessing) a criminal record that will be discussed include race, gender, and occupation and education.

#### ***Race***

Criminologists and sociologists have led the way in studying the reality of how blacks are treated relative to whites by law enforcement and the courts (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2010) in the United States of America. There is now extensive literature documenting the far greater likelihood of blacks being arrested, sentenced and incarcerated than whites, and fairly contentious literature attempting to sort out the degree to which these racial disparities in outcomes are traceable to racial discrimination in the justice system (Hurwitz & Peffley, 2010). This implies that members of the black community are more likely to have criminal records.

In South Africa, the gross inequalities of apartheid and its legacy resulted in the majority of black people in post-apartheid South Africa being much poorer than their white counterparts (Breetzke, 2010). In the past, laws were constituted in South Africa that disadvantaged the African/black people. The recent political history of South Africa is inherently intertwined with the apartheid era social disorganisation, community fragmentation and segregationist policies, most notably the migrant labour system and the Group Areas Act, which resulted in predominantly black communities being marginalised, both socially and economically, as the apartheid government sought to maintain class exploitation and to prevent unified resistance (Breetzke, 2010). This affirms the observation that in general laws favour the black community less.

Hino et al. (2018) suggest that in the official nomenclature in South Africa people is routinely classified into four “race” categories – African/black, white, coloured and Indian. According to the Report of the South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey for 2017, “language, i.e., proxy for ethnicity, and race are by far the most prominent identities of South Africans: about one half of South Africans consider language and race as either their primary or secondary identities” (Potgieter, 2017). As people identify themselves according to their race, it becomes easy to identify others according to that trait as well. As Reich (2017) describes it, impression formation transpires through subjective stereotypical beliefs based on categorical

characteristics such as identifiable race or a criminal record, as well as objective personal attributes unique to the individual.

From empirical studies, results pertaining to the difference between race remain the major finding from Pager's research (conducted in the Northeast or the Midwest in the United States of America), as white testers with a criminal record were more likely to receive job call backs than were black testers who did not have a criminal record. These findings reinforce the effect of criminal stigma when job seeking, an effect that varies with race, but is often trumped by race (Decker et al., 2010).

Decker et al. (2010), drawing from Galgano, examined the differences between black and white women in terms of the effect of a criminal record by using a correspondence design where job applicants' résumés were submitted to employers over the internet (e.g., through email). It was found that there was no significant difference between white women with a criminal record and black women without a criminal record in the likelihood of advancing through the hiring process. Using a correspondence test, examining white, black and Hispanic women's employability, it was found that there was no effect of race/ethnicity, prison record, or community college on men's success in advancing through the hiring process. In comparison, women's chances of receiving a favourable response to their résumés from employers were negatively impacted by race and prison record (Decker et al., 2010). Black women and women with a prison record were less likely to receive a positive reply from a hiring manager than white women or women without a history of incarceration (Decker et al., 2010).

Ex-offenders' race is the main category that surpasses all other features when employment decisions are made (Pager et al., 2009); specifically, black male non-offenders are scrutinized far worse than their white male counterparts, indicating that racial stereotypes underpin employers' hiring (Pager et al., 2009).

Race, gender, age and some non-inherent factors such as social status and occupational level are determining factors in the employment of individuals. The dynamics are highly likely to be negatively affected by the presence of a criminal record. And this particularly affects the black community.

### **Gender**

Wonci (2019) states that South Africa has a long history of gender discrimination, and this is evident in the prevailing societal echelons where women are relegated to the traditional

subordinate roles and also remain the victims of the gender pay gap that continues to rise, thus seeing them getting paid less than their male counterparts. This is in addition to the organisational practices.

Literature has previously indicated that women are highly disadvantaged as compared to men in terms of employment. In their study, Gonzales et al. (2019) revealed that under equal terms, the likelihood of receiving a call to a job interview was 30% lower for women than for men. However, when the element of a criminal record was added into the profile of a woman candidate, Reich (2017) adds that studies examining particular socio-demographic attributes of the ex-offender report differential employment outcomes for male and female ex-offenders. In terms of sentencing, the likelihood for imprisonment for female offenders were approximately 42% lower than the likelihood of imprisonment for offenders (Doerner & Demuth, 2014; Koons-Witt et al., 2014), while race, too, plays an essential role. Empirical evidence from Decker et al. (2010) suggests a difference between male and female across the three races (Hispanic, black and white) exists in terms of entry-level jobs. They report that there was no effect of race/ethnicity, prison record, or community college on men's success in advancing through the hiring process, however women's chances of receiving a favourable response to their résumés from employers were negatively impacted by race and prison record (Decker et al., 2010).

There is a tension in the guidelines between the goal of a gender-neutral implementation of the law emphasising uniform treatment based on offence severity and criminal history, and the realisation that important differences exist between the lives of men and women that might create a need or desire for differential treatment (Doerner & Demuth, 2014).

### ***Occupation and Education***

Some organisations may provide employment to those who possess a criminal record, whereas others may not, depending on the job level or the type of job for which an individual with a criminal record is applying. Considering the job level is imperative to give some insight into the relationship that may exist between job level and criminal record.

In their study, Decker et al. (2010) surveyed employers within the food service industry – this is, according to Visher et al. (2004), one of the job sectors targeted most heavily by returning offenders who are limited by their low skill sets and education. As such, these jobs are more likely to be places where employers may take a risk on a job applicant and a large number of prisons offer employment and training in culinary arts, i.e., jobs that should transition to food service industry employment on the outside (Decker et al., 2010). Using a different method, in



the food service industry Hispanic men were significantly less likely to receive a call-back than matched white males; however, Hispanic women's employment chances were significantly greater than matched white women's (Decker et al., 2010).

Employers that provide second chances take into account the type of job to be executed, for example individuals with convictions may be prohibited from working as private security officers or police officers and from continuing to serve on regulatory bodies (Pinard, 2010).

Another factor to consider is the type of offence that was committed in relation to the inherent requirements of the job. Does the minor offence affect the type of job that a criminal record holder may have access to? According to Reich (2017), ex-offenders typically are in the lower categories of education and have limited experience and skills, this reducing their options for employment to the lower-skilled jobs Varghese et al. (2010) found that among applicants with a misdemeanour (minor offence), qualifications increase employability, but qualifications have no influence for applicants with an offense.

There appear to be mixed results in terms of the socio-demographic factors that influence the employment opportunities of individuals who possess criminal records. This may be due to the various methods used that led to these findings. From this, however, one can generally conclude that black Africans with a criminal record, across both genders, have a disadvantage in securing employment. Extensive literature is broadly based on racial disparities within this topic, with limitations regarding occupation and education, which leaves room for further research.

#### **2.1.4 Recruitment, Selection and the Perception (of the Criminal Record)**

Recruitment and selection (R&S), as stated by Ryan and Ployhart (2014), is deemed as one of the oldest areas in the field of applied psychology and is still considered a key area in the domains of talent management and human resources (HR), appealing to a large number of researchers and HR practitioners". However, there is limited research on the recruitment of individuals with criminal records, particularly how the recruiter's perceptions affect the Recruitment & Selection process; especially in terms of opening up the channels that allow for more information regarding the severity of the offences on the criminal record. A wide variety of activities, organisational processes and quality-of-life issues are affected by perception, including managerially crucial activities such as hiring and performance appraisal (Sinding & Waldstrom, 2014). In South Africa, as is the case in some other countries such as the United

Kingdom and the United States, people continue to be denied employment on the basis of their criminal records (Mujuzi & Tsweledi, 2014).

An organisation is a reflection of its people, and the success of the organisation depends on the quality of the talent it employs (Goldstein et al., 2017). Goldstein et al. (2017) also notes that an organisation determines who it wants to employ, based on an assessment of the characteristics and capabilities of the people who apply. That is, organisations select whom to employ based on a perceived fit between the makeup of the person and the needs of the organisation (Goldstein et al., 2017). One of the factors taken into consideration during the R&S process is the candidates' criminal history. Most organisations conduct background checks to verify the identity of candidates, their previous employment and their criminal history. According to Management Integrity Evaluation, criminal checks remain the most requested checks (Background Screening Index, 2018).

Goffman (1963) describes stigma as the process by which an attribute is deeply discredited by society and which, consequently, breeds discrimination. A negative perception of individuals or objects, proven by a criminal record holder's challenge with acquiring employment, can lead to stigmatisation, as well as discrimination. People with criminal records seemingly live with the shadow of the record over their heads, regardless of its nature. Uggen et al. (2014) maintain that criminal records can haunt the accused, as well as the convicted. Within our society is an array of individuals, including recruiters. They, too, hold certain perceptions regarding criminal records as well as decision biases in the professional context. The recruiters' perceptions form a vital attribute in the way decisions are made regarding the employability of criminal record holders. It is therefore imperative to begin by understanding some fundamental elements of perception, as this forms the bigger part of this study.

The perceptions of the recruiter towards candidates with criminal records may be prevalent early in the Recruitment & Selection process, as the first few stages are the major screening stages. When Recruitment & Selection activities are in progress, one may not be able to detect that a certain bias is used in the decision-making. As stated by McShane et al. (2016), people are able to make sense of information even before they become aware of that sensory. The concept of selective attention, an element of perception, may be at play, with studies revealing that selective attention, perceptual organisation and interpretation operate very quickly and to a large extent without our awareness (McShane et al., 2016).

Uggerslev et al. (2012) hold that due to various factors, the first two stages are the dominant focus of recruitment drives. A negative perception of candidates with a criminal record who

apply ultimately renders them unsuccessful and one of the premises that this study holds is that these perceptions lead to a lack of thorough background checks being conducted for criminal record holders with minor offences, therefore resulting in hindrances to employment. Interviews with employers have suggested that individuals with lower-level arrest histories may experience less stigma than those with records that are more extensive (Uggen et al., 2014). This study also found that employers claim to assign a lesser sanction to a criminal record history that contains only misdemeanour arrests when compared with a felony conviction (Ispa-Landa & Loeffler, 2016). Uggen (2008) contributes by further stating that the Ban-the-Box (BTB) movement, a movement that focuses on the beginning stages of the candidate recruitment process, for example, seeks to prevent employers from asking criminal-record-related questions (nicknamed “the box”) on job applications and at interviews. The notion behind Ban-the-Box is that premature discrimination inhibits candidates from an opportunity to sell themselves to with their qualifications (Uggen, 2008).

Although on the one hand any negative signal could hinder an applicant’s prospects, on the other hand employers are likely becoming more discerning in evaluating criminal records, such that they may discount an otherwise qualified applicant’s brush with the law (Uggen et al., 2014). Furthermore, employers have also reported that they assign a lesser stigma to job applicants who have been “clean” (free of criminal justice contact) for longer periods (Ispa-Landa & Loeffler, 2016). Another view by Michael Stoll and Shawn Bushway suggests that the negative effects of conducting background checks, where these result in not hiring persons with criminal records, are smaller in magnitude than previously thought and that they are unevenly distributed across social space (Agan & Starr, 2017).

### **2.1.5 Management Prerogative**

An organisation can practise its own discretion in selecting an individual that it deems suitable and fit for a job. Therefore, it is not required to hire individuals with criminal records should they believe the candidate to be unsuitable; organisations can use their managerial prerogative in deciding who is suitable for a particular job. Managerial prerogative has two components, the one concerns (1) the power or the management of resources and financial resources in the form of industrial capital, (2) the power to take charge of labour and human capital through employment contracts (Jordaan, 1991). The employer decides on the number of employees needed, when and how to do the work, when to start and finish the work, the standard of work and so on (Kanamugire, 2014).

Furthermore, in exercising its managerial prerogative to recruit, an employer has to take its internal values and environment into account, without compromising or disregarding the larger society, within which it operates and exists; factors such as affirmative action are paramount to the social responsiveness of the business (Johanette Rheeder, n.d.); In this way, the legislature has intervened by introducing laws (i.e. unfair discrimination laws) that favour employer and employee in an effort to create harmony in the relationship; and to protect both parties' interests. (Kanamugire, 2014).

An organisation exists in part to improve the economy and societal issues such as unemployment. For this reason, several measures have been put in place by the government to encourage businesses to contribute to such issues. Besides the control of the law, additional initiatives that government has introduced to ensure this are the Sector, Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). According to the National Skills Authority (n.d.), the SETAs, established in 2000, are concerned with learnerships, internships, unit-based skills programmes and apprenticeships. Additionally, one of the primary objectives of the SETAs is to collect skills levies from employers within each sector, in terms of the Skills Development Levies Act, and make the money available within the sector for education and training. Such money was to go to employers and training bodies, and to learners in the form of discretionary grants and bursaries (National Skills Authority, n.d.). The questions that arise in this instance are: What role does the organisation play within the society in which it exists? What relevance does it have in social recourse?

When a decision to select one particular employee as opposed to another is made, the employer is within its rights to reject candidates with a criminal record. However, should the reasoning behind this not go further than the criminal record?

According to Goldstein et al. (2017), first impressions that are formed during the Recruitment & Selection process tend to impact candidates' behaviour beyond the recruiting phase. Candidates not selected or hired utilise the first impressions formed as customers within the market that the organisation operates. (Goldstein et al., 2017).

## **2.2 THE DENT OF A CRIMINAL RECORD: RECIDIVISM, THE EFFECTS OF RECIDIVISM, AND REOFFENDING**

A criminal record puts a dent in one's life and generally reduces one's quality of life, as highlighted earlier. Faeza (2016) states that a person with a criminal record will not be granted a visa, which means they cannot travel to other countries. This serves to emphasise how a

criminal record could be a limiting factor in the quality of life of the respective individual. These are referred to as “collateral consequences” in America, where a criminal record limits your probabilities of securing not only employment but housing as well (Carlin & Frick, 2013). Another factor is the prohibition of criminal record holders from establishing strong ties to their communities, such as hindering their access to receiving any public assistance; this can be counter-productive, as these are the very things most likely to help reintegrate an offender back into society (Mince-Didier, 2020). Such people tend to show signs of depression owing to isolation and pessimism, low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness (Mulaudzi, 2017). In many cases, when an ex-convict or person with a criminal record is unable to reintegrate into society, they are likely to reoffend. Betzi Pierce, from the National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders, relates that when clients are asked why they commit crimes so soon after release, they say that it is about boredom, hunger, homelessness, poverty and unemployment (Kiewit, 2020).

Recidivism can be defined in three specific ways: duration of time monitored; types of offences included and the inclusion of parole violations (Khwela, 2015). Urahn (2011, p.7) describes recidivism as “the act of re-engaging in criminal offending despite having been punished”. Recidivism is the criminal act of re-offence that led to reconviction and re-arrest for either the same offence or a dissimilar one (Good Therapy, 2018). According to Khwela (2015), 50 to 70% of offenders recidivate within a period of three years, although these statistics may exclude some of the offenders that should otherwise be included, as these statistics refer to the former definitions of recidivism. Betzi Pierce states that there no accurate statistics on recidivism or the habitual relapse into crime, which could be as high as 87% (Kiewit, 2020).

### **2.2.1 Effects of Recidivism**

There are various reasons for recidivism and stigma is one of them. Ahmed and Ahmad (2015) have confirmed through their study that a relationship between stigma and recidivism exists; ex-prisoners experience societal rejection and labelling because many people may not freely interact with them.

The stigmatisation that ex-offenders face leads to the “revolving door of crime” because they are disadvantaged and consequently unequipped to lead fruitful lives as part of society. (Kiewit, 2020). It is believed that imprisonment disrupts the normal psychological functioning capacity of the individual, thus disrupting their ability to reintegrate into society. There is also the possibility that prisons are “schools of crime” – meaning that offenders learn more about

criminal activities that they may use once released, thus re-offending; as well as the stigma attached to imprisonment (Rhodes et al., 2017). Betzi Pierce mentions that there are people who do not belong in prison and who are non-threatening to society, who are being exposed to hardened criminals (Kiewit, 2020).

Criminal sentencing laws commonly impose a harsher sentence or punishment to a re-offender of the same or similar crime, such as a longer imprisonment period. (Mince-Didier, 2020). Does the length of stay in prison affect the likelihood of recidivism? Rhodes et al. (2017) state that an increase to the prison sentence does not have a significant effect on recidivism, instead it may have adverse effects, depending on the offender's view of reality and of prison life; therefore, the length of imprisonment is not the only factor to consider in terms of recidivism. Recidivism, nevertheless, remains unrefined as a concept.

### **2.3 STIGMA THEORY**

Goffman (1963) introduced stigma theory. The following text will be with reference to the terms Goffman used in describing stigma:

He defines stigma as “the process by which an attribute is deeply discredited by society and in some instances, [a stigma] is also called a failing, a shortcoming, and a handicap ... It [also] constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity” (Goffman, 1963, p.12). Lucas et al. (2017) describe stigma as the processes of labelling and discrimination that lead to us–them separations, with some group members being identified as less whole and worthy than others. “Stigma constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity” (Goffman, 1963, p.12). Further, in this sense, normal identity is understood as the identity of the individual before they are stigmatised by those of the dominant group. An individual has their own identity, which they develop based on their assumptions and set of beliefs about society (virtual identity), while an actual “social identity is what the individual embodies in reality” (Goffman, 1963, p. 13).

“Three grossly different types of stigma may be mentioned: (1) there are abominations of the body – the various physical deformities; (2) there are blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid beliefs, and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record of, for example, mental disorder, imprisonment, addiction, alcoholism, homosexuality, unemployment, suicidal attempts, and radical political behaviour; and (3) there are the tribal stigma of race, nation, and religion, these being stigma that can be transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members

of a family” (Goffman, 1963, p.7 ). This study focuses on the second type of stigma as it relates to an external characteristic of an individual, which in this case is a criminal record.

Stigma inherently occurs as a reflection of power dynamics that enables stigmatization of others. (Lucas et al., 2017). As such, the terms “power”, “status” and “stigma” mutually influence each other (Lucas et al., 2017), thus creating a cycle. Frost (2011) explains that once established, social stigma manifests in a myriad of conceptually distinct related processes, such as the following:

**Structural inequalities.** – “Laws, policies, religions and other institutional structures” are intentional about stigmatising others by creating negative connotations attached to those stigmatized groups constructed (Frost, 2011, p.4). Formal rules in organisations give persons in certain structural positions the power to direct the behaviour of others. This creates an unequal access and distribution of resources, thus encouraging an accumulation and continued power to those who were previously in possession of it. The rights, freedoms and resources of the stigmatised are limited compared to the non-stigmatised (Frost, 2011).

**Stereotypes and prejudice.** –” Stereotypes exist at the psychological level and are often the product of social stigma” (Frost, 2011, p.4). Frost (2011) provides a definition of discrimination as “behaviour directed towards category members that is consequential for their outcomes and that is directed towards them not because of any particular deservingness or reciprocity, but simply because they happen to be members of that category” (p.4). For this reason, this study seeks to understand the influential element of perceptions in recruitment and selection processes, as there may be a prevalent blanket approach that stigmatises individuals with criminal records when they apply for a job, thus supporting the structural inequalities mentioned above.

**Discrimination.** Discrimination refers to unfair or unjust behaviour toward persons or a group of persons because of a stigmatizing feature (Correll et al., 2010) “to include both actions towards, and judgements/decisions about, group” (Al Ramiah et al., 2010, p.85).

### **2.3.1 The Social Power of Stigma, Persons with Criminal Records Face**

Perception in a societal context emerges as social perception. The top-down theory has described the way social perceptions form, as it extends beyond the sensory stimuli that make

up bottom-up perceptual processes. As Freeman and Johnson (2016) have described, social perceptions are not only sensitive to bottom-up cues originating in the target of perception but also to top-down factors harboured within perceivers, such as stereotypes, goals and prior person-knowledge, thus making social perception the better contender in understanding how perception plays a role in society; more specifically, in providing a channel that can form stigma. Furthermore, social perception is characterised as the combination of the top-down and bottom-up processes of perception; where the five senses connected to the physical body, integrate with the social cognitive processes (Freeman & Johnson, 2016). When one sees an object, that object is created in your brain/eye to reflect that which is happening at that moment in your environment. For example, as one sees a vehicle approaching, the vehicle develops in your brain as a reflection of what is occurring (approaching). Bottom-up theories describe approaches where (1) perception starts with the stimuli from physical touch, audio stimuli to visual stimuli, i.e., you look out onto a cityscape with your eye, for example, and perception happens when the light information is transported to your brain (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). With top-down theories, the perceiver uses learned information and experiences in sensory information building the perception (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). Perception is not simple and linear, because it includes other cognitive processes (Riener, 2019), such as attention and memory (Dolcos et al., 2019).

Cherry (2020) states that top-down processing can hinder our ability to perceive things in new and different ways, because we use shortcuts in assessing an object or environment, therefore creating bias. However, this could prove beneficial when one needs to organise information to lessen information overload (Cherry, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Contributing Factors to the Negative Social Perceptions that Exist Concerning Persons with a criminal record.**

Although the perception held about criminal record holders is negative, it is not all maliciously intended. The University of Sheffield has cited one of the effects of being a victim of a crime can be feelings of anxiety, thorough shock that such a thing has happened, and worries about re-victimisation, sometimes leading to feelings of loss of trust in one's community and in society (Future Learn, n.d.). It is important to note that such emotions may be a trauma response to contact crimes rather than nonviolent crimes that are civil in nature, such as drinking in a non-prohibited area, which can also lead to an arrest (African Reporter, 2017) and, consequently, a criminal record. Crimes may be non-distinguishable at the mere mention of someone having a criminal record; thus, easily placing all individuals with criminal records into one faction. Hadjimatheou (2016) concurs with the statement that labelling people as



criminals stigmatises them as such. She further raises concern on whether labelling can ever be justified for those whose criminal guilt has not been legally proven.

However, for an individual who has been a victim of a (contact) crime, certain emotions and perceptions can be triggered. As such, emotions and prior experience may play a role in the formation of perceptions. Zadra and Clore (2011) reviewed the evidence on emotion influencing perception and argued that the direct influence of emotion and motivation on perception helps inform efficient action choices and the avoidance of potential danger, without the need for further conscious, deliberative steps of evaluating costs, benefits and consequences. They further add that when people adjust their perceptions of the basic visual characteristics of the world (e.g., distance, slant, height and contrast) based on their emotional states, it facilitates more immediate and automatic decisions on how to act with the perceived objects and how to navigate the environment (Zadra & Clore, 2011).

In 2019, the crime rate in South Africa was reported as 35.9% per 100 000 people, according to Macrotrends (2017), with murders at the forefront of most reports, rising to 36.4% (Vecchiatto & Cohen, 2019). Contact crimes are the most common crimes to be reported. These are generally serious offences that pose a threat to society. In a conversation with radio personality, Eusebius Mckaiser, well-known anti-crime activist, Yusuf Abramjee, mentioned that crime is out of control, and we are living in fear (Sehloho, 2020). This is a common sentiment in South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (2017), the respondents to a survey conducted during the period 2015–2017 revealed that even though they experienced lower levels of crime, they still felt unsafe, with 29% of the respondents reporting feeling unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods after dark.

It is evident that exposure to high levels of criminality and widespread fear of crime contribute not only to individual and group anxieties and attitudes but also to public discourses that entrench feelings of threat and justify intergroup prejudice (Eagle, 2015). This provides the justified reasoning behind the prevalent stereotypes against people with a criminal history, and the boundary line that is created to shield oneself from people that may have a criminal history, whether violent or civil. The Bayesian inference, named after Thomas Bayes (1701–1761), can contribute more detail to this (Goldstein, 2019). The Bayesian inference proposes that “our estimate of the probability of an outcome is determined by two factors: (1) the prior probability, or simply the prior, which is our initial belief about the probability of an outcome, and (2) the extent to which the available evidence is consistent with the outcome, where this second factor is called the likelihood of the outcome” (Goldstein, 2019, p.76). Stereotyping

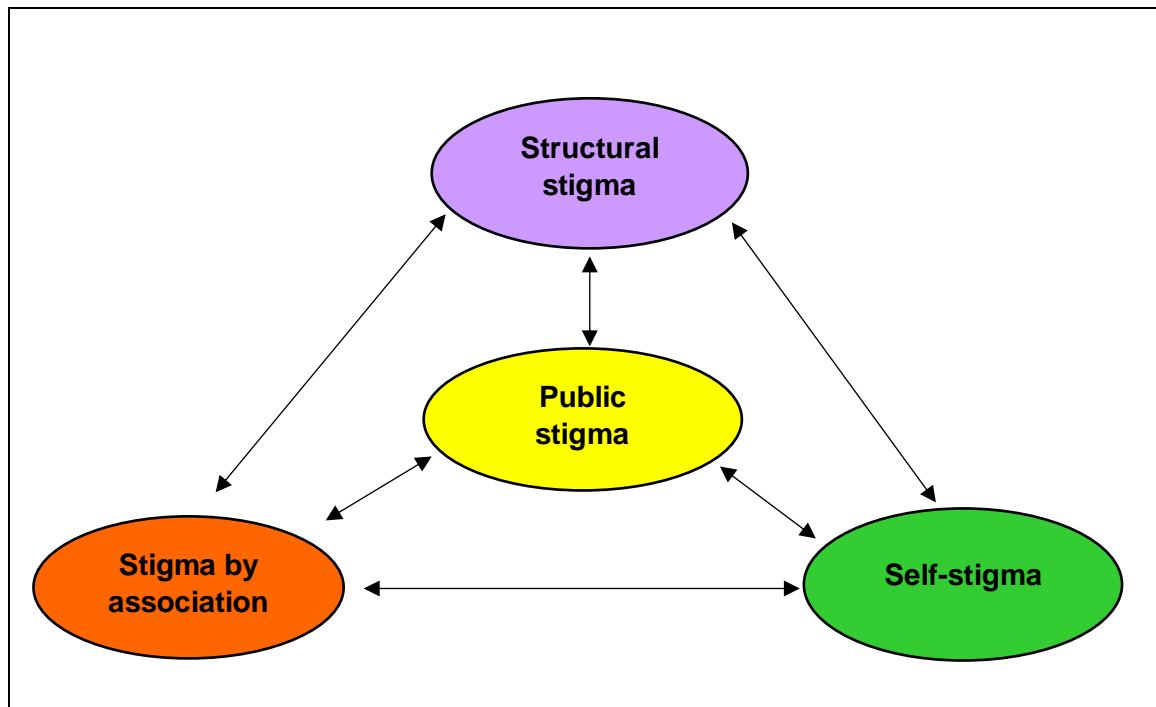
exists because, it involves categorical thinking and lessens the effort required to form perceptions about our environment and also exists because we have an innate need to understand and anticipate how others will behave (McShane et al., 2016). The existence of stereotypes and discrimination are the consequences of social stigma (Frost, 2011).

### **2.3.3 The formation of stigma as a product of perception**

Stigma represents a social construction that reflects social power; a distinguishing characteristic is identified as a mark that would be used to socially deviate from the normal structures of society, and to also decrease their value (Major et al., 2018). Stigma is “an attribute that results in widespread social disapproval – a discrediting social difference that yields a “spoiled social identity” (Bos et al., 2013, p.1). It is therefore something that is socially assigned (Major et al., 2018). It does not emanate from the individual. However, the stigmatisation does not just occur on the societal level, but also on the societal, interpersonal and individual levels (Bos et al., 2013).

**Figure 2.1**

*Types of stigma (based on Pryor & Reeder, 2011)*



The main focus of this review draws attention to the prevalence of public stigma, rather than delving deep into the other facets of Pryor and Reeder's (2011) model of the types of stigma (Figure 2.1), by emphasising perception and stigma, although there are various aspects that one would identify as relevant with reference to the model. From my viewpoint, one scenario may carry the stigma relating to the model owing to the interconnectedness of these various types of stigma. However, the main focus will be on public stigma, as well as structural stigma as a result of the former.

In relation to the preceding notions in this discussion, the idea that stigma flows from society takes the responsibility away from the individual and is driven by the idea that the stigmatising feature is as a consequence of their individual behaviour; that is, a criminal history. The individual is only held accountable through the response of society to the stigmatising feature – by lawful punishment, and the very fact – stigma. This is also referred to as the collateral consequences of criminal conviction, as Bennett (2017) describes it. The stigmatising feature though, only becomes real, when the bearer becomes aware of public stigma, as people with stigmatised conditions are keenly aware of the social devaluation connected with their condition; this awareness can be referred to as self-stigma (Bos et al., 2013). The stigmatised individual internalises the negative response brought about by public stigma and suffers harmful consequences (Corrigan & Rao, 2012).

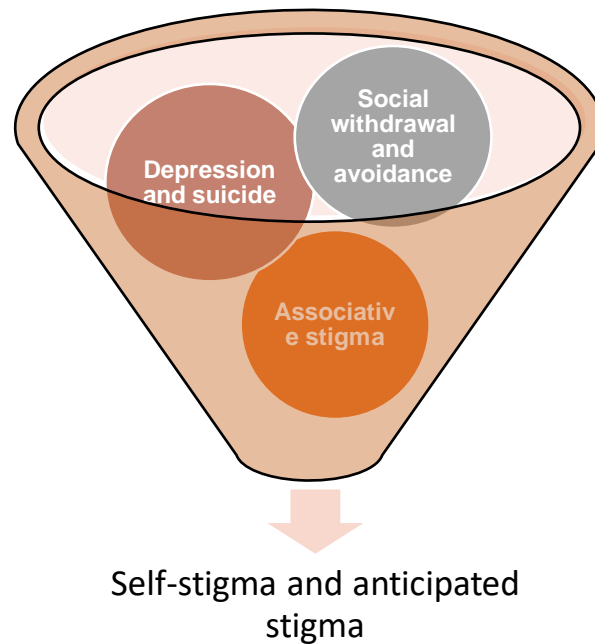
High levels of attributed personal responsibility for the onset of the deviant condition evoke anger and stigmatising behaviour (Bos et al., 2013), in that the person is responsible for possessing the stigmatising mark or condition, and this causes rage in others. Criminal behaviour is a personal responsibility, as the individual has ultimately committed the crime; therefore, a criminal record is perceived as a stigmatising feature or mark that was self-inflicted. The thought that the stigmatising mark is self-inflicted makes it ironic, and raises the question: How do you say an individual is responsible for the stigma that was decided upon by someone other than themselves? In essence, the individual did not bring about the stigma, it was prompted by the society and perhaps its standards. Society decided that a criminal record would deem one suitable to be stigmatised – alluding to the social power expressed in the definition of stigma. Such persons who have inflicted the stigmatising feature on themselves therefore receive less sympathy as people may, for example, be less willing to invest funds to find cures for diseases that are viewed as being under people's personal control, such as lung cancer, which is often attributed to smoking (Major et al., 2018). Public stigma is, therefore, able to extend as far as diminishing the health of stigmatised individuals in terms of physical and/or mental health. Pattyn et al. (2014) relate that self-stigma affects feelings of self-esteem and self-efficacy and individuals suffering from public stigma avoid seeking help from health specialists.

#### **2.3.4 How Social Stigma and Social Perceptions Affect Criminal Record Holders on a Psychological Level**

Having a criminal record lowers one's standard of living (i.e. lowers opportunities for employment), and results in a decline in life satisfaction, as well as risks for mood disorders and substance abuse (Sage, 2017). Work offers an immediate and tangible path away from poverty (Thompson & Dahling, 2019) and contributes positively to one's mental health, as unemployment and depression commonly co-occur (Nurmela et al., 2018). Another element that should be noted is that unemployment and the psychological effects trickle down to families and children. Thompson and Dahling (2019) state that children may be depressed, lonely, confused and embarrassed due to their parent's unemployment. Saunders (2018, p.22) adds that children of convicted parents experience "courtesy stigma", which is stigma by association. Saunders (2018) found that they too withdraw from society, owing to feelings of isolation and bullying. Just as changes at the family level affect a family's ability to access resources, broad economic changes at the community level affect the community's levels of income, wealth, debt, crime and educational resources (Thompson & Dahling, 2019).

**Figure 2.2**

*Blend of Stigmatising Features for Persons with a Criminal Records*



Note: The main categories of features used to stigmatise against persons with criminal records

Mental illness, a criminal record and unemployment form a blend of multiple stigmatising features – stigma is accumulative in that one stigmatising feature acquires another, thus reinforcing the prospect of stigma (Oexle et al., 2018). Alternatively, Oexle et al. (2018) state that society selects the most salient stigmatising feature; a perceiver seldom stigmatises using all the stigmatising features. Therefore, the perceiver’s background/characteristics and setting determine which stigmatising feature they apply. Although these stigmatising features do not exist in a vacuum, for the purpose of this study, where a criminal record and employment is the main focus, this section will emphasise criminal record, unemployment and mental illness. Figure 2.2 depicts the psychological effects that ultimately lead to the two types of stigma most commonly cited in this text. It explains how the community or societal perceptions and subsequent stigmatisation affect a criminal record holder’s psyche.

The experience of acquiring a criminal record (i.e., getting arrested for a crime) has great potential to negatively affect the self-concept – coupled with the “negative perceptions of community members’ attitudes, expectations about discrimination”, because of stigma, may promote persons with criminal records’ behaviours of avoidance or withdrawal (Moore et al., 2018, p.2). They further add that the avoidance of and withdrawal from situations involving discrimination is particularly detrimental to functioning, as it prevents individuals from learning

how to restructure and/or manage thoughts about stigma, serves to confirm original negative beliefs and also increases the potential for illicit behaviours (Moore & Tangney, 2017; Moore et al., 2018).

In addition, mental illness carries the potential for suicide. Oexle et al. (2016, p.2) support this notion through a study conducted and found that “perceived stigma was associated with increased suicidal thoughts among persons labelled as mentally ill or with deficits in emotional clarity”. The stress caused by stigma closely relates to suicidal thoughts (“occurring when perceived stigma-related harm exceeds personal coping resources”), mediated by social isolation (Xu et al., 2016).

From the above, it would be justified to suppose that internalised stigma (self-stigma) is equally self-inflicted and emanates from society. The self-stigma and anticipated stigma that criminal record holders experience is a result of the existing stigma in society. Most mental health problems, such as anxiety and, depression, are characterised by negative expectancies and self-concept and environment that can have victims of stigma placing unwarranted pressure on themselves or anticipating negative outcomes, exacerbating the effects of stigma on the self-concept (Moore et al., 2018).

## **2.4 The Perception of an Organisation Through Employer Branding and Recruitment**

This section mainly focuses on expanding the understanding of perception in terms of the employer branding of an organisation. It is about the way perception is used as a tool to shape the organisation’s brand as an employer and, subsequently, its attractiveness to those in the external environment. One way that an employer communicates its brand is through recruitment, and this relationship forms a significant part of the discussion.

### **2.4.1 Being the Employer of Choice**

Recruitment and employer branding are examples of the attraction strategies used by employers to communicate and connect with the external environment (Stariņeca, 2015). The preconceived ideas that individuals and/or the community has about the organisation is because of the messages that the organisation has conveyed through these strategies, as will be mentioned in the discussion below. These messages are received through word of mouth, peers, colleagues, and intentionally curated information, such as company websites and social media pages. Employers are cognisant of the impact of these activities, as they are a return of investment for their operations.

The way candidates receive and perceive employers provides a basis to consider the employer as the best choice amongst its competitors (Sirrojuddin, 2022). Employer branding uses manipulation tactics to ensure that it becomes the employer of choice. Vasco et al., 2022 express that the idea is to communicate the benefit that would increase the organisation's attractiveness to applicants. This can be psychological cues that the audience can resonate with, to attach emotions to the brand. Emotionalizing brands increases the probability for being an employer of choice (Aboul-Ela, 2016). For employees, identifying with the organisation's employer brand attaches them to that employer.

The various factors that make an employer of choice varies with the potential employees' values and perceptions of the employer brand, because of the way the brand has positioned itself to the labour market. The higher the candidate can identify or connect with the employer, the greater the chances they will apply.

The Top Employer Institute is an organisation that recognises top employers globally, based on HR best practices. It measures organisations eligibility using a survey that explores the following themes: (1) Steer, can you the business strategy and provide good leadership? (2) Shape, the organisation and work environment, (3) attract employees in terms of Employer Branding and Talent Acquisition efforts (4) Are employees well-developed in respect to their performance, career and learning? (5) Are there engagements activities that increase productivity and lastly, (6) Is there unity and agreement on the purpose, values, ethics and integrity of the organisation (Top Talent Institute,n.d).

Not only does Employer Branding attract applicants but it can also assist in employee retention. It increases the reduction of recruitment costs and the period of time that it takes to hire an individual because the potential employee is already familiar with the brand and has shown interest to be a part of it (Sokro, 2012). Employer Branding introduces one to the culture of the organisation in a way that will lead an applicant into applying for a job there.

Sirrojuddin (2022), found that potential employees are not always aware of the brand strategy but rather use experience, together with perceptions held by the greater community. In other words, others' thoughts and views on the brand play a significant role in forming the perceptions of potential employees.

To ensure that the views are favourable to an organisation's Employer Branding strategy, communication to the greater community needs to begin within the organisation, rather than externally; because, Employer Branding also means the perception of current employees. Essentially, the retention strategies need to positively impact current employees, so that they drive the Employer Brand of the organisation, through simple tactics, just as word-of-mouth. When employees are genuinely happy and engaged in their work and loyalty to the

organisation, they are able to express that to external stakeholders, for instance in interview settings where candidates pose questions regarding their views on the organisational culture of the organisation. Therefore, recruiters are key role players in driving favourable Employer Brand. The reputation of an organisation can be influenced by the information provided by the internal employees to potential employees, this is a factor the employer should take into account when recruiting talent, because potential employees ask about their future, business and workplace conditions despite what is displayed on the company website.

#### **2.4.2 The Concept of Perception in Marketing**

Perception is a psychological concept that plays a role in our daily lives and can be exposed or visible in various ways. Therefore, perception occurs irrespective of your awareness of it, affecting us on an individual level because it is centred on our senses and memory. It, in turn, builds itself towards the societal level.

In society, perception can be used in marketing. For instance, a new concept referred to as “sensory marketing” has emerged – linking marketing to psychology. In sensory marketing, all five senses may be engaged: sight, sound, smell, taste and feel (Kotler & Keller, 2016). This is marketing that engages the consumers’ senses and affects their perception, judgement and behaviour (Krishna & Schwartz, 2013). This role of sensory experiences in judgement and decision-making has seen a surge of interest in marketing as well as psychology (Krishna & Schwarz, 2013).

Marketing not only plays a role in consumer buying behaviour, it also plays an important role in employer branding and recruitment. Sivertzen et al. (2013) define employee branding as the process of building an employer identity, directed at existing and potential employees, in order to differentiate the firm from its competitors. To be an employer of choice, an organisation needs to attract employees. Recruitment communication strategy is key in ensuring that an organisation fulfils its vision to becoming employer of choice (Elving et al., 2012). With recruitment being the organisational activities that affect the number and type of applicants who apply for an open position (Gatewood et al., 2010), most organisations put time, effort and money into their organisational branding. The world operates in an economy where brand is everything and organisations are always trying to build, enhance, and defend their brands; accordingly, the brand represents a set of promises made to the consumer (Maylett & Wride, 2017). The consumer could be a potential employee and in such a case the organisation’s external reputation represents a fundamental component of the employer brand equity (the inherent value of your brand) and the potential talent pool (Mosley, 2014).



Understanding how your organisation is perceived as a potential employer can be a complex exercise, as it is influenced by many different factors, including the following (Mosley, 2014):

- The overall image of the industry sector(s) your organisation works within.
- Your relative standing in relation to talent competitors.
- The leading factors driving attraction within your key target groups.

The main purpose of this literature review is to emphasise the relationship between employer branding and recruitment, and to link this to how the external environment perceives recruitment as an aspect of the employer brand. In addition, the purpose is to contribute to existing literature by briefly looking into how influencer marketing may have a positive effect on recruitment perceptions.

### **2.4.3 Employer Branding and Organisational Attractiveness**

Employer branding and image are based on how an external individual views the organisation. The economic sector is competitive; in a low supply environment this competitiveness compels organisations to fight for the same resources, i.e., the war for talent phenomenon. Finding the desired employees is not easy, as many organisations are seeking the same skills in their employees, and true talent is scarce (Elving et al., 2012). When competition became global and financial, organisations had to search for what distinguishes them from others (Shamnot, 2014). Building a strong employer brand allows companies to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage in the labour market, as they differentiate themselves from competitors (Ronda et al., 2018).

When considering the attractiveness of the organisation to potential employees, one shortcoming that concerns employer branding is the creation of expectations that cannot be met. This may be referred to as a condition known as the “Paris syndrome” (Mosley, 2014), which relates to first time (Japanese) visitors’ “grand” expectations of Paris, versus the underwhelming actual experience of Paris, thus causing physical and mental problems. This scenario is common, with organisations selling a dream and creating high expectations of their products and/services but failing to meet these expectations. Potential candidates are also offered that which organisations cannot deliver on, thus resulting in demotivated employees and conflict within their roles. In a UK-based survey by ThriveMap (2019), 48% of 1000 workers surveyed revealed that they had left their job because it was not what they thought it would be. The distance between expectations and day-to-day experiences often grows with poor communication (Maylett & Wride, 2017). Job and/or organisational attributes such as

salary, working hours and promotional opportunities are an important element of the employer brand offering, and the benefits or value that employees obtain from these attributes are important in predicting actual employer choice (Ronda et al., 2018).

Employer branding as a tool for attracting job applicants is closely connected to Human Resources R&S (HRRS) activities (Stariņeca, 2015). Moreover, the use of social media is increasingly used in employer branding campaigns and in the recruiting process (Sivertzen et al., 2013). Frequent use of social media has provided convenient access for information on candidates during the recruitment and selection activities (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015). Communication through social media is interactive to the target group, and cost-effective but less formal than during a career fair or job interview (Kissel & Büttgen, 2015).

#### **2.4.4 The Recruitment Environment**

As stated above, recruitment comprises the organisational activities that influence the number and types of individuals who apply for a position (such as choosing recruiting sources, developing what will be stated in recruitment ads, and deciding how much money will be spent) (Gatewood et al., 2010). When recruitment is conducted, there are a number of factors that play into how the process is implemented, which may result in a negative or positive perception of the recruiter and the recruitment process of an organisation in general. As noted earlier, recruitment has an impact on the employer brand. However, behind the brand are employees who play an active role in the execution of delivering on the brand promises. An employee brand is increasingly being linked to the firm brand where those employees focus on delivering on brand promises to outside customers (Ulrich et al., 2017).

Recruitment has come in for its fair share of criticism, because for the thousands of great recruiters, there are a few that continue to damage the recruitment industry's reputation (Robinson, 2015). This section reflects on the working conditions of recruitment or, in other words, the factors that influence how recruitment is achieved within organisations, and how that affects perceptions that emanate from the external environment – mainly candidates' perceptions.

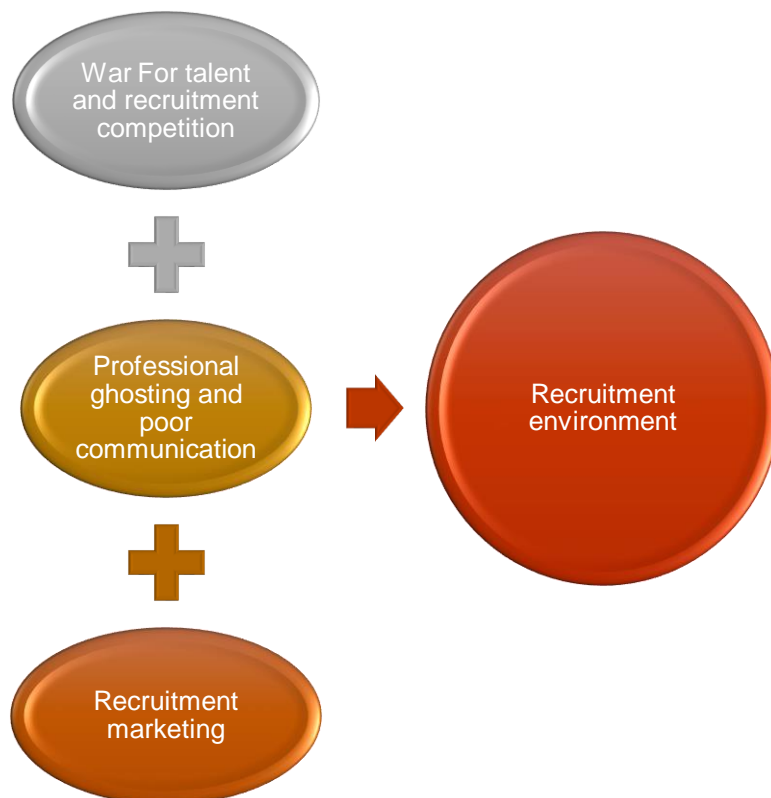
During the recruitment process, the main focus is on the person in the process – the candidate or potential employee. Interviews allow interviewers to retrieve information about applicants' competencies in order to assess person-job fit (Nikolaou & Oostrom, 2017). The employer seemingly has the “upper hand” in terms of assessing an individual; Nikolaou and Oostrom

(2017) add that interviews involve one applicant and one or more recruiters and are, typically, high surveillance.

The process of screening candidates' trustworthiness at the early stages of recruitment has become a less tedious task with the use of technology; Recruiters have increasingly resorted to the use of social media and other sources to assess candidate trustworthiness, and to screen. (Chauhan et al., 2013). Employers form their own perceptions, which are a deciding factor in who to hire (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014), through various methods, such as interviews. Interviews are known to be subjective, and ironically also the most commonly used tool to hire (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). A study conducted by Davidson (2011) also reported that impression formation starts prior to the interview, employers have a perception of candidates based on their appearance, mannerisms and behaviour. The focus of much research is rarely on the perceptions of candidates, new employees or the general external environment of the recruitment process and/or recruiters.

**Figure 2.3**

*Factors that have Influence the Recruitment Environment*



## 2.4.5 War for Talent and Recruitment Competition

Often recruiters are seen as less trustworthy and credible than members of the intended work group. One reason for this could be because they have less knowledge about work operations (Gatewood et al., 2010). The recruitment environment (refer to Figure 2.3 above) may also serve as a basis for clarifying these perceptions. The recruitment process is one aspect of HR that functions in a competitive environment, because organisations need to respond to a rapidly changing global environment by attracting and retaining top talent who can respond effectively to such an environment (Mondy & Martocchio, 2016; Newell, 2005). As Herbert (2012) states, recruitment is a “numbers game”. Recruitment combines sales, account management and HR roles and in terms of agency recruiters, their compensation is dependent on filling a role (Amundson, 2018). However, the sales environment is notorious for dishonesty, evasiveness and untrustworthiness. In an article on LinkedIn, Ratcliff (2015) notes that the sales profession is has a poor reputation, because there is no trust between seller and buyer. Since recruitment is akin to sales because you are (1) competing for talent, (2) there is a business development element to recruiting, especially in agency recruiting, and (3) convincing candidates that the position in your organisation is the best one for them (Slezak, 2015), it justifies the perception that accompanies it.

Agency recruitment is the specialised body of professionals who carry out recruiting tasks, and these services (or tasks) are provided to an organisation (Abdullah et al., 2013). Seemingly, agency recruiters are more competitive due to their working conditions as opposed to corporate recruitment, because they are mainly supported by the employer brand (Slezak, 2015). On the other hand, “corporate recruiting is treated as a zero-sum intense competition, instead of a competitive battle where two or more firms fight fiercely over high-value talent” (Sullivan, 2016). It is undeniable that competitive forces operate in the labour market to a degree (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017).

The concept of the “war for talent” brings perspective to competition in recruitment and is still a relevant force within the HR sphere. Regarding the 2018/2019 HR recruitment trends, ProSourcingSA has identified that 46% of organisations find a shortage of skills to be their biggest obstacle to attracting the best talent (Koekemoer, 2019), despite the high unemployment rate in most countries (McDonnell, 2011). The immigration of South African skilled professionals to other parts of the world such as the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada is also mentioned as a contributing factor to skills shortage because there is an increase in demand for skills. The skills shortage is caused by the attractive packages that alternative countries provide, and the country’s lack of development, and

retention strategies for this labour force. (Mateus et al., 2014). Organisations face growing competition to attract and retain top talent (Thibaut-Landry et al., 2018). During economic overflow of skills supply and/or demand, companies face increased fluctuations (Boštjanc & Slana, 2018). When for instance, there is a high labour demand, versus a low labour supply, competition rises and companies are pressured to outdo each other; similarly, when labour demand is low and supply is in excess, it's the workers who compete (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). Refined recruitment and selection strategies are imperative during a short labour supply, to ensure high-quality hires required (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017). An example of this, is "influencer marketing" which will be discussed in more detail later on.

The resource-based view, where organisational sustainability is in question, accounts for many organisations' increase in their efforts to obtain talent and these wars for talent continue to heat up (Cho & Ahn, 2018). Supporters of the talent war uphold the notion that new incumbents decrease costs by propelling profits that are higher than the cost-to-hire (Cho & Ahn, 2018). Searching within the same pool for talent generally increases recruitment competition. Ulrich et al. (2017) suggest that if the focus on talent becomes overly emphasised, it might well be counterproductive to HR's ability to optimise its impact on business performance.

#### **2.4.6 Professional Ghosting and Poor Communication**

Recruiters have been known to be poor communicators and are inclined to misrepresent roles (Robinson, 2015). Recently, the term "ghosting" has emerged within the dating and romantic domain, referring to stopping communication with another party by not responding to phone calls, text messages or emails (Navarro et al., 2020). Although ghosting has permeated the professional world, more commonly with recruiters and candidates, academic research is lacking in this regard. Nevertheless, this concept can be easily translated to poor communication during the recruitment process. It is said that professional ghosting in the workplace started out as an act by employers, however candidates have also started to adopt the behaviour (Half, 2019). It is not uncommon for new applicants to receive no answers regarding the results of job interviews, or feedback regarding their applications to jobs (Šmitiņa, 2018), with 36% students in a study conducted by Šmitiņa (2018) affirming that interviewers often or sometimes promised that they would provide a response about the results but failed to do so afterwards. In addition, only 15% of the respondents related that they had received consistent feedback from an interviewer (Šmitiņa, 2018).

In a high-demand-low-supply market, it is more likely that candidates or employees leave an organisation or stop communication without warning (Half, 2019). The wider economic climate has some bearing on how employers recruit potential workers; for example, in times of economic recession, and in areas of high unemployment, employers might have a larger pool of labour to draw on to fill their vacancies (Davidson, 2011). Research from Resource Solutions (2019) showed that 94% of candidates feel the recruitment experience affects their decision to accept or reject an offer.

Professional ghosting on the employer's end limits the candidate pool and talent network for future reference and is detrimental to the employer brand for internal and external employees; where internal employees are less likely to recommend the organisation to others (Half, 2019). There is a myriad of reasons that account for recruiters "ghosting" applicants, such as a change in priorities, an influx of internal recommendations, or a poor recruiter (Jaffer, 2019). Communication is key.

According to a survey conducted in the United States of America by Careerbuilder (2018), 82% of employees expect employers to provide a clear timeline and thorough details about the recruitment and selection process. Candidates expect recruiters to be in constant communication with them, to during the hiring process (Resource Solutions, 2019), such as prompt responses by the company; this may indicate to the applicant that the company is efficient and, therefore, a desirable place to work (Gatewood et al., 2010). As the candidate progresses to the later stages of the process, communication between recruiter and candidate increases, creating a trust relationship, as such the recruiter becomes the primary point of contact with reference to trustworthiness, for job applicants (Searle & Billsberry, 2011). Additionally, positive experiences in recruiting and onboarding enhance the ability to gain referrals from satisfied and engaged new hires, which can lower recruitment costs (Careerbuilder, 2018).

However, misrepresentations of information and poor communication can be detrimental to the trust relationship between recruiter and candidate; this can result in a negative perception of trustworthiness about the organisation for the candidate (Searle & Billsberry, 2011). A negative perception adversely impacts the attractiveness of an organisation, so impression management tactics are used in recruitment and selection, in an effort to neutralise the negative perception (Gatewood et al., 2010). An example of this, is that "recruiters may imply that applicants will be on a career fast-track" (Gatewood et al., 2010).

The above working conditions for recruiters may account for their questionable behaviour in handling the recruitment process, and also justify the perceptions held toward them.

#### **2.4.7 Recruitment Marketing Trend**

Social media are increasingly being accessed and always used in all places; although LinkedIn is the most common social networking platform organisations use in employer branding and recruitment, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram can also be used to headhunt and connect with potential applicants (Roth et al., 2013; Wilson, 2019). The arrival of the internet and growth in the economy altered consumer perspectives from top-down toward their peers and digital influencers (Resource Solutions, 2019). Marketers have adapted strategies that place emphasis on high customer engagement, especially through social media to attract visibility to their products in the market (Hudson et al., 2015). Customer-engagement acts as reinforcement for growing brands and can be done so through influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a type of social media marketing that uses endorsements and product mentions from influencers – individuals who have a dedicated social following and are viewed as experts within their niche (Chen, 2020). Social media influencers are early birds with access to adopting new ideas and trends; early adopters' opinions and approval on new ideas and products is valued (Levin, 2020). And so, many such individuals have more power in the media and influence more than media houses previously had; they attract attention that is beneficial to advertising. (Levin, 2020).

Influencer marketing can impact positively on the recruitment strategy within an organisation. Mela, for Cure Media (2019), states that using influencer marketing in the recruiting strategy allows an organisation to communicate with potential candidates in a brand new way – on their own terms – through the influencers that they have actively chosen to follow. Influencers can tell your corporate story in their channels, thus adding positive impact to the employer brand. In essence, the influencers become your job advertisers through employer branding.

There is limited scientific research on the use of influencer marketing as a recruitment tool (as this is still an emerging concept), such as whether it is indeed an effective tool in optimising the recruitment strategy of an organisation and whether it has a positive impact on the employer brand or has a direct influence at all. Organisations typically make use of their websites for passive recruitment (Caers & Castelyns, 2011).

Recruitment marketing is an emerging concept and trend within the recruitment industry (Aditya, 2019), as modern recruitment is now all about marketing (Sirin, 2018). Recruitment marketing uses the techniques of inbound marketing, developing a reliable employer brand and running advertisement campaigns for job offers (Alashmawy & Yazdanifard, 2019). Recruitment marketing is the process of promoting your company's employer brand – externally and internally – by creating interesting and engaging recruiting content and sharing it via multiple channels such as the company's career site and blog, job boards, social media, email campaigns, talent networking events and the like (Employerbrandingsa, 2017). Recruitment marketing capitalises on using alternative and new methods in recruitment search activities and in connecting with potential employees in a meaningful way (Alashmawy & Yazdanifard, 2019). It is a blend of marketing and recruitment (Mayer, 2020), where recruitment marketers focus on brand awareness, reputation management, social engagement and lead generation – attracting quality candidates that help recruiters fill jobs faster and easier (RallyM, n.d.). This is achieved through the combination of target group-specific content (employer branding content) and a recruiting marketing strategy, enabling companies to build and maintain relationships with their candidates (Talention, 2018). The role of an “influencer” would be similar to that of a recruitment marketer. However, the placement of this influencer would either be in the HRM department or the marketing department of an organisation (Mayer, 2020). For instance, HR influencers are operative as HR marketers who launched the HR Marketing Channel, which is a channel for organisations to use renowned HR influencers to share their original content on social media, strengthening their visibility in the market (Willaman, 2018). This new trend (recruitment marketing) compels recruitment and talent acquisition to transform their role by adding value to their portfolio in organisations and to also enable them to use their skills and knowledge in a meaningful way to broadening the employer brand and in attracting more candidates (Mayer, 2020). In other words, this role is not necessarily a recruiter moving into the recruitment marketing function; rather individuals with the skillset that are relevant to recruitment marketing.

One of the challenges with social media/digital recruiting is that it is about creating a positive recruitment environment by sound communication (Purvis, 2016). One study found that 74% of employers think it is easy to destroy an organisation's reputation through social media (Davison et al., 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) present challenges like negative comments expressed on social media and their effect on the organisational image, placing control of brand and content in the hands of the customers by providing them with a voice, as well as privacy related. Fournier and Avery (2011) warn brands to be cautious about social media involvement because the brands may enter a hostile environment that does not welcome brands' presence – indicating that relationship building through social media is a



complex practice. Perceptions of the use of social media as a selection tool can also influence recruitment outcomes (Carpentier et al., 2019). Social media screening often reveals information such as personal/demographical information, creating the impression for the potential candidate of an invasion of privacy (Stoughton et al., 2013). Furthermore, consumers (potential candidates) tend to be highly expressive on social media. For example, Wilson (2019) states from a study by Career Arc that 72% of candidates who have had a negative candidate experience during a recruitment process have expressed their disgruntlements on public platforms. Public platforms such as Glassdoor have provided access for customers to express concerns and dissatisfaction. Social media presence has evidently provided easy access for their consumers, therefore making it easier to express dissatisfactions and concerns (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015).

## **2.5 CONCLUSION**

The perceptions and attitudes of society towards people with criminal records have proven to be negative, adversely affecting their mental health, and activating a snowball effect of stigma in various spheres of society. Perception is, thus, centre stage, substantiated by a myriad of motives and explanations; from the functioning of perception within a top-down perspective to the conceptualisation of stigma as an independent construct. Persons with a criminal record bear a stigma that fundamentally stifles healthy progression in society.

Perception has elements of consciousness, where individuals make a concerted effort in controlling their responses to certain stimuli that can lead to stigmatization of a disadvantaged group. Just as organisations use of manipulation tactics in Employer Branding and Recruitment to attract candidates. Recruitment processes play a vital role in shifting the perception of potential employees either favourably or negatively. Their working environment affects the quality and standard of behaviour they demonstrate.

## **CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH DESIGN**

This chapter will focus on providing details of the process that was undertaken in the research design and research approach and the way in which data were collected, such as the ontology and epistemology, the narrative framework and the research method that guided the study. It will expand on these strategies that were used, as well as the reasoning that justify the decisions made during the study.

### **3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH**

Research approaches are plans and the procedures for research that span the steps from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This plan involves several decisions, and they need not be taken in the order in which they make sense to us and the order of their presentation here (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The philosophical framework is interpretivist, which is characterised by a qualitative research approach, thus this study followed a qualitative research approach. The research (problem) is explorative in nature and thus required an approach that would effectively tap into the thought processes of the participants. Therefore, this study employed the focus group method for data collection. Focus groups are used to understand informants' views and opinions (Hollis et al., 2016). Most of the items/questions were open-ended, which enabled respondents to express their ideas freely. In addition, respondents were able to explore each other's ideas, and absorb information from each other, and share new information, with which they would have been previously unfamiliar. A grounded theory analysis was used, which will also be discussed in this chapter, in an effort to further elucidate on its significance to this study.

#### **3.1.1 Ontological and Epistemological Foundations**

Ontology explains the existence and our subsequent interpretation of a particular reality. It interrelates to our beliefs about reality and the social world (Al-Saadi, 2014). The ontology of this study is rooted in providing an explanation of the existence of stigma in the views of individuals and certain aspects of their social world, i.e. a criminal history. In an interpretivist paradigm, it is assumed that reality or knowledge, is constructed by the society or events that individuals encounter (Thomas, 2011; Ormston et al, 2014). This study rested on the notion that an individual reflects the reality of the greater society, and on their understanding of their

world. Perceptions help individuals to interpret information (Al-Saadi, 2014). Accordingly, the focus was on divulging into the inner workings of the participants and how they interact with the society, with respect to their positions in the workplace. The perspective of one participant, reflects the societal level that they live in - an example of this, is that their (recruiter) biases can be said to be a general perspective of that community. The interpretivism approach maintains that understanding the meanings and interpretations of the social world and 'social actors' in that environment produces knowledge of that setting (Al-Saadi, 2014). It therefore became imperative for the study to also consider the environment and society that the target group of study functions in, by reflecting on the recruiter environment, in theory and in practical means. This reality emanating from society influences the hiring of persons with criminal records, whether it leans on the positive or negative side. The essence of the study also maintained the principles of the multiple reality (Tuli, 2010; Creswell, 2007), that ontology embraces by creating an open-ended interview guide that facilitated a free flow of information and participation. It therefore reduced the difficulty in prompting the various perspectives held about a single phenomenon.

The interview guide (appendix D) was developed with the research questions in mind, since this is qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The themes, namely: (a) Understanding the participant, (b) Understanding of recruitment policies, (c) Perception of persons with a criminal record, (d) Understanding of criminal records/laws in South Africa, (e) Perception of imminent changes in the world of work (South Africa). The aim was to primarily establish the participant's thoughts and comprehend their awareness of the self, as ordinary citizens (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) and, in relation to the roles they play in the working environment. The items were structured sequentially, as was the delivery and flow in the focus group session. This study expanded on recruitment policies as well as the recruitment environment and how that would affect recruitment decision-making and the implementation of policies within the organisation. Therefore, the imperative was also in establishing how the policies reflected the recruiters' perceptions. Another way to process the factors that practically affect recruiter's inner workings was to comprehend their understanding of general criminal law and accompanying policies, because recruitment is relatively dependent on external influences. The reason for the last theme was to establish how the recruiters' view the future of the industry but also their future in reference to their roles within the industry. These items were able to illicit the notion that recruiters do not treat background checking seriously. It is a mere part of their job. The participants had no exposure to the interview guide beforehand. Since the interview questions were an extension of the research questions, the researcher found it necessary to ensure that they were rephrased when clarity was required (Creswell, 2007).

In obtaining the data, the items would prompt a range of divergent ideas that would reflect personal experiences and encounters that the participants would have had with persons with criminal records both professionally and in their personal capacity. By attempting to understand their comprehension of policies would enable their general views outside of their job role. As people they have their own vices and complexities that were worth exploring. As per the results, the ideas were expressed in multiple ways, however, forming and reflecting a similar perception.

Epistemology refers to defining the 'knowing', the 'known' and 'knowledge' – essentially, what reality is (Given, 2008). The assumptions we have guide how we go about determining this reality, so that we can explore social behaviour (Al-Saadi, 2014). As Creswell (2007) states it, epistemology is what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified. In an effort to define and explore knowledge (reality) and the epistemological assumptions made, direct the procedure that the research may use, based on the guiding principles of an existing paradigm (Given, 2008). The paradigm used for this study, is interpretivist, justifying the qualitative inquiry conducted. The data was collected through a focus group session, where a close interaction was established. In an interpretivist inquiry, the researcher immerses themselves into the study, findings are influenced by their (researcher) views of the world and value systems (Al-Saadi, 2014) – thus providing the researcher an opportunity to observe body language gestures and to become cognizant of subtle cues to responses that could have potentially been undetected in a different setting. As a researcher, you are able to “know” what the participants “know” and the dynamic of that “knowing” by minimizing the researcher-to-participant (Creswell, 2007). Closely interacting with the data/participants increases subjectivity, however, some scholars have stated that it provides an advantage to understanding the ‘contexts of what the participants are saying’ (Creswell, 2007). The coding process revealed the stories and subjective experiences of the participants, through my interpretation and the line-to-line coding during the data analysis. In addition, the prolonged engagement that was established during the participant recruitment assisted in gaining more insight about them. This approach relies on analysis of the data, and not on objective measurement because the information derived from participants is about their subjective interaction to their surroundings (Thomas, 2011). The findings would reflect what Bhati, et.al. (2014) stated as a combination of researcher and participant inter-subjectivity. The premise of the study was centred on supporting the subjective views of the participants.

### 3.1.2 Reflexivity and the role of the researcher

Researchers within the qualitative methodology have argued that the participant's views are as a result of context rather than a mirror of reality in general (Burck, 2005). Reflexivity is the acknowledgement of your own being, perspectives and beliefs that give way to the research context, decision-making and interpretation of the research under study (Berger, 2015). Mann (2016) describes it as being self-aware enough to observe how you fit into your work.

The following is constructed in the first person, as an emphasis of the message conveyed:

I am a woman of colour whose life trajectory has been closely identified as a marginalized group. From when I was becoming conscious to social structures, through formal education and life experiences in general; most experiences have been centred around my identity and the 'belonging' to a disadvantaged community. In identifying as a marginalized group and experiencing life as stigmatized or labelled, I can recognise similarities to those persons disadvantaged by their criminal record. Although theoretically the types of stigma or reasons behind that stigma can vary; nevertheless, I am able to empathise.

My initial thought toward this research undertaking is guided by my professional experience. Having worked in an HR environment, I was able to think about some of the themes as a reflection of how I perceived the systems that governed the corporate world. My personal and professional stance contributed in forming part of decisions made during this entire research study.

An acknowledgement of this is important, to understand the driving force to how this study was constructed and conducted (Mann, 2016; Cohen, et al., 2007). Although the qualitative research approach requires the researcher to closely intermingle with the data, in my attempt to ensure reduction in bias, a well-structured script was the better option, with open-ended questions in collecting data. As a novice researcher, I had debates about whether to use a facilitator or conduct the focus group independently; with financial constraints at play, the latter was selected. I used my (Human Resources) HR/recruiting experience to conduct the focus group. The script would also hinder digression during the focus group session, keeping quality of the data in mind and the research study in general. Due to the prolonged engagement that I conducted, during the recruitment stage of this study, led me to become acquainted with the participants, thus necessitating a good balance between 'detachment' and attachment to the data and participants. This was a challenge that I avoided by using audio recordings that were transcribed in verbatim, so I do not add an excess of my own thoughts and perspectives, but rather, to extensively use those of the participants.

I believe that this study represents my views and the ideologies and perspectives of the participants in a well-balanced manner, to the best of my abilities that qualitative research would require.

### **3.2 RESEARCH METHOD**

A method is a set of procedures and techniques that guide the integration of the theoretical and practical aspects of research to determine the reality being investigated (Novikov & Novikov, 2013). The focus of this section is to describe the method that was employed in collecting the data, such as the sampling techniques, description of the participants and the ethical considerations that were made throughout the study.

#### **3.2.1 An overview of Grounded Theory**

The grounded theory method is said to be flexible in its approach in qualitative research because it uses guidelines that help researchers in analysing and interpreting data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory forms part of social research, which is a complex arm of research where limiting rigid laws and rules may hinder on the nature of subjective interpretation that is required in investigating social intricacies (Al-Ababneh, 2020).

This study emphasises on how the recruiters are a reflection of social structures that label persons with criminal records and used that as a basis to understanding their perceptions on a personal level. From this, the aim was not to pursue a “fact finding” journey, rather, it was based on comprehending the subjective views that influence the social world and communal complexities. Although initially, the researcher assumed that grounded theory is singular, it was later realised that it consists of different forms as tabulated below. Table 4.1 illustrates that grounded theory can be distinguished according to three forms, although some scholars have noted an additional one. (Sbaraini, Carter, Evans and Blinkhorn, 2011), governed by the authors who introduced these perspectives at various timeframes, namely: (a) Barney Glaser, (b) Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, (c) Kathy Charmaz, (d) Adele Clarke (Singh & Estefan, 2018; Sbaraini, Carter, Evans and Blinkhorn, 2011). It is also imperative to further consider that these perspectives are characterized by a different ontology and epistemology that is, their belief of reality and the strategies used to ‘know’ or determine knowledge of that reality (Singh & Estefan, 2018).

This instigated some arguments to unveil the contrasting features that grounded theory carry and to offer well-needed clarity about the theory. Some scholars have described it to be a positivist methodology, rather than an interpretive methodology. As such, Glaser’s theory has been categorized as a more positivist paradigm, more similarly with Strauss and Corbin, who

rely on a post-positivist paradigm (Singh & Estefan, 2018). Each perspective relies on a different approach to investigating phenomena, but as an extension of the original version. Charmaz tends toward the constructivist paradigm, which rests on a more interpretivist methodology that the grounded theory can presently be identified with and Sbaraini, Carter, Evans and Blinkhorn (2011), document that Clarke relies on postmodernism. It has been noted that selecting the best practice for the novice researcher, can be a challenging task (Chun Tie et al., 2018). However, placing the distinctions aside, grounded theory evolved with its core characteristics reserved - its evolution has had minor modifications (Charmaz, Thornberg & Keane, 2018). Therefore, grounded theory was considered a sound method for this study and used according to its interpretivist-constructivism principles.

**Table 3.1**

*Perspectives of Grounded Theory*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Grounded Theory Perspective</b>	<b>Philosophical Paradigm</b>
Glaser	Classic Grounded Theory	Positivist
Strauss & Corbin	Refined Grounded Theory (Basic Qualitative research)	Post-positivist
Charmaz	Constructivist Grounded Theory	Constructivism
Clarke	Situational Analysis	Postmodernism

An interpretivist allows free speech from participants and encourages participants to also understand the researcher’s study aims, as a means of enhancing the quality of participation and that of the research (Tuli, 2010). Transparency was key in elevating freedom of participation, therefore the study introduction furnished participants with information that would empower them to decision-making aligned to their values and beliefs and, participation was voluntary.

Grounded theory also considers a co-creation relationship between the researcher and participant Chun Tie, Birks & Francis (2018), hence a focus group route was followed. It involves first-hand collection of raw data as well as an opportunity to closely interact with the source of the data – the participants. Through this interaction, the researcher is able to uphold the principles specified by the method of inquiry selected and, promotes the ability to make meaning of the raw data and mediate it through their own perceptions (Tuli, 2010). With grounded theory, the researcher was able to make connections from closely reading the data

and discovering data that lay under the surface (Timonen, et al., 2018). The defining characteristic of grounded theory is that the theory should be grounded in the data (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2018). Timonen et al. (2018), add that in essence, the interpretation of the data gives birth to the theory. This study did not produce an emergent theory and it is not imperative that a study does so, however, from categorization of the data, it is essential that a pattern or conceptual framework that further explains behaviour is developed (Timonen et al., 2018). Furthermore, the pattern or concept that develops should add depth to existent literature (Timonen et al., 2018).

### *3.2.1.1 Adopted Methodology*

Grounded theory is a flexible method in qualitative research as it embraces dynamic methods of collecting and analysing data, such as purposive sampling, collecting the data through qualitative means and, making meaning of data through coding and generating a theory or pattern that describes perception and other constructs (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2018). Using the grounded theory, the below process was followed:

### *3.2.1.2 Purposive sampling*

When Purposive sampling is used in grounded theory, it is usually used at the first stage of sampling, and the data derived from it is analysed (Chun Tie, et. al., 2019).

### *3.2.1.3 Data collection: Focus group*

Focus groups are consistent with the grounded theory approach as a process of Qualitative research. Context plays an important role in grounded theory-based focus groups, such as the reason people hold the perceptions and views that they do, rather than the number of people in the focus group session (Wright, 2013; Timonen et al., 2019). Context may sometimes be shaped by circumstances or a particular situation - a thought more consistent with Clarke's situational analysis (Timonen et al., 2019). Focus groups enable the researcher to observe behavioural cues that may contrast with what they say, observation is also another method of collecting data during the focus group, to obtain more insight about the data (Timonen et al., 2019).



#### *3.2.1.4 Coding*

Coding is a fundamental process in grounded theory that results in the formation of categories generated from the reoccurrences found in the data. The different grounded theory perspectives use different terminology in describing the coding phases, this study used contemporary terms as related by Charmaz, initial coding, focused (axial) coding and relational statement (theoretical coding). The coding process requires a comparative analysis of the data and drawing out a variety of codes and interpretation in building the codes into meaningful statement that culminate into a theory (Chun Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). In coding, the recurring of words is labelled, as building blocks that feed into the emergent theory (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) also recommend that keeping the codes according to the words used in the data enhances the quality of the coding process. This study used the exact and recurring words used by the participants, quotes were kept in verbatim, a process that grounded theory refers to as “vivo coding” (Chun Tie et al, 2019). In addition, a constant revisit to the data increases the volume of codes that emerge, therefore providing a saturation o data that can be used to categorize data into information.

#### **3.2.2 Research Participants**

The sample consisted of HR professionals, who play an integral part in recruiting in the organisations that they work for. The group consisted of five participants who were diverse in terms of gender, age and their tenure and role within their respective organisations. The group included one HR manager, one talent acquisition specialist, two HR officers and one recruitment officer. They all worked for multinational organisations within the private sector in the Johannesburg region. The reason for selecting the Johannesburg region was that it is urban and characterised by diverse corporations and high employability, which implies that a large range of recruitment undertakings occur. The focus group was a 60 – 90-minute session, held in the Johannesburg central business district, at a convenient meeting place.

In terms of ethical adherence to the COVID-19 policy, rules and regulations, the above activities were undertaken during the COVID-19 alert level 3, where protocol was observed. Alert level 3 guidelines as instituted by the South African Government, regulations allowed for in-person interactions, under strict health protocols. Additionally, a thorough ethical clearance

from the university was conducted to ensure proper compliance to the regulations and so, approval was subsequently provided.

Prior to the session, the participants were required to sign a consent form, as approved by the Ethical Clearance Committee, that included a COVID-19 statement to ensure transparency and full agreement to participate in the study. COVID-19 screening questionnaires were provided to the participants before the focus group session, to ensure that participants declare information relevant to the COVID-19 compliance. The focus group venue was well-ventilated, with adequate spacing, in ensuring social distancing. A “no mask, no entry” directive was established, and hand sanitizers were also provided throughout the session

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

The following sections give details on the data collection method employed, including the use of sampling techniques that correlated with the criteria used to recruit participants, as well as the measuring instrument that was used in obtaining the data effectively.

#### **3.3.1 Sampling Technique**

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The reason purposive sampling was used is that the selection criteria were very specific, and a direct approach was best suited to attain the most appropriate set of participants. The sampling frame used to recruit the participants included: HR professionals (1) who are actively recruiting for white collar roles, (2) working in corporate South Africa in the Johannesburg region, and (3) with three or more years' experience in the recruitment field. A sampling frame defines the members of the population who are eligible to be included in a given sample, in the sense of drawing a boundary or frame (Given, 2008). The professional social media platform, LinkedIn, was used to recruit participants. LinkedIn is the most commonly used recruitment/social media platform and professional networking site. It can be used for various recruiting activities and for all professionals – candidates and recruiters (LinkedIn, 2020). A few days were allowed for receiving responses; the response rate took time before gaining some traction, however favourable responses were received and further arrangements concerning the focus group were made.

**Table 3.3***Participant Profile*

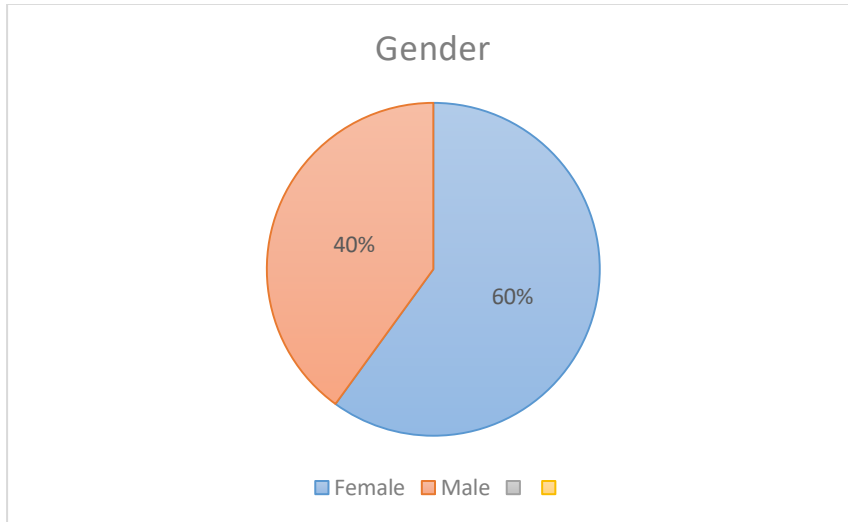
<b>PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>ROLE</b>	<b>TENURE</b>
S	HR manager	15 years
D	HR officer	5 years
O	Talent acquisition specialist	7 years
C	HR officer	4 years
G	Recruitment officer	5 years

*Participant Profile*

Five participants took part in the session. They were given pseudonyms represented by their initials. They comprised two males and three females as shown in Figure 3.1 below. Each had between three to fifteen years' experience within their respective roles, namely: one talent acquisition specialist, one HR manager, one recruitment officer and two HR officers. HR officers were the generalists within the group, with recruitment being just one of their key responsibilities, as shown in figures 3.2 respectively. The reason for using a three-year tenure benchmark is that the researcher believed this to be a sufficient period for one to have established oneself and settled into a role. The racial distribution was Africans/black, due to the high response from this particular racial group. At the time of the study, the respondents were all working within the recruitment industry in corporate South Africa, particularly in Johannesburg. Johannesburg is a financial and industrial metropolitan city in South Africa and may be referred to as the financial hub of South Africa because of its various undertakings that boost the economy.

**Figure 3.1**

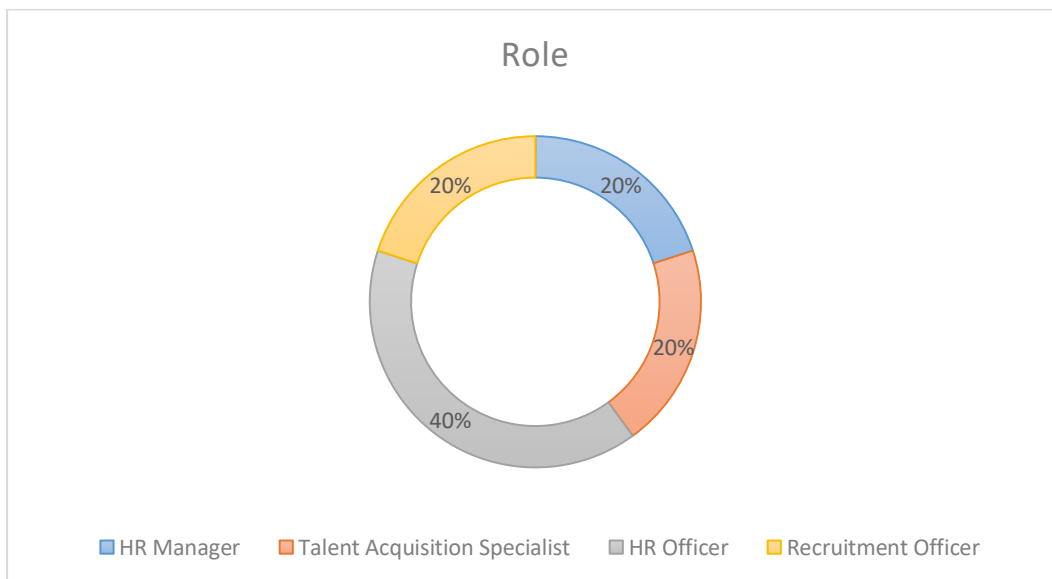
*Sample Distribution by Gender*



Note: From the 5 participants, 60% (3) were female and 40% were male (2).

**Figure 3.2**

*Sample Distribution by Occupation*



Note: The occupational distribution are as follows: 1 HR Manager (20%), 1 Talent Acquisition Specialist (20%), 1 Recruitment Officer (20%) and 2 HR Officers (40%)

### **3.3.2 Measuring instruments**

The measuring instrument employed for the study was an interview guide that was drawn up prior to the focus group session. The focus group was treated as a group interview, hence the interview guide was used to elicit information from the participants and to ensure that there was no loss of direction to the aim of the session. This came as a requirement as the researcher moderated the session. Lune and Berg (2017) state that amateur moderators or facilitators may use a standard questionnaire or script to draw out the data, however it should be adequately flexible to encourage participation from the respondents. Even so, the session was presented in a conversational style, and the participants were provided with platforms to dialogue among themselves when answering the questions.

The interview guide was constructed by the researcher; it consisted of five themes focusing on the main aims of the research problem (Annexure D). The 28 items presented emanated from the key research questions proposed in the study and general information gathered during the literature review stages (Chapter 1).

### **3.3.3 Focus Group Session**

The focus group session was recorded as a means to accurately capture and keep a record of the data for transcription and data analysis purposes. According to Given (2008), audio recording ensures the integrity of the data. The data were stored in a password-protected laptop and a confidentiality agreement was signed by the peer auditor, as the second party apart from the researcher with access to the data (field notes, transcriptions and audio recordings). The participants were informed of the process of data collection and agreed to the conditions communicated. Only five research participants were included, since the other three who had committed to attending cancelled shortly before the session commenced. Nevertheless, the researcher deemed this number sufficient, as the remaining five formed a quorum to proceed. The researcher did not consider a second focus group since the group was diverse enough to produce a variety of ideas and perspectives. A small focus group creates a platform for equal participation from the participants, where the less outspoken participants are able to speak as equally as the stronger participants (Lune & Berg, 2017).

## **3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Administrator/chairperson of the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) at the University of South Africa. Research ethics addresses the integrity of the research activity – honesty, openness and candid revelation of

a study's strengths and limitations according to commonly held standards of practice are distinctive indicators of the integrity of a study (Given, 2008). Participants were approached using a standard statement of introduction, summarising the details of the study. Consent and confidentiality agreements were provided to responsive and interested participants to sign at their own time before the session and to also limit paper-to-hand contact. The participants were informed that participation was voluntary and that they would not receive an incentive. It was also explained that all names and other biographical/identifiable data would uphold anonymity and the records of the focus group would be confidential. It was also explained to the participants that confidentiality could not be guaranteed due to limited control over information leaving the room in focus groups.

Covid-19 questionnaires were also electronically and physically distributed to the participants to ensure that Covid-19 regulations were adhered to. The session was held under level 3 regulations, which allowed for gatherings to take place under the precautions provided. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee from the University of South Africa.

### **3.4.1 Trustworthiness**

The following is a brief description of the methods used to ensure and strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. In describing trustworthiness, Korstjens and Moser (2018) state that trustworthiness is the qualitative equivalent of the reliability and validity found in quantitative studies. Since this is a qualitative study, the credibility of the research is critical in ensuring that the data and findings satisfy the integrity of the research field.

#### *3.4.1.1 Credibility*

To ensure credibility, prolonged engagement was utilised. Prolonged engagement is a method for ensuring lasting presence and consistent engagement during observation of long interviews (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Furthermore, "sufficient time should be invested to become familiar with the setting and context, to test for misinformation, to build trust, and to obtain rich data" (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher conducted telephonic pre-screening with the candidates once they accepted the request to participate in the study. The pre-screening was intended to ensure that the participants met the requirements of the study and was also to provide additional background information about themselves, their experiences and general information, although this was not formally collected for the study. Apart from closely engaging with the participants in preparation for the session, a participant introduction was included in the interview guide. This formed as additional means for building rapport with the participants.

#### *3.4.1.2 Dependability*

A peer auditor was used to elevate the dependability of the study. The peer auditor was provided with notes from Chapter 1 – to gain a better understanding of the study – and field notes from the focus group session, transcription notes and the coding notes. The peer auditor is a Clinical Psychologist who has recently obtained a PhD in Clinical Psychology from the University of South Africa and was identified as an experienced and suitable individual to contribute to the dependability of the study. These field notes served as raw data for the peer auditor on which to base their independent evaluation. The peer auditor was also provided with a confidentiality agreement to sign and adhered to the agreement in preparing the audit trail. The audit was summative as opposed to a formative approach, in order for the peer auditor to draw conclusions from completed notes. Amin et al. (2020, p.7) present the following challenges in the timing of bringing the peer auditor in: “If the auditor is contacted at the end of a project and finds issues with its trustworthiness, it would be too late to make changes to salvage the study; on the other hand, if the auditor is brought earlier, the auditor may be ‘co-opted’ into a role different from the one intended by the researcher, calling disinterestedness into question”. In light of the limitations of the audit trail, the researcher and the auditor settled on a summative approach as being best suited, considering the logistical challenges.

#### *3.4.1.3 Confirmability*

An audit trail, as well as the use of the research report, provided details about the limitations of the study. Dependability can be achieved through formative examination of the process that the researcher conducted; confirmability on the other hand can be achieved conducting a comparison between the product and the emerging data and interpretations (Amin et al., 2020). Confirmability challenges the subjectivity of a research study, considering the qualitative nature of this study. However, Charmaz (2006) advises that a qualitative researcher commonly uses language that reflects who they are, therefore in addition to the above, the grounded theory approach integrated much of the language and terms used by the respondents, as HR professionals, in analysing the data, as well as the researcher’s interpretive language. The intention is not to become derailed from the meaning of the data collected.

#### *3.4.1.4 Transferability*

A thick description of the research approach, methodology and sampling is provided. In addition, notes depicting the setting of the focus group session and its pros and cons are provided. This will feed into the reflective notes (memo-writing) that will assist in deriving the

theory. The qualitative researcher's responsibility is to "provide thick descriptions of the setting, subjects and other persons involved, quotes, and other data compelling interpretation and synthesis to position the reader to (if deemed applicable) transfer the findings to their own context" (Amin et al., 2020).

### **3.5 DATA ANALYSIS**

The grounded theory approach was used to analyse the data, where coding was the key process for developing an overview of the general perceptions derived. As previously mentioned, a peer auditor was also used once the data were coded and analysed, to solidify the accuracy of the methods used to analyse the data. The peer auditor is a recent PhD graduate in Clinical Psychology, the researcher deemed the peer auditor as a reliable candidate to assist with elevating the credibility and dependability of this study. The materials presented to be audited were the raw data, transcriptions, audio recordings and the coded information.

Transcription software tools were used to transcribe the recordings from the focus group session. Although the transcriptions were not a 100% accurate, the program provides editing tools to correct any errors that occur. The researcher took the line-to-line approach in analysing the data, to closely assess the main concepts/codes that emerged from the session. "Line-by-line coding works particularly well with detailed data about fundamental empirical problems and processes whether these data consist of interviews, observations, documents, or ethnographies and autobiographies" (Charmaz, 2006, p.50). A three-step coding process was used as adopted from Charmaz (2006), namely: (1) initial coding, in this stage, I used the main ideas that were conveyed from the discussion. All the data that was used was in verbatim to the participants' words, in avoidance of deviating from their true meaning; (2) focused coding, to achieve this stage, I made sense of them by grouping together the main ideas into one and; (3) relational statements, were related to what was said and interpreted, and I merged the two to develop the statement to form a whole that gave meaning to the responses. Once coded, the themes were used to develop the pattern through repetitive words and phrases.

The peer auditor is a recent PhD graduate in Clinical Psychology that the researcher deemed suitable to assist with elevating the credibility and dependability of this study, especially since the researcher is a novice. The materials audited were the raw data, transcriptions, audio recordings and the coded information. The peer auditor was provided with a week to check the documents provided and how they correlated with the analysis.



### **3.6 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter was dedicated to providing a description of the research design and the methodology used to fulfil the aims of the research. The ontological and epistemological foundations were discussed as insight and acted as a justification to the subsequent undertakings for the research, such as the research method, particularly defining the ontology and epistemology of the interpretivist paradigm, and the connection to this research study. The study used contemporary methods and procedures for sampling - more specifically, purposive sampling using professional social media platform, LinkedIn and obtained data using the traditional in-person focus group. Ethical considerations also provided a foundation for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. The study addressed ethics by adhering to the ethical protocol provided by the ethics committee, consent was provided to all parties concerned. The global pandemic, COVID-19 was a challenge that could not be undermined, therefore the necessary precautions factored in to ensure the safety of all participants.

## CHAPTER 4 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This chapter details the findings of the study, in table form, coupled with a brief discussion of the sub-themes that emanated from the data collection. This is followed by a thorough discussion of the meaning inherent to the main ideas found in the focus group.

### 4.1 FINDINGS

The research instrument was devised to elicit the true feelings and thoughts of recruiters when they recruit, as well as for recruiters to divulge their understandings of the role that they play in the organisation and the importance that they perceive their job to hold, as well as to unpack their personal biases that play a role in recruiting activities. The themes for the study were derived from the research instrument, and further refined to reflect the main ideas found from the focus group. The themes provided the foundation for the sub-themes that represented the participant responses. In Grounded Theory, the labels given to each stage of coding are not to be excessively scrutinized, because the primary goal remains: to expand the data (Timonen et al., 2019). The core premises for this study were that recruiter perceptions are the main obstacles to the recruitment of persons with criminal records. It was further presumed that the processes and procedures put in place in organisations pose as a contributing factor to this notion as well. Therefore, the research questions addressed were as follows: (1) what are the perceptions of recruiter's persons with a criminal record? (2) What is the impact of the socio-demographic factors that affect persons with criminal records? (3) What challenges do recruiters face in organisations?

From the questions posed to the participants, line-by-line coding was used in analysing the data, Charmaz (2006) advises the process as a method to find the main words, repetitive phrases and ideas expressed by the participants. These main ideas were used to determine the sub-themes. Each sub-theme was placed under the theme that it closely represented. This technique can also be referred to as categorizing codes (Charmaz et al., 2018). These sub-themes are explained below, with reference to some of the responses from the participants. The respondent's names have been given pseudonyms according to their initials as well as their job titles as a reference to the participant profile previously mentioned on table 3.2.

Theme 1 is characterised by Recruitment is a purpose. The reason for this section was to determine the level of engagement that recruiters have towards their job and to learn more about the recruiters – about their view of the function of their job as gatekeepers. The

researcher deemed it important to know more about the recruiters on a personal-professional level, as it is their perceptions that are being investigated, to build rapport on their thought processes and act as an icebreaker at the commencement of the session. The sub-themes discovered here was the concept of changing people's lives through recruitment; accordingly, that respondents value this aspect of their job.

**Table 4.1**

*Recruitment is a purpose*

Theme 1: Recruitment is a purpose
Sub-themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Recruitment changes people's lives and purpose</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Recruitment is sales-driven and overlooked.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Interviewing, gut feel, discernment used in hiring.</i></li> <li>▪ <i>External factors play limited role in hiring decisions</i></li> </ul>

***Recruitment changes people's lives and purpose***

There was a general consensus among the recruiters in terms of the level of enjoyment in their work. Their views were somewhat similar when reasoning was related to the purpose of the job. All five participants reported that they found their job to be more than merely placing a candidate in a job; rather they saw it as a purpose and that they were acting as change agents in people's lives, and positively contributing to their livelihoods.

See for example the response below:

*C – HR Officer: I do I think it's very nice when you try to get a candidate that fits a particular role that you're looking for, and if you and our role in recruitment is just seeing that they are within you know, this person would fit the culture with the team and the ideal candidate. So I really do enjoy that process. It's for me, it's changing people's lives. And I don't just see it as a job, but, you know, purpose as well.*

*D – HR Officer: I'm making a change in people's lives and actually convincing them to come to the company, and they actually enjoy it whilst they're on their journey.*

***Recruitment is sales-driven and overlooked***

Although they all shared these sentiments, they did, however, rationalise the external environment's view of their industry; with two out of the five, expressing thoughts around the industry being sales-driven. They were the more seasoned recruiters in the group and were able to reminisce on how the recruitment function has taken shape and transformed over the last few years. In their view, this lessens the respect that people will have for it.

See for example the response below:

*S – HR Manager: I think initially, recruiting was for people, people. And I think over time, it's become a business. It's become sales. The people aspect diminished over time.*

*G – Recruitment Officer: I think organisations have the recruitment process, but they don't understand the role of recruitment. So that's about the talent acquisition. But in actual fact, it's not. It's just filling in gaps in the organisation, they just do recruitment for the purpose of having bums in the seat.*

The remaining three participants were able to concur with this sentiment but failed to substantiate it in a direct manner. Together with the other two, they expanded on how much the industry/function is overlooked and undermined and the fact that many people (both internally and externally) have had negative experiences with the process. Firstly, the notion was that most people (both internally and externally) have had negative experiences with the process and are therefore more prone to have a negative view of the recruitment function. Secondly, little value is placed on the recruitment function.

See for example the response below:

*O - Talent Acquisition Officer: I think people really undermine it, not only external people, but people within the field as well. They undermine the recruitment element to it. I think it's overlooked, and recruiters are just seen as administrators that bring in talent.*

*C – HR Officer: I would say it depends on the manager. And their experience of the process, as well as the profit rate with regard to maybe the talent acquisition issue and how the process goes, because if, let's say, I had a good experience, and my recruitment was seamless, I would have a positive picture around the whole*

*recruitment process. And maybe if I had two candidates that were ultimately was successful, and they didn't do anything, right, wrong very well, they were around, I wouldn't see a problem with recruitment process. But there's so many factors in the recruitment process that tend to go wrong in a way that can have a negative impact on managers, and even people in general.*

### ***Interviewing, gut feel, discernment used in hiring***

The respondents conveyed the information that they use interviews and other methods of recruitment to determine the best candidate; however, all five concurred that interviews are not enough in determining the suitability of a person, and they would therefore need to use their personal intuition and gut feel to reach a decision on whether the person would fit well into the organisational culture. This brings light to the skills that they all concurred would be critical in recruitment; these are mentioned as being able to discern the authenticity of a candidate beyond the interview and having people skills.

See for example the response below:

*C – HR Officer: And I understand you might be nervous on the day, but I can only see past that. You know, and I always say don't judge a person by the interview.*

*G – Recruitment Officer*

*: So, so for me as an interview, it's based on my own judgement, you know, to say sometimes it could be wrong because it does not have a duty, is not guided by anything. I think it could process by itself. It's bias.*

### ***External factors play limited role in hiring decisions***

Two respondents relayed that they do not excessively regard external factors when making a recruitment decision. While the remaining three mentioned that the closest external factors used for hiring were references and the economic conditions when an offer is made; these played a role in their recruitment undertakings because they form the total reasons when making a decision and you may find red flags that you may have missed.

See for example the response below:

*D – HR Officer: It would be a lot of things, so like external things would be like if you do references and there's already a red flag there or there's certain questions that you actually like to probe more on and you didn't get that opportunity to do so*

*S – HR Manager: The only thing you consider is to say ... the inflation rate when you have to make an offer.*

Theme 2 is characterised by Understanding of recruitment policies focused on the recruiters' knowledge about the recruitment policies within the organisation. Since recruiters use the guidelines that the policy provides, their views on the fairness are essential in understanding their implementation of the policy.

**Table 4.2**

*Contravention of Recruitment Policies*

**Theme 2: Contravention of Recruitment Policies**

**Sub-themes**

- *Recruitment is important, but undermined*
- *Policy partially fair – contravention occurs*
- *Recruitment and discrimination policy link only on paper, disconnected from practice*
- *Business meets societal needs*
- *Criminal record discovered post interview*
- *Further investigation of criminal history*
- *Labelling and judgement of persons with a criminal record*

***Recruitment is important, but undermined***

The recruiters felt that their role in the organisation is important, although management does not perceive it that way. The respondents all reported that management does not always follow their advice when making a hiring decision, and therefore management has the final say. Three out of the five respondents maintained that they were seen as administrators rather than recruiters who play an advisory role. Only two of the respondents reported that the role had become strategic and advisory; therefore, they were able to make pivotal decisions in the hiring process.

See for example the response below:

*O – Talent Acquisition Specialist: I think recruitment and selection has grown over the past few years, it's no longer just getting a bum in the seat. You can kind of structure it the way you want to structure it. So I become a bit more strategic in terms of my recruitment and selection role where I have to sit with business and talk about, you know, do we still see this role relevant in this year?*

**Policy partially fair – contravention occurs**

The respondents relayed that the policy was partially fair, although violation of the policy occurred. Most of the respondents alluded to the notion that management undermines their role/function, thus making hiring decisions that do not always uphold or comply with policy or the guidelines provided.

See for example the response below:

*S – HR Manager: The policy and practice at times are two different things. So they'll have the people, and they'll come up with whatever excuses not to follow.*

*G – Recruitment Officer: It does what everyone from a disability, it's very important. So I commend you for that, that the policy that you make good doesn't discriminate against anyone. And then also the recruitment policies based on the law like you, you implement it in your eyes and all those conditions.*

*C – HR Officer: So I would say, it was fair to most, I would say, if I could raise the other 60%. But there was that 40% grey area with evidence that they want someone they could pull a favour.*

**Recruitment and discrimination policy link only on paper, disconnected from practice**

Four of the respondents conveyed that their organisation did not have a discrimination policy, with one reporting that it did exist, but was mostly integrated into the recruitment policy. Four of the respondents concluded that although the discrimination policy did not exist, it was important in terms of ensuring representation, but would not make a difference because policies are contravened.

See for example the response below:

*O – Talent Acquisition Specialist: I think on paper, if I'm being honest, they are linked, but practically it's not really they don't really give an example. So the recruitment policy would be strict, but maybe in a particular case it wouldn't necessarily be so because we are not meeting targets or anything like that or there's not a lot of representation. The easiest way to get your presentation is from the recruitment process.*

If there is no discrimination policy, there is no benchmark to ensure that discrimination is alleviated, signifying that contravention can easily occur.

### ***Business meets societal needs***

Although there are contraventions of the recruitment policies, the respondents believed that the business does meet the needs of society in terms of providing jobs.

See for example the response below:

*G – Recruitment Officer: I think it does respond to the needs of society as much as possible in the environment. And I just think that, you know, with everything you cannot one hundred percent get it right, because of some loopholes, but it does correspond to, like, the society.*

*C – HR Officer: Yeah, I think it speaks to that, because at the end of the day, recruitment process or process and so people in the real world, people do call in favours, they do maybe put in a CV directly to their recruiter to say, consider this person, my family member, whatever, it has happened in the real world.*

### ***Criminal record discovered post interview***

All recruitment within the organisations where the respondents worked followed a similar process, where the background checking stage occurred towards the end of the recruitment process. All five respondents concurred that a criminal record is discovered after the interview. One of the respondents further expanded that most preferred candidates go through thorough checks after which they will be offered the job, with terms and conditions related to the final criminal check report. Another issue that was noted was that dishonesty about the possession of a criminal record leads to dismissal.

*O – Talent Acquisition Specialist: We uhm, give the person the opportunity to be interviewed, you do the necessary assessments, and then you only decide to do the proper checks for the criminal record.*



### ***Further investigation of criminal history***

One candidate mentioned that occasionally a criminal record is revealed during the interview, which provides them with an opportunity to delve into the issue thoroughly, while the remaining four respondents relayed that they probe once they have conducted background checks. Another respondent reported that they at times enquire about criminal history during the initial screening, however, should the candidate have a criminal history, they still proceed with the candidate, depending on context. All the respondents reported that extended investigation is conducted for preferred candidates especially, before an offer is made; if the offer is made before the results, some terms and conditions would be put into place.

See for example the response below:

*C – HR Officer: Okay, so with the criminal record, most of the time, they will need more information around the actual offence. If they really want you to say, okay, what's happened, then you tell them, and then they'll also need like supporting stuff, because I think when they do pull up the criminal record that is like a snippet from steps that says what the offence is.*

### ***Labelling and judgement of persons with a criminal record***

The respondents mentioned that a candidate's or employee's criminal record is regarded as confidential by HR; however, because some information does have a tendency to leak, this can cause some corridor talk, labelling among co-workers and judgement regarding the criminal record. Questions relating to the nature of the crime also arise. One respondent mentioned that some managers are likely to victimise their subordinates with criminal records as a means to abuse their power within the working environment. This can lead to self-stigma and feelings of threat to their job security

See for example the response below:

*D – HR Officer: We discriminate against people with criminal records already. We label them. We don't believe in them changing. We still have a long way to go.*

*G – Recruitment Officer: I feel like, the problem is we working with people, I think once you have a criminal record, there's always that thing of flows to others, because it's only supposed to stay with the recruiter. And the manager recruiting, it doesn't have to go out of the room. But you know, people, speaking, and sometimes a manager, you*

*know. And this type of thing, they don't have EQ, they can actually use this in a blaming game. And don't forget, you have a criminal record*

*C – HR Officer: Oh, just remember, I'm doing you a favour, and you owe me and it's not that they owe you.*

Theme 3 is about the Perception of persons with a criminal record focused on determining the thoughts around those with the record. Recruiters are people first of all before they are their occupation, therefore it is vital to ascertain their personal ideas regarding people with criminal records.

**Table 4.3**

*Perception of Persons with a Criminal Record*

**Theme 3: Perception of persons with a criminal record**

**Sub-themes**

- *Serious offence*
- *Conviction and arrest make a criminal*
- *Fear and concern when criminal record is discovered*
- *Inquisitiveness when criminal record is discovered*
- *Second chance given, people can change*

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***Serious offence***

All five of the respondents stated that they consider a serious crime such as rape and murder as true crimes.

See for example the response below:

*S – HR Manager: I think rape, murder. As much as I don't want to judge that person, but I want to protect everyone else around them.*

***Conviction and arrest make a criminal***

The respondents all agreed that a conviction or arrest indicates that the person committed a serious offence and may be guilty of the crime, and they therefore consider this person a

criminal. All five of them mentioned that a wrongful accusation might lead to a conviction and an arrest, however there are no guarantees.

See for example the response below:

*C – HR Officer: Even though it's someone that just broke the law, to the extent they would be maybe arrested, or yeah, I have a record. That would be someone that is a criminal, but obviously, there is degrees to criminality as well, depending on the crime.*

### ***Fear and concern when criminal record is discovered***

The respondents provided mixed views regarding the first thing that comes to mind when they hear of someone's criminal record. Two of the respondents felt more sympathy and fear around how they would be treated within the organisation, with judgement being one of the behaviours mentioned. The remaining three, however, felt that they would be fearful of the criminal record bearer, and would be concerned about the nature of the crime committed. Two of the respondents responded on a professional level, somewhat indicating that they are in harmony with their jobs.

See for example the response below:

*O – Talent Acquisition Specialist: It's fear the first thing it's already fear and red flag.*

*S – HR Manager: I'm like, I hope they're not gonna, I hope they're gonna hire that person without having to do a criminal background and base the decision on the criminal background.*

### ***Inquisitiveness when criminal record is discovered***

The fear and concern relayed above results in questioning the criminal record and whether the person would be suitable for the role or not. Another concern relates to fear of reoffending, which the respondents conceded they also consider when they hire someone with a criminal record.

See for example the response below:

*O – Talent Acquisition Specialist: The report comes in and gives you that red flag that this person has a criminal record. Oh, my gosh. What did you do? The same things that scare you, you already judge them on and not in good way.*

*S – HR Manager: I would think, OK, this guy at some stage, they got in trouble with the law. But that doesn't mean I have to now discriminate against them.*

### **Second chance given, people can change**

One recurring theme throughout the discussion was that persons with a criminal record deserve a second chance, because people can change. When asked whether they believed that persons with a criminal record should be welcomed back into the organisation and society, they collectively agreed. The most common narrative was that some criminal offences are long-standing, where the person would have committed these offences when they were younger; therefore, the probability that they had changed was high. Another reasoning was that recidivism could be lessened should persons with a criminal record be given a second chance.

See for example the response below:

*G – Recruitment Officer: A person's gonna have a criminal record from 10 years ago, you know, we could be 26 ... when you're 16, 10 years ago, you can, you know, it does not speak to who we are at all, not even one bit. I believe everyone deserves a second chance.*

Theme 4 was centred around the recruiters' general understanding of how criminal record laws function in South Africa and to also ascertain whether they can identify various degree of offenses, to determine the factors that influence their perceptions of persons with criminal records.

**Table 4.4**

*Degrees of Criminal Offences*

**Theme 4: Degrees of Criminal Offences**

**Sub-themes**

- *Unsafe*
- *Limited knowledge on offences*
- *Severity of crimes plays a major role in hiring*

***Unsafe***

Four of the respondents stated that they did not feel safe in South Africa, due to the excessive gender-based violence, especially against women. However, one of the respondents did not share this sentiment, but rather feared for others.

See for example the response below:

*D – HR Officer: Not really safe; and you know, our country, the state of the country, at the moment when it comes to gender-based violence and all of that.*

*O – Talent Acquisition Specialist: I don't now feel safe at all. And I'll tell you why. Right. Because people know so much. You didn't know who's in and who's honest about what. In fact, people can get to be police officers or agents and then never believe them.*

***Limited knowledge on offences***

All five respondents were not able to give any of the finer details relating to the different types of offences, indicating that they have limited knowledge of offences under the law. They reported that some offences can lead to jail time while others lead to fines. Therefore, they are aware that there are various levels and types of offences. In light of this, they are able to discern which to disregard against those that cannot be considered at all in hiring.

See for example the response below:

*C – HR Officer: If it's something like I would say, we all have, I would say, it's difficult because we all have different degrees of what is serious and not so serious. But for*

*me, like, let's say, I would compare, let's say, someone who attacked someone with what do they call it grievous bodily harm, or something like that? It's serious for me.*

### **Severity of crimes plays a major role in hiring**

All the respondents concurred that the nature or degree of seriousness of the crime plays a major role when a criminal record holder is being considered for a role. Another factor taken into consideration is the industry that the person is being considered for. For example, all five respondents mentioned the financial industry as a non-negotiable for someone who has a criminal record.

See for example the response below:

*C – HR Officer: Well, that plays a huge role. So, for example, if it's been fraud before or anything like that, it's very hard for us to take you in the financial industry because you'll be dealing with a lot of money and anything could go wrong. I would have known that you do have a criminal record and you would have committed fraud.*

### **Table 4.5**

#### *Imminent Changes in the World of Work (SA)*

#### **Theme 5: Imminent changes in the world of work (SA)**

##### **Sub-themes:**

- *Pandemic caused a major shift*
- *Improvements required in remote work*
- *Improvements required in remote work*
- *Reintegration of persons with criminal records needs further probing*

Theme 5, the main focus of this theme was to ascertain the trends that recruiters find most important, as well as those that affected them instantaneously and most evidently. This section reveals that remote work is the biggest trend that has affected them so far. Consequently, the criminal record as a topic has generally received limited attention; nevertheless, the general feeling was that it should receive more attention. Respondents reiterated their positive stance towards reintegrating persons with criminal records into the job market.

### ***Pandemic caused a major shift***

At the time the research was conducted, four of the respondents were working from home and could attest to the fact that remote work had caused a major shift to their working life. All the participants made reference to the Covid-19 pandemic, which was understandable. One of the respondents who was still in the office shared similar sentiments, because they worked with people who are working from home. The respondents working remotely reported that the concept is still in its infancy and that some colleagues are not too pleased about it because it has compromised work/life balance on a great scale; such as the requirement to be available at all times. However, one of the respondents added that it increases productivity.

See for example the response below:

*D – HR Officer: The world of work, I think it constantly changes. It has changed drastically since Covid, as it has, of course; [people] from working from home are more productive.*

### ***Improvements required in remote work***

Although four of the respondents were pro-remote work, they could agree that remote work needs some refinement because it had certain loopholes that make it a bit difficult to implement.

See for example the response below:

*G – Recruitment Officer: Not everyone is akin to some old school, some just don't like the policy, so it's a struggle. So it's been good and positive in that sense, because now we are enabled to work from home. Not everyone is happy about it, but as finding the rules around how you work, and still be productive and stuff, but I think also, when we got into this whole thing of working from home, there were no real rules in place.*

### ***Reintegration of persons with criminal records needs further probing***

All five respondents reported that they had not given much thought to the hiring of persons with criminal records. All five expressed that it is a discussion worth exploring further in order for it to become common practice, as opposed to being off-limits. One respondent added that education around rehabilitation programmes can assist in supporting the reintegration of persons with a criminal record and that normalising this can reduce stigma.

Response below:

*D – HR Officer: No one has actually thought about it to say, OK, what if we give them a chance? What do we really think about people with criminal records, in which cases the overlook, in which case this is non-negotiable and what also happens to them as well? So I think it's it also when I walk away thinking about this differently than I did.*

*C – HR Officer: Maybe if correctional services show us a successful rehabilitation program. Or even the set of people who have criminal records and happy working in the world safely with no hiccups and whatever. I think people would be more open to I say people with criminal records are also being taken back into the workplace. I think the problem is, maybe our recruitment practices are also a bit outdated. And when people do their recruitment policies and stuff, they don't look at maybe those types of things about what is the criminal record.*

## **4.2 DISCUSSION**

The study found that recruiter's position is mostly positive, with negative attitudes emanating mainly from management. The following section provides a brief discussion that begins with the recruiters' engagement levels as they pertain to their job and how that affects the hiring decisions; the results concerning the two main research questions; a discussion that summarises the results of the study; and, finally, the concluding remarks, also referred to as the emergent theory.

The participants showed great enthusiasm for their jobs and had strong opinions on the importance of the role played by the recruitment function. They found value in their roles and expressed what seemed to be high job satisfaction. The respondents also showed empathy toward the stigmatisation of criminal records, almost signalling that given the authority to hire, they would hire persons with a criminal record. Engagement is an important aspect of one's job as Karanika-Murray et al. (2015) state that employees who are strongly and positively engaged in their work show energy and dedication to their work.



Although the above statement may be true, the respondents conveyed that they view their job as having the purpose to change people's lives; however, the industry is undermined and overlooked by managers and the external environment. The reasons attributed to this disregard is negative experience of the process by management. Participants conceded that the people aspect of recruitment has diminished over time, and that it has become sales-driven and typically about placing a person even though that ideology of the organisation does not personally resonate with them.

#### **4.2.1. Research question 1: What are the perceptions of recruiters in hiring persons with criminal records?**

Research question 1 was concerned with determining the views of recruiters on persons with criminal records and how these perceptions affect their consideration of these individuals. From the results, it is evident that recruiters deem their job as a calling and purpose and thus believe that persons with a criminal record should be given a second chance to reintegrate back into the job market and society at large.

However, the sentiments expressed by the participants were that most people would not share similar attitudes. This is in respect to their adequate knowledge of offences to know which offences would be the least conducive within their respective workplaces.

Therefore, the assertion was that persons with a criminal record would be judged and ostracised in the working environment from all occupational levels, with managers using the criminal record as a stigmatising feature to oppress these individuals, especially those in the lower job levels. The participants expressed more concern regarding these perceptions than regarding their own, since their perception was positively inclined.

Personal bias was a strong premise for this study, in that recruiter biases result in obstacles to entry to employment for job seekers with a criminal record. Although the respondents all stated that personal bias or gut feeling contributes to their decision-making in their recruitment activities, they do not hold stigmatising ideas against persons with a criminal record; therefore, repudiating this premise. The prediction that those with criminal records would not be well received by others created concerns as to whether they would advocate for the hiring of a criminal record holder. Having no authority to make the final hiring decision may prove this statement to be correct, in that recruiters act as service providers to the rest of the business, and are tasked with ensuring that hiring managers obtain the most suitable candidates according to their departmental needs. Furthermore, recruitment is an extensive process that requires a large amount of time, effort and financial resources. Managers generally do not like

to prolong this process and will find a means to shorten it. The study found that managers shy away from conducting extensive criminal record checks, unless for the most preferred candidate, due to the time constraints and expense involved; therefore, why would they waste time and money on people who are anticipated to be unsuitable for the role?

#### **4.2.2 Research question 2: What is the impact of the internal processes on hiring persons with criminal records?**

The respondents mentioned that a standard procedure in the recruitment process is to conduct basic criminal record checks on all candidates. Since the time and effort spent on background checks is restricted to the preferred candidates, unless you are a preferred candidate for the job, then the particular person with a criminal record is most likely to be accommodated and considered a valuable expense for an extended criminal background check. The study revealed that managers typically have a candidate in mind prior to hiring, and that recruitment activities are often a mere formality, which gives reasons to why they exclusively exercise even more effort in background checking for preferred candidates. Thus, this becomes an easier decision to make regarding the job offer, as they are able to include certain clauses in their employment contract to reduce the employer risk.

The nature of the crime is taken into consideration when a criminal record is in question, with serious crimes receiving less probability or none at all of being considered. The respondents expressed that they were aware of the threats of having someone with a seemingly serious charge or offence in the organisation and expressed that they would generally want to protect all stakeholders, and possibly their job.

The focus group discussion also revealed that recruiters receive a significant number of applications from persons with criminal records; however, every case is considered on its own merits. Some cases involving a minor offence are not considered for any role or position; this would depend on various factors such as the industry, the nature of the crime or the manager who is hiring or the period within which the crime in question was committed. The majority of the participants also stated that they would not be able to tell whether the individual has a criminal record or not until a later stage in the process – there is no reason to disclose that information in the earlier stages of the recruitment process. However, in other organisations, the organisation has a pre-screening form on which candidates are required to disclose a criminal record status beforehand. Moreover, some job advertisements vehemently exclude candidates with a criminal record regardless of the nature of the crime, thus signifying an

unfavourable element towards progression for persons with a criminal record. For example, Figure 4.1 includes an application process from a large supermarket retailer, where the initial screening process for a job application requires a candidate to disclose their criminal history. In addition, Figure 4.2 indicates a job post that explicitly states that a criminal record is non-negotiable.

### Figure 4.1

#### *Job Application Pre-screening Form*

**Do you have a criminal record, or are you the subject of any pending criminal investigation by the SAPS?**

**Have you ever had a civil judgement (credit record) taken against you or are you the subject of any pending civil judgement by the SA Revenue Services, or any similar proceedings?**

**Do you suffer from chronic illness, disease or any physical or mental disability which may affect your application for the position which you are applying for?**

**Are you willing to relocate?**

<b>BACK</b>	<b>APPLY</b>
-------------	--------------

## Figure 4.2

### *Administration Assistant Job Post*

- Fully bilingual in English and Afrikaans
- Strong organisational skills with fine attention to detail
- Excellent Customer Service skills
- Be organised and able to take direction under authority
- Excellent Listening skills
- Excellent telephone etiquette
- Strong personality that can manage heavy workloads
- Positive attitude
- Must be able to delegate and manage people successfully

#### Further Requirements:

- Must preferably reside in the Centurion or surrounding area
- Must have at least 3 years' experience in a similar role
- Have must own transport and valid driver's licence
- No criminal record
- Contactable references and accurate history

#### Package and Benefits:

- Market Related - Negotiable depending on experience
- Provident Fund
- 15 Days Annual Leave

WeBuyCars  
30+ days ago

[Apply Now](#)

### 4.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS: EMERGENT THEORY

The following sections serve to summarise all the findings of the study. This study discovered certain categories which led to an emergent theory to further determine the overall perceptions of and stigmatisation of persons with a criminal record. It is represented by figure 5.3 that illustrates the dynamic of all the factors that surfaced in the study; namely (1) recruiters have a positive perception of persons with criminal records, (2) recruiters have no real decision-making power, (3) hiring managers are against people with criminal records.

**Figure 4.3**

*Emergent Theory: Indirect Stigma*

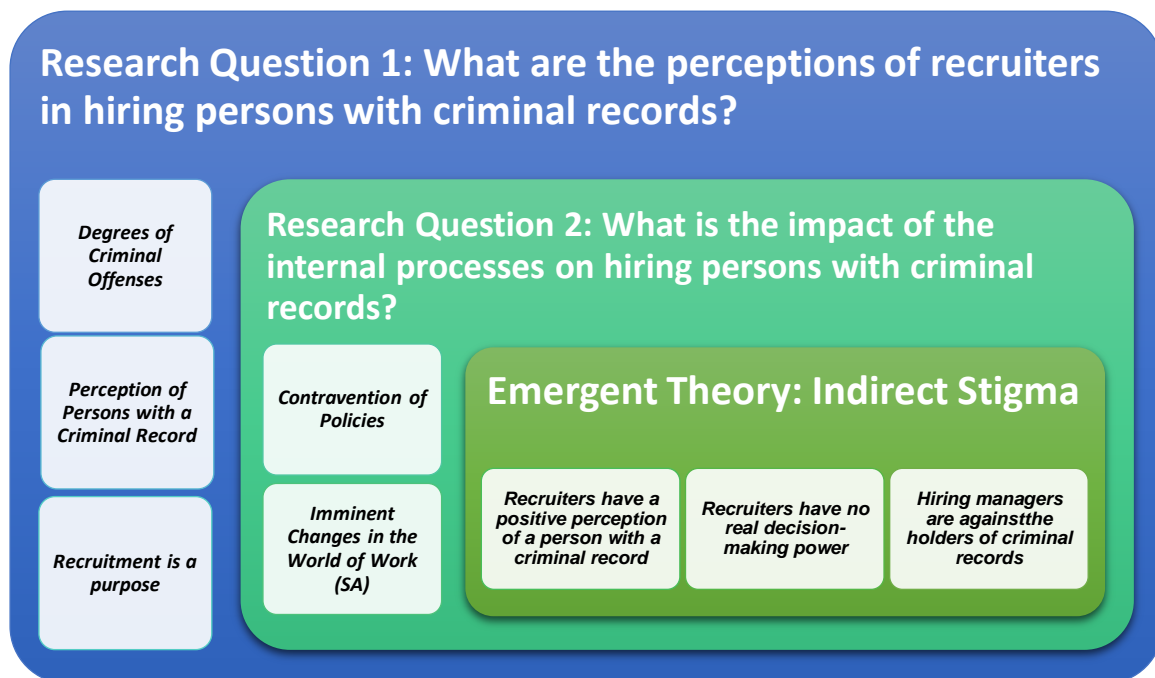


Figure 4.3 indicates the relationship that all the elements the study found and how these connect to each other; subsequently leading to indirect stigma towards persons with a criminal record. The interrelations of these categories all blend to forming the emergent theory. A brief discussion with reference to Figure 4.3 follows below.

The results reject the premises introduced in the study, that (1) individuals with criminal records are not employed mainly because of the recruiters' perceptions of persons with a criminal record, regardless of the nature of the crime, and (2) the negative perceptions held by the recruiters influence how they use the recruitment and selection process. Alternatively, the recruiters indicated a positive attitude and perception towards persons with a criminal

record, but are inhibited by policy and procedures, as well as the internal organisational environment. In addition, the recruitment function is undermined, and they do not have authority over decision-making, as discussed below.

#### **4.3.1 Recruiters have a Positive Perception of a Criminal Record**

With reference to Figure 4.3 the recruiters in this study had a positive perception of individuals with criminal records, in that they believed that everyone deserves a second opportunity and that minor or long-standing offences could be corrected because people can change. However, violent crimes may be considered particularly serious and are widely perceived as a legitimate reason to deny employment (Denver et al., 2017). This is consistent with a study by the Society for Human Resource Management (2018) which found that non-management personnel are generally receptive to working with individuals that have criminal records, indicating a 51% willingness to work with persons with a criminal record, and HR professionals showing 47% willingness. Surprisingly, in the study managers indicated a 55% willingness to work with persons with a criminal record (Society for Human Resource Management, 2018).

Recidivism occurs as a result of preventing persons with criminal records from entering the job market, and recruiters are cognisant of this, therefore advocating for the reintegration of persons with criminal records into the job market. However, owing to their limited influence, the practical implications of these perceptions, is hopelessness to the value of the role and low work engagement. Apart from recidivism, another concern is that of disclosure. The recruiters mentioned that dishonesty about the status of a criminal record leads to dismissal. This is fair, but persons with criminal records fear rejection and may refrain from disclosing until they believe it to be necessary. For them, this becomes a futile exercise in pursuit for reintegration into society both in terms of reform and the inevitable discovery of the criminal record in employment. Cherney and Fitzgerald (2016) oppose this, stating that although many people with criminal records anticipate rejection, they also articulate the importance of honesty with their potential employer.

#### **4.3.2 Recruiters have no Real Decision-making Power**

The predictions that recruiters have about how others will receive persons with a criminal record enables the stigmatisation of such persons by placing limitations on opportunities to represent themselves. Individuals with criminal records often have their applications discarded because of preconceived ideas associated with criminal records, and they are denied the

opportunity to present themselves in a positive light to a potential employer (National Employment Law Project, 2017), therefore indirectly contributing to the stigma and the barrier to entry. The participants attributed stigma to others rather than themselves, with the manager's role being that of the oppressor, rather than as partners in the hiring process. Management's disregard for the recruiters inhibits the forming of relationships that could foster change and influence in hiring decisions.

Although the participants of this study deemed their role to be important, they did not play an active role in ensuring this. In this regard, the recruitment function has thus not soundly established itself as an advisory body or strategic partner. From what the study has gathered, the recruiters' job satisfaction level is dependent on the internal organisational environment, such as the recruiter–manager relationship and overall team perceptions. They seemingly expressed high job satisfaction and high work engagement through their description of the meaningfulness of their jobs; however, as the study probed, they inadvertently gave hints of feeling disheartened and low work engagement. Their perceptions are characterised by their background and psychological functioning. Recruiters experience burnout and work pressure brought on by all the challenges, such as strict deadlines and limited costs to hire, involved in the hiring process and engaged employees often find it difficult to separate from their jobs because they have made great investments in their organisation (Ivanovic et al., 2020).

According to the work engagement model by Kahn (1990), when employees feel less dedicated and absorbed into their roles, they withdraw from their jobs and will be less likely go the extra mile. Employee engagement is a mechanism in which workers engage and motivate themselves to make use of their actions to achieve higher personal and corporate efficiency (Asokk et al., 2021).

Recruiters, whatever the level, have no real decision-making power in the final hiring decision. The power that they have is not far-reaching. Employee involvement is often identified as the employee's greater interactions or contributions in helping a company accomplish its policy document and its key goals; they do so by implementing their ideas, skills and strategies for critical thinking and decision-making (Zubair et al., 2015). Recruiters may contribute to the development of policies; however, they are unable to monitor and ensure the proper implementation of these policies, since policies are contravened as and when management deems necessary. For example, in the United States, a “ban the box” policy was developed, to ensure that organisations do not enquire about one's criminal history during the earlier stages of the recruitment process. However, a study found that most organisations have not “banned the box” and thus still probe criminal history regardless of the policy and/or law (Day,

2019). The law rejects discrimination, but that does not guarantee its non-occurrence. For instance, while some employers may express willingness to hire people with criminal records, evidence shows that having a record reduces employer call-back rates by 50%. What employers say appears to contradict what they (actually) do when it comes to hiring decisions (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). It is therefore a challenge to discern whether an individual was rejected due to their criminal record or due to their job/organisational fit.

#### **4.3.4 Hiring Managers are Dismissive of a criminal record**

Managers generally dismiss an applicant with a criminal record because they would rather hire an individual who poses little risk to the business (Day, 2019). Another reason would be the stigmatising implications it would have for the organisation as well as the time and financial resources spent on background checks.

Recruitment is a subjective process, and the results are consistent with the narrative of this study; that is, that personal biases impede the implementation of recruitment processes and also inhibit progression in changing attitudes and perceptions related to the stigma of a criminal record. The process is guided by policies put in place to eliminate the likelihood of bias but some of these policies are not implemented (Kranthi & Lakshmi, 2019). HR Policy is function as guidelines that direct people management and how people issues should be handled (Kranthi & Lakshmi, 2019). Policy and practice are not aligned and although sound, are prone to contravention. The justified flexibility provided in policies is not always used appropriately, thus endorsing subjectivity and subsequent bias. Hiring a person with criminal record is a risk that most managers are not willing to take (Day, 2019), and ideals regarding the integration of persons with criminal records are restricted and dismissed. An example of such risks includes reoffending within the working environment, and low performance and retention (resulting from self-stigma). However, an analysis of a recruiting consultancy company's records indicated that hires with a criminal history were less likely to quit, although those hired for sales positions were slightly more likely to be terminated (Minor et al., 2018).



While some employers may express willingness to hire people with criminal records, evidence shows that “having a record reduces employer call-back rates by 50% – what employers say appears to contradict what they actually do when it comes to hiring decisions” (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). The United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidelines instruct employers to consider the nature of the offence, time passed since the offence or completion of sentence, and the nature of the job sought, as well as to perform individual assessments that consider additional circumstances (Kuhn, 2018). Alternatively, in a survey of over 200 organisations’ background check policies, fewer than 1% of informants indicated that their organisation followed these guidelines (Levashina et al., 2017). The recruiters in the current study did not expand much on using the external environment or reality in decision-making. Their decisions are based on the immediate need to fill a vacancy. Their view is that recruitment in their organisation does not look beyond filling a vacancy gap that may have existed due to a resignation or otherwise. Decisions take place within the extent to which the internal policy allows.

#### **4.3.4 Perception on overall topic of discussion**

The participants shared that the topic needs further exploration because it is broad and rarely discussed fully in the recruitment space; rather, when faced with a criminal record, the “issue” is handled, and it becomes “business as usual”. Although the dynamic of criminal records is widely investigated in academia, this does not inevitably imply or suggest that it is a topic of discussion in other spaces. The literature indicates that it is common knowledge that a criminal record is a stigmatising feature; however, there is no real or actual concern to change that narrative, otherwise the topic would be broadly discussed in essential spaces that most affect the persons with criminal records. This assertion ties in with the ideas discussed above; that a criminal record is handled evasively, much like a “plague” that should rather be evaded or an afterthought. The participants believe that the reintegration of persons with a criminal record should be normalised, however, they do not believe that it is their responsibility to do so. This consistently alludes to the concept that recruiters do not have real decision-making power, or rather, do not exercise the extent of their power in order to destigmatise the hiring of persons with criminal records. This evasiveness leads to a decline in the destigmatising of criminal records, especially for minor crimes that could otherwise be disregarded in hiring.

#### **4.4 CONCLUSION**

This study achieved that which was intended. The results indicated that persons with criminal records are rejected by society, and although some are given a second chance, those with authority to do so reject the idea. Recruiters, with their positive attitudes and perceptions towards persons with criminal records do not necessarily facilitate the changes required for their reintegration into society. This study asserts that as the gatekeepers of the recruitment process, their perceptions would fundamentally prompt the change required for the reintegration of persons with criminal records. However, the discussion revealed that as change agents, they do not resonate with this ideal in respect of persons with criminal records and are therefore detached from their reintegration into the job market – leading to indirect stigma. The study also unpacked the reasons behind the recruiters' perceptions of powerlessness regarding the recruitment process, such as the undermining of their role and the detachment that emerges thereafter. Furthermore, research question 2 revealed that thorough background checks are partially conducted once a criminal record is discovered in either stage of the process. The mention of a criminal record rules you out of the race, unless in some cases the hiring manager (personally) prefers the candidate. Precedence is provided to the hiring manager's preferences, owing to the costs and time constraints associated with background checks. In essence, notwithstanding the various dynamics presented, the results indicate a negative-to-positive outcome to the premises of this study.

## **CHAPTER 5 LIMITATIONS, CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter of the study provides the limiting factors that arose during the investigation. This discussion is included to ensure transparency and provide an understanding to how the results and outcomes came about. It is also crucial to provide the limitations in order to cater for future research. Recommendations corresponding to the research findings are also made and, finally, concluding remarks are provided that bring perspective to the study.

### **5.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The participants were recruited purposively from a recruitment platform, LinkedIn. The response rate was initially low; however, the researcher provided enough time and leeway for receiving responses to the call for research participation. I was finally able to identify an initial number of eight participants, although in the end three failed to attend the focus group discussion. With the knowledge that this is a common occurrence in the focus group dynamic, the session fortunately proceeded with the five participants who were able to attend. The smaller number worked fairly well for the researcher, as a less experienced facilitator, who otherwise has experience as an interviewer and was thus able to control the group better. The researcher found it unnecessary to arrange a second focus group due to time constraints and the related costs. The time and budget for a study influences the number of participants (Hollis et al., 2016).

The participation rate was high, with the more experienced participants expressing themselves more confidently than the others. It is the researcher's view that some of the participants were somewhat reserved in certain parts of the sessions, presumably worried about divulging certain information regarding their respective organisations. However, the researcher was able to extract certain information that they seemingly held back, through other questions that closely related to those in which they fell short. Additionally, the study lacked in terms of racial sampling, thus accounting for the similar perspectives that resulted. Considering the above, the group does not necessarily reflect the broader recruitment industry in the Johannesburg region at this given time.

Another limitation to be noted is the time lapse factor. The study was conducted in the year 2021 and participant views may have changed from the initial focus group session. The second focus group session or further communication with participants would have strengthened the dependability and confirmability of the study. This calls for a more nuanced and thorough investigation.

### **5.1.1 Implications of the Study for Theory**

The significance of this study is that the research problem has not been investigated previously within the Johannesburg region. Accordingly, the recruiters mentioned that this is a topic that they do not put much thought into, even though they are often faced with applications from people with criminal records. The study advanced literature on the perspectives of recruiters based in Johannesburg and revealed that the recruitment of a person with a criminal record is an afterthought. Another gap identified was that further investigation of the problem is needed, perhaps on a much senior level in South Africa, since this study was based on recruiters, who were varied in terms of seniority level.

### **5.1.2 Implications of the Study for Practice**

This study was based on the assertion that recruiters are the champions of the recruitment process; an assertion that the study found to be partially true. Recruiters lay a foundation for decision-makers. Although it has been widely stated that the recruitment function plays an important role in an organisation and should play a more advisory role within the business, it is seemingly lagging behind. In the interim, talent management plays a more pronounced role in the HR sphere. Does it replace recruitment or do these feed into each other? Most organisations have separated the two, where recruiters are more administrative than they are advisors; in other organisations these two functions have merged, with non-distinguishable factors that indicate which of the two is advisory and/or administrative. Therefore, the lens may also focus on determining the actual role of these two functions in organisations, in order to lessen confusion on the value placed on roles.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Since one of the primary views identified by this study was that recruiters felt voiceless and undermined within their organisations, the issue that emerges is that of the recruiter–manager relationship. The relationship between hiring managers and recruiters contributes positively to

the hiring decisions. When a function in an organisation and the policies that guide them to execute that function are undermined, the incumbents feel disempowered. A study conducted in the manufacturing industry found that involving employees in decision-making increases productivity and lowers employee turnover (Kranthi & Lakshmi, 2019). A collaborative approach to the final hiring decision could potentially eliminate the high rate of policy contravention and prevalent bias.

Another equally important thing to consider is the responsibility that an organisation has in responding to the needs of society. Organisations (employers) perpetuate the revolving door phenomenon that has a negative impact on the greater society. Persons with criminal records are not acknowledged and that negatively affects the individual involved, and consequently the society in which they live, especially when recidivism occurs. It also becomes counterproductive to the corporate social responsibility of the organisation, as well as for the adherence to rules and regulations that dictate discrimination and unfair labour practices.

A new vision for HR and organisations has emerged, Green Human Resources Management. This may be a solution for organisations that are open to expanding and exploring the labour market, involving a different perspective on hiring persons with criminal records.

Since recruitment is a subjective process, organisations should provide more training on discrimination for all stakeholders who use the recruitment process; they should also provide educational programmes regarding criminal records and methods for navigating the hiring of persons with criminal records, such as showcasing successful persons with criminal records who were able to reintegrate into society, to change the perception that vilifies persons with criminal records, as well as integrating a shift in the language used to describe persons with criminal records. Coyle (2013) states that different words or phrases can signify different meanings, for example the choice to define and describe someone who commits a crime in general terms as a criminal” or an ‘offender’, rather than in specific terms as an individual who committed a given crime or offence”. This may influence the meaning others attach to him or her.

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## **APPENDIX A: INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT**

Good day,

I hope you are well.

My name is Palesa Motlhanke. I am studying for a Master's degree in Industrial Psychology with UNISA.

I'd like to interest you in a one-on-one interview session (online/face to face) for my study at your earliest convenience. This will take about 30–60 minutes of your time. My topic is "The perceptions of recruiters when hiring people with criminal records".

The criteria for participation are:

1. Persons who have been actively recruiting for white collar workers for 3 years and more
2. Aged 18 +
3. Working in corporate SA in the Johannesburg area.

If you are interested and meet the criteria, kindly let me know and I will provide further details.

Thank you for your time.

Regards

PP Motlhanke

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

Ethics clearance reference number:

Research permission reference number:

30 May 2020

Title: The perception of recruiters when hiring people with criminal records.

#### **Dear Prospective Participant**

My name is Palesa Motlhanke and I am doing research with Prof. Harry Nisha, a professor in the Department of Industrial Psychology, towards a master's degree in Industrial Psychology at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a focus group session for the study entitled "The perception of recruiters when hiring people with criminal records".

#### **THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

I am conducting this research to explore the views and perceptions of recruiters in hiring individuals with criminal records. The aim is to understand what the prohibiting factors may be when hiring or not hiring those with criminal records for participants in Gauteng (Johannesburg Region), South Africa.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

I obtained your contact information through LinkedIn as this is a platform that facilitates business networking. LinkedIn is also one of the most used platforms by recruiters to connect to applicants and potential employees as well as create insight for working class communities. You are an active recruiter and your views are thus more relevant to this study.

The sample size for this research study is eight participants, in the form of a focus group session, where the said topic will be discussed in more detail.

### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

The study involves audio taping and a conversational type of discussion. Examples of the questions to be asked:

- *What are the fundamental reasons you selected this particular field (HR)?*
- *Not necessarily mentioning the recruitment policy in the organisation that you work for; do you believe that the policy in place is tuned into the reality of the external environment within which you recruit?*
- *What do you know about the criminal justice system in our country?*
- *What are the implications of recruiting someone with a criminal record within a working environment?*

This study will take 60–90 minutes of your time.

### **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

Participation is voluntary and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. You are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form thereafter, should you decide to participate. However, please note that withdrawal during the session will not remove what you would have stated in the discussion.

### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participants will gain new perspectives from their peers that they will be able to apply in their respective roles as champions of the Recruitment and Selection processes in their organisations. This may serve as new information that may be to the personal development of individual participants.

New perspectives may emerge that may change the way recruiters conduct their daily tasks, and therefore open up the job market within which they recruit, as well as de-stigmatise the rejected and vulnerable group in question.

## **ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

There are no foreseeable risks in participating in the study. There are, however, two known discomforts to be experienced: your time and travelling costs.

One other factor to consider is that focus groups do not guarantee full confidentiality, however, a confidentiality agreement will be signed by all parties/participants involved.

*NB: Kindly refer to the Covid-19 statement below.*

## **WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher, will know about your involvement in this research and your name will not be recorded anywhere. No one will be able to connect you to the answers you give.

A research assistant will have access to the data and this individual will be bound by a **confidentiality agreement** that will prohibit the sharing of data used on this study. Your answers may be reviewed by the people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the research assistant (auditor) and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

*NB: While every effort will be made by the researcher to ensure that you will not be connected to the information that you share during the focus group, I cannot guarantee that other participants in the focus group will treat information confidentially. I shall, however, encourage all participants to do so. For this reason, I advise you not to disclose personally sensitive information in the focus group.*

### **HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies/hard drive copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for the duration of the study (maximum, 5 years), in the personal filing cabinet. Future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Information will be disposed through complete deletion of electronic files and shredding of any hard copies

### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the said department, at Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, and should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study please contact Palesa Motlhanke (the researcher) on 073 077 4275 or email: [63305003@mylifeunisaac.com](mailto:63305003@mylifeunisaac.com).

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Professor Nisha Harry on: 012 429 8304, email: [harry@unisa.ac.za](mailto:harry@unisa.ac.za). Contact the research ethics team on [engelm1@unisa.ac.za](mailto:engelm1@unisa.ac.za) if you have any ethical concerns.

### **COVID-19 HEALTH PROTOCOLS**

The Covid-19 pandemic is a novel virus that has affected people on a global scale. In South Africa, there have been lockdown regulations put in place and subsequently eased gradually, in five stages/levels. We are currently in "Level 3" of the lockdown regulations, which allow for in-person interactions, under strict health protocols to take place. The nature of this study involves physical interaction, therefore the health protocols gazetted as of 12 July 2020 and the guidelines set by UNISA will be adhered to. These guidelines include ensuring that:

Every member or participant of the study needs to wear a mask,

The area of the session is sanitised before, during and after the session.

Practise social distancing, and this will be considered in seating arrangements.

Participants will be provided a questionnaire to disclose their risk level.

Should there be a member/participant who feels unwell, they will not be allowed to participate any further in the session.

Telephonic pre-screenings are conducted before the session is and to also complete a register of all members/participants attending the session.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for considering to take part in this study.

Ponatshego Palesa Motlhanke



## APPENDIX C: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT is between Palesa Motlhanke (primary investigator), a student of University of South Africa (UNISA), Department of Industrial Psychology and participant (name).....

.....  
.....

Prior to beginning the study, please read and acknowledge your adherence to the following confidentiality agreement due to the sensitive nature of the various information or ideas presented in this study.

By signing below, I hereby agree to keep all information about the interview, including all information discussed and disclosed, completely confidential and further agree not to disclose such information to any other party. As to members of my household, I agree that they are also under this same obligation of confidentiality.

I understand that the proceedings may be audio and videotaped. I also understand that these audio and videotapes will be used for research purposes only and will not be used publicly.

Participant signature.....

Date.....

**APPENDIX D: RESEARCH MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENT (INTERVIEW GUIDE)**

Focus Area	Questions and Probes
Participant Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Do you enjoy recruitment and selection and why?</li> <li>○ What are the central reasons you selected this particular field (HR)?</li> <li>○ How do you think people generally view recruiters or the field in itself?</li> <li>○ As a recruiter, what fundamental skills do you believe are most important in your field of work?</li> <li>○ As a recruiter how do you reach the conclusion or the decision that someone is suitable for a particular job?</li> <li>○ What aspects of yourself do you believe influence your decision-making in the selection of an individual for a particular job? <i>These being your personal or professional experiences or character traits etc.</i></li> <li>○ How much would you say external factors encourage you to reach a particular decision to select or hire an individual for a particular job?</li> </ul>
Understanding of Recruitment Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How important is recruitment or (talent acquisition) in an organisation?</li> <li>○ How would you describe the recruitment policy in the organisation that you work for, in terms of fairness? (<b>NB:</b> The organisation that the participant works for will only be known by the researcher and participants do not disclose this information in the discussion.)</li> <li>○ How well is the recruitment policy linked to the discrimination policy in your working environment?</li> <li>○ Not necessarily expanding on the recruitment policy in the organisation that you work for, do you believe that the policy in place is tuned into the reality of the external environment within which you recruit? <i>How so?</i></li> </ul>

Focus Area	Questions and Probes
Perception of persons with Criminal Record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In your opinion, what is a criminal/what constitutes a criminal?</li> <li>○ When you hear the word criminal record, what is the first word or feeling or thought that comes to mind? – <i>What do you believe to be the reason that prompted that initial thought or feeling?</i></li> <li>○ What are your thoughts around people with a criminal record in general?</li> <li>○ Do you believe that criminal record holders should be reintegrated into the society? (Including the job market)</li> </ul>
Understanding of Criminal Records/Laws in South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How safe do you feel in South Africa and why?</li> <li>○ What do you know about the different types of offences in our criminal law? <i>Please provide examples, if possible.</i></li> <li>○ What are the factors most taken into consideration when recruiting an individual, other than skills (generally)? <i>Such as being open to people with disabilities as an example.</i></li> <li>○ At what point is it discovered that one has a criminal record? <i>In the beginning of the recruitment and selection process or towards the end of the recruitment and selection process?</i></li> <li>○ How would you describe the steps taken when it is learnt that a candidate has a criminal record in your working environment? <i>Has there been a situation where someone with a criminal record was hired, if so, please describe the situation.</i></li> <li>○ What are the implications that may exist for the atmosphere in the working environment in terms of hiring someone with a criminal record?</li> <li>○ What role does the severity of the offence play in the recruitment of a criminal record holder?</li> </ul>

Focus Area	Questions and Probes
Perception of Imminent Changes in the World of Work (SA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How has the world of work changed for you on an individual level?</li> <li>○ Do you believe that these changes that have taken place are sustainable or need further re-evaluation?</li> </ul> <p><i>The future as a frame of reference:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ On a general basis, what changes do you believe should or could be implemented in your line of work?</li> <li>○ What are your final thoughts around the topic we have discussed today?</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX E: COVID-19 QUESTIONNAIRE

### COVID-19 SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

<b>NAME:</b>		
<b>Kindly tick appropriate box</b>		
<b>SIGNS</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Does the individual have red eyes?		
Do you have a cough?		
Do you have shortness of breath?		
Do you have a sore throat?		
Do you have diarrhoea?		
Do you experience a loss of smell?		
Do you experience a loss of hearing?		
Do you experience a loss of taste?		
Do you experience body ache or pains through your body?		
Do you experience fatigue?		
Are you nauseas?		
Are you vomiting?		
<b>EXPOSURE (OVER THE LAST 14 DAYS)</b>		
Have you had contact with a confirmed COVID-19 positive person?		
Have you travelled to other high-risk areas?		
<b>CO-MORBIDITIES: Kindly describe any existing or underlying conditions that you may have such as asthma, TB, Diabetes, Hypertension, Lung Disease etc.</b>		
Have you visited or been in a hospital/doctors rooms?		
<b>SIGNATURE:</b>	<b>DATE:</b> _____	
<b>WITNESS SIGNATURE:</b>	<b>DATE:</b> _____	

## APPENDIX F: MEMO-WRITING

### Reflections (in the data collection process)

This is a memo of the developments of the study. It presents an unravelling of the smaller details that contributed to decision-making throughout the study and is written 'freely'. Since I have limited experience with the Grounded Theory enquiry, I used Charmaz (2006), "Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis" as a guideline and to feed into the trustworthiness of the study, through thick description.

#### ▪ What is going on in the field setting or with the interview accounts?

The focus group session is quite a risk to take in light of the COVID-19 regulations that were provided. This pandemic has shifted things quite a lot. I need to think about the best method to use in collecting data, considering the circumstances.

To consider:

My plan is to still continue with in-person focus group, provided that the participants are comfortable with that.

Will the lockdown rules be relaxed at the given time?

#### Virtual vs In-person: Pros and cons

Method	Pros	Cons
In-person	Rich data – quality of data is higher	More logistical effort
	Body language can be interpreted	Costly
Virtual	Convenient	Somewhat impersonal
	Stronger response rate	Technological malfunctioning, that negatively plays on the quality of the data

I turned to a few peers to find out how they would prefer to have a meeting or a focus group and the responses were mixed. Most of them made references to meetings and conveyed that it is quite easy to lose focus in virtual meetings, however that could be for a myriad of reasons. Most of my peers mentioned that it was convenient, so perhaps would be the better option.

However, they also mentioned that in person group settings are livelier and would encourage more participation. Some said “it’s good to see people, you want to see people”.

### ***Decision***

I considered the disadvantages that in person focus group could have however, the decision was mitigated by the relaxed conditions of the lockdown regulations as well as the approval from ethics. The participants were mostly relaxed in terms of interaction. The first theme enabled them to relate to one another, and therefore forming a conducive environment of open discussion. The fear here, is “Group think”. The group lacked the diversity that would have elevated the session. However, the discussion was informative and yielded that which it had intended to.

Participants are relaxed and open. Most of them are already comfortable in their roles as recruiters and are very familiar with the role and its functions. The pandemic has had a negative effect on most of the world, however we were able to have a great discussion with most participants feeling at ease, due to the relaxed COVID-19 regulations at this point. Therefore, the discussion was not highly compromised.

With some participants unable to attend, were able to reach a quorum of 5 participants out of 8.

- **Can you turn it into a pithy category?**

I extracted various grounded theory research studies to guide me in analysing the data as well as reporting. Most of these were similar and provided me with the guidance I needed to proceed. One of the disadvantages of the analysis is that I am less experienced, however to my knowledge, grounded theory holds some drawbacks relating to subjectivity and coding, because there is no one way of conducting it.

I had to go over the data a few times, both on record and text - as it was filled with an overload of information, and my background as an HR professional eased the process a bit, as I could interpret implicit responses from the participants. I used the line-by-line coding system, so that I do not lose the true meaning of the data. In fear of distorting the data with my own perceptions, I used the terms and concepts mentioned by the participants extensively, and derived relational statements that best described the main ideas that emerged. Their responses were in verbatim and nothing changed, except for the parts and sections where the transcription tool could not capture accurately.

Sometimes these questions are answered before being asked, because the questions are related. So some questions were answered alike, but in different context.

- **What do research participants' actions and statements take for granted?**

From the session, I could tell that the respondents took lightly the importance that they play in terms of recruiting the vulnerable. I could sense some helplessness in them. In other words, they played down their roles, because they considered themselves unheard; they have almost succumbed and just *do* their job. Together with this thinking, I was able to derive that from the data text as well. A lot “overlooked”, “they just do as they please”, “personal biases” arose in the session – data, and I was therefore able to make note of that as a main theme that probably drives the entire recruitment process, from their perspective.

The respondents really showed a lot of compassion for persons with criminal records, my thinking was around the fact that they probably know someone who has a criminal record and therefore would be likely to give others a second chance, unfortunately they are not in charge.

- **What connections can you make? Which ones do you need to check?**

The connection made was quite evident, the respondents are undervalued in their role, therefore they cannot really make decisions, just suggestions. Which is fair, however because the recruitment process it long, it plays on futile efforts, if the process is simply for window-dressing.

A grounded theory study allows you to look for processes. The following questions help to maintain a focus on process (Charmaz, 2006):

- **What process is at issue here?**

Recruiters' anticipated stigma on the part of persons with a criminal record, together with the Undermining of recruiters leads to less decision-making power – which leads to not considering persons with criminal record, which then leads to a form of indirect stigma.

Add on: it is not a topic for discussion, and therefore no solutions are likely.

- Work engagement



- Feelings towards persons with a criminal record – sympathy, concern, curiosity (what happened, why? it's sad, we can't do anything about it) – deserve a second chance
  - Feelings towards the working relationships - indifferent
  - Worth looking into?
  - Others perception/anticipated stigma leads to rejection in the process
- **Under which conditions does this process develop?**

Respondents' background and the environment that they work in

- What are the consequences of the process?
- Structure memos to chart observed and predicted relationships in your data and between your emerging categories.

The discussion was very conversational with most of them seemingly upstanding in their portrayal of themselves and their views, however, attributed negative traits to narratives towards others. By others referring to internal and external stakeholders. The data were very straightforward, with some responses having restraint, in order to not implicate themselves. To substantiate this assertion; upon analysis of the data, some follow-up questions revealed contradictions from other participants that affirm this, especially concerning the views of fairness.

- **Example of the coding process**

THEME	SUB-THEME	INITIAL CODING	FOCUSED/AXIAL CODING	RELATIONAL STATEMENTS	Category
<b>Understanding of Recruitment Policies</b>	How important is Recruitment or (Talent Acquisition) in an organisation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Highly important</li> <li>▪ Recruiters do most of the work in candidate and selection</li> <li>▪ People don't see the importance</li> <li>▪ Undermined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruitment is an important function in the organization</li> <li>▪ Recruiters do a lot of work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Although, undermined, the recruitment function is important, especially because recruiters do extensive work in the recruitment process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Important</li> <li>▪ Undermined</li> <li>▪ Extensive work</li> </ul>

- **Did the use of a peer auditor really help?**

Yes, she gave me perspective where I believe was required. Remember I have limited experience especially with qualitative research, my honours was quantitative so a second pair of eyes was needed.

- **Biasness from me? (Reflections)**

I am a woman of colour whose life trajectory has been closely identified as a marginalized group. From when I was becoming conscious to social structures, through formal education and life experiences in general; most experiences have been centred around my identity and the 'belonging' to a disadvantaged community. In identifying as a marginalized group and experiencing life as stigmatized or labelled, I am able to recognise similarities to those persons disadvantaged by their criminal record. Although, theoretically the types of stigma or reasons behind that stigma can vary; nevertheless, I am able to empathise.

An acknowledgement of this is important, in order to understand the driving force to how this study was constructed and conducted. Although the qualitative research approach requires the researcher to closely intermingle with the data, in my attempt to ensure reduction in bias, I opted for a well-structured script, with open-ended questions in collecting data. The script would hinder digression during the focus group session, keeping quality of the data in mind and the research study in general. Due to the prolonged engagement that I conducted, during the recruitment stage of this study, led me to become acquainted with the participants, thus necessitating a good balance between 'detachment' and attachment to the data and participants. This was a challenge that I avoided by using audio recordings that were transcribed in verbatim so I do not add an excess of my own thoughts and perspectives, but rather, to extensively use those of the participants.

I believe that this study represents my views and the ideologies and perspectives of the participants in a well-balanced manner, to the best of my abilities that qualitative research would require.