Security Vetting in the South African National Defence Force Army Support Bases

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Abstract

The study explored the implementation of security vetting processes in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). This is a qualitative study, and semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from 21 participants from Army Support Bases (ASBs), the Defence Intelligence (DI), and selected managers in the SANDF. Vetting proved to be a "foreign" word among junior-ranking participants at the ASBs, which creates a big challenge in the security environment. Lack of knowledge and information always creates problems within an organisation. A selected finding revealed that several factors other than security vetting processes, which include non-adherence and attitudes towards security vetting by members, are impacting vetting at Army Support Bases. Lack of personnel was found to be hampering the implementation of security vetting throughout the Department of Defence (DOD). This study recommends that to enhance the implementation of security vetting in the entire DOD, there is a need for a broader definition of the acronym PEOPLE-D, representing partnership, environment, outcome-focused approach, population-based intervention, life course security awareness, empowerment, and decentralisation.

Introduction and Background

The South African National Defence Force (SANDF) members at all levels are expected to maintain high moral and professional norms and act with utmost integrity. These standards encompass trustworthiness and security consciousness within individual members. In assessing and strengthening integrity, thorough and compelling security vetting is a key measure. Security vetting identifies the areas of vulnerability which can damage global confidence within an organisation. Evaluating individuals before you invest in them is not just smart, but critical in a world where one social media posting can make or break a reputation. South Africa's state security relies on the ability to maintain the protection of sovereignty and territorial integrity, which includes human security. Security at the individual level is related to that of the organisation and the state (Mongwaketse 2016; Baldwin 1997, 7; RSA 2024–2028). Public confidence is built upon various blocks. Imende (2012,12) believes these building blocks are human attributes, and their attainment is dependent on conducting duties in the workplace. Imende (2012,9) further states that among the building blocks is the competitiveness of state organs in conducting security matters. Through reliable procedures and processes, the Department of Defence (DOD), its arms of services (SAHMS, SA ARMY, SA NAVY, SA AIRFORCE), and Defence Intelligence preside over the reasonable and fair administration of security matters. One of SANDF's values is to commit to ethics, guided by the code of conduct. This commitment is carried out through accountability, responsiveness, and openness, all of which underpin public interests. During South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, from 1990 to 1996, the political choice was made that institutions should not practice security vetting (Klaaren 2007,147). This is clearly stipulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report of South Africa, Volume 5, published in 1998. The Goldstone Commission, a judicial commission of inquiry established during the transition period, was seen as the closest to security vetting for transitional processes (Klaaren 2007,147). It was declared that the use of security vetting to deal with those who were responsible for human rights violations would be inappropriate in the South African transitional context (Klaaren 2007,148; 150 and Mdluli 2011, 8). This political compromise was agreed upon by political parties and through doctrines of law, which led to the birth of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 108, of 1996 and its preamble (Klaaren 2007,149).

Democratisation also brought incorporation into the SANDF and SAPS of military and police personnel with criminal records (Williams 2002,18). The key pointers of the challenges are found in the official records on members found to have committed crimes that include fraud, corruption, theft, and numerous other crimes in the SAPS and SANDF. It can therefore be speculated that members of the SANDF with criminal offences were brought into the force during the integration of forces, as vetting or screening processes were never conducted before they were absorbed into the SANDF. However, according to Masiapata (2007,5), not all members integrated into the force are criminals. Given the above, in 2000, the DOD developed a new recruitment strategy, the Military Skills Development System (MSDS) programme, in which members are

screened before being employed in the defence force. Though security vetting is not comprehensively applied when hiring through MSDS, the programme was developed to ensure that every member's security status is scrutinised before being employed in the defence force. The system sought to gradually decrease the number of military personnel with criminal records recruited into the SANDF. The question now is: To what extent has security vetting been carried out in the South African National Defence Force's army support bases? This study provides insights into the conditions of security vetting processes that are being carried out in the Army Support bases. The researcher further explains the major drawbacks and provides recommendations on how to overcome these challenges.

Problem Statement

The arrest of a South African Defence Force General, Leon Eggers, for fraud and corruption, and the 27 members who were charged for fraud in the South African Army Support Bases in 2017, indicated how members do not take the vetting process seriously (Ethridge 2019, np). The SANDF is faced with criminal challenges ranging from theft, housebreaking, and corruption of all sorts to fraud and nepotism by some of its members. In 2017/18, the Chief of Military Policy, Strategy and Planning in the SANDF, Major General Michael Ramantswana, gave a presentation to the Joint Standing Committee on Defence (JSCD), which covered the state of security measures at SANDF military bases and criminal activities taking place. The presentation was given following an incident at 9 South African Infantry Battalion (SAI Bn) in Cape Town on 14 April 2017, where five armed suspects broke into the unit and stole six weapons. Ramantswana outlined security challenges such as theft of firearms, rations, diesel, and petrol. The presentation highlighted the challenge of military court sentences and fines that do not deter perpetrators. Besides, research indicates that the military did not have jurisdiction over civilians employed by the SANDF (Martin 2018,1). Maj Gen Ramantswana outlined the crimes committed on military bases over the past five years as follows:

Table1.1. Reflection of criminal activities that were committed at military bases for five years (2014–2019)

Criminal activity	Cases 2014/15	Cases 2015/16	Cases 2016/17	Cases 2017/18	Cases 2018/19
1. Possession of stolen property	39	20	28	10	13
2. Housebreaking and theft	73	108	90	39	65
3. Theft of state property	243	229	182	69	132
4. Theft of state vehicles	13	11	06	02	10
5. Negligent loss of state property	16	11	10	04	19
6. Theft from/ out of state vehicles	34	20	17	13	16
7. Theft of pistols	02	05	08	02	03
8. Theft of rifles	04	11	05	10	02
9. Ammunition	07	26	1436	12	05
Totals	**428**	**441**	**1782**	**161**	**265**

Source: Maj Gen Ramantswana's presentation

Having looked at the crimes outlined by Maj Gen Ramantswana, the question arises whether members had the necessary security clearances issued when they were appointed in the SANDF. This study investigates whether security vetting is being utilised effectively as a security measure to address the problems of corruption, fraud, nepotism, and incompetence at SANDF military bases. Identified criminal activities and incompetence are taking place at SANDF Army Support Bases and other units around the Republic (Defence Web 2016).

Literature Review

Nature and Extent of Security Vetting

Security vetting is the process of performing background checks on individuals before offering them employment. Security vetting extends to checking someone before conferring an award and conducting fact-finding before taking an informed decision. The process can vary depending on the reasons behind vetting, but it usually involves background checks and assessments of competency and substance abuse (Queen 2025, np). It investigates and examines someone's suitability or reliability for a task and tests their level of integrity. The security vetting process examines a person's lifestyle and habits to determine eligibility for security clearance. The process of security vetting is conducted by looking at the whole person concept consideration (Paltmier and Rovner 2015,13). The "whole person concept" means that a person in question is evaluated based on all available information regarding their security competence or risk potential. This includes the possibility of previous criminal behaviour, any previous convictions on a person's record, or being engaged in secret, questionable behaviours (Queen 2025,

np). This includes all mitigating and aggravating factors combined in the relevant context. Security vetting process incorporates investigations, polygraph testing, psychological evaluation (psychometric testing), social and electronic media platforms to test and determine the security competence of the person in question. To make security investigations a success, applicants' family members, friends, and previous employers are interviewed to source rich information to determine security competence. This will also include studying social contacts to get a broader idea of who the applicant is on a personal level.

The Importance of Security Vetting in the SANDF

The concept of security vetting has been established to broaden the idea of security measures in an unprecedented way. Security vetting is regarded as the first line of defence in the SANDF. Therefore, it is conducted at the recruitment phase and subsequently when the responsibilities of the subject change to validate an identity and ensure the integrity of members. Security vetting ascertains that SANDF does not employ applicants or utilise employees or service providers who will compromise classified information, or who are susceptible to blackmail, influenceable, corruptible, or lack integrity (Queen 2025). For example, if a person has a history of financial difficulties, offering such a person a sensitive position may subject them to vulnerability. Integrity ensures the honesty of an individual and determines vulnerabilities (Brooks, Corkill, Pooley, Cohen, and Ferguson, 2010). No person is obligated or can be forced to participate in security vetting processes, especially a reference. However, some areas of responsibility need a person to be vetted depending on the nature of a position (Cabinet Office 2010, 7). For example, a member who is recruited in the intelligence environment and works with sensitive information or at National Key Points (NKPs) such as Army Support Bases (ASBs) should possess a valid security clearance.

The security vetting framework in the SANDF is tailored according to organisational needs. In essence, security vetting is conducted as an effort to instil integrity and security competence at the Army Support Bases, where the trustworthiness of members is a central priority. The evaluation of a person's background and private life is an attempt to ascertain that they can be securely trusted to handle secret or classified matters in their area of responsibility. In reviewing literature, the researcher used official documentation such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996; Defence Act, 1995 (Act 68 of 1995), SANDF Code of Conduct, DOD Journals, and DOD annual reports. Furthermore, the researcher used the Auditor-General reports, Military Police presentations, White Paper on Defence (1998), and White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele Principles, 18340 of 1997). The documentation gives a clear indication of the meaning of security vetting from a security perspective.

Enforcement, a Security Vetting Dilemma

Post-apartheid South African government institutions are seen as failing to enforce security vetting. There is no serious threat prevailing, and as a result, the system is too relaxed. Employees generally fail to take security vetting seriously. In fact, security vetting has never been fully enforced in terms of ensuring that there is compliance from government employees (Matakata 2011). The general attitude is that there is nothing the government or a department can do, even if one does not comply.

The primary goal of conducting security vetting is to mitigate risks in the SANDF. Security vetting is used as an administrative measure and not as a criminal or accountability measure; it does not subject anyone to imprisonment, but may prohibit one from being employed in an organisation. Though it partially achieves its goal in the SANDF, security vetting enforcement remains a dilemma. The dilemma in this context refers to the situation in which actions taken in an organisation to mitigate security risk factors cause reactions from employees, which affect the implementation negatively (Wivel 2019). Some employers take security vetting findings seriously, and repercussions may be removal or denial of certain positions, depending on the classification of the job (United States Department of State 2016). However, actions that are taken after security vetting can be disputed in courts. For example, the Bill of Rights protects employees from participating in processes that they are not happy with. Security vetting invades the personal space of a subject. It goes across all levels of an institution, and its processes involve verifying all historical events of an individual's circumstances and behaviour to ensure the integrity of public institutions and their members. In general, the security vetting concept is used as a microscopic tool for determining integrity and security competence (Rusere 2013,1).

In some countries, such as the United States of America, vetting is used to determine whether an individual's past criminal conduct can influence their future reliability and trustworthiness (Hardley 2005 and Afolabi 2017). Matakata (2011,2) describes vetting as a process of public power which involves an examination of previous and current employment and other records of individuals for hiring purposes. Security vetting can also be regarded as a process of conducting due diligence, because of its deep searching of an individual's integrity and nature (Matakata 2011,4). Chapter 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa provides that the main objective of the SANDF is to protect and defend the country, its territorial integrity, and its people in accordance with the Constitution (South Africa 1996 and Le Roux 2005, 240).

Methodology

This paper followed a qualitative research approach, as this suited the nature of the problem researched. The approach was followed to explore the conduct of security vetting in the SANDF Army Support bases. The qualitative approach was fitting for this study since the researcher wanted to critically explore the conduct of security vetting in the army support bases. It allowed for a holistic, thorough and in-depth exploration of

members' experiences, behaviours, and opinions on security vetting processes. The target population for the study were members of the DOD deployed at identified ASBs and managers at the Defence Intelligence (DI) unit. Targeted participants needed to have experienced the phenomena of security vetting as vetting officers, an interviewer, a subject, an interviewee, or a manager. The sample reflected the full range of individuals taking part in the vetting process. Purposive sampling was thus used in this study to generate a greater understanding of what is being studied, as participants had to be relevant to the questions posed (Bryman 2016; Roller and Lavrakas 2015,196). This study relied on the interaction between the researcher and participants, comprising all races of the Johannesburg, Potchefstroom, and Limpopo ASBs and selected senior managers (generals) in the army.

Included were soldiers and civilians with the most experience in security vetting, and those who had served at ASBs for at least five years or more. The researcher received permission to interview ASB members and managers from both the Chief SA Army and Chief Defence Intelligence (gatekeepers). A clearance certificate no ST14 of 2019, issued by Unisa CLAW Ethics Review Committee was used to conduct this study. All participants in this research took part voluntarily after the importance of their contribution to the research was clarified. The identities of all participants were protected by not mentioning their names, and their right to privacy was explained. One-on-one interviews with 21 research participants were carried out according to an interview schedule. All interviews were conducted at participants' workplaces, which made them feel comfortable to express their views about the vetting concept (Boyce and Neale 2006,3; Gill and Baillie 2018,669). All interviews were recorded with a voice recorder, and field notes were also taken to serve as a backup. All participants voluntarily gave consent to the recording of the interviews. Recordings were later transcribed, some of which are verbatim as quoted in the data analysis.

Thematic analysis, which involves identifying patterns before starting with the actual analysis, was used in this study. Its flexibility, in that it is not tied to a particular epistemology or theory, helped the researcher to collect and analyse data, as well as make interpretations, and write a report. Following Maguire and Delahunt (2017,1) and Creswell (2009,184), the researcher managed this exercise by identifying themes while conducting interviews and making notes. Credibility in this study was ensured through prolonged engagement, triangulation, and referential adequacy as advised by De Vos et al. (2011,419). This was achieved by asking the same questions to all the participants throughout the study.

This study was conducted at Army Support Bases in different provinces, and all participants responded to the same questions, which ensured the credibility of the data collected. The researcher did thick descriptions of data, which are a true reflection of what was said during interviews, and which can act as a database for making judgments about the transferability of findings. Confirmability is neutrality in the research findings, which clarifies that the researcher acted in good faith, was not biased, and that the data

is based only on participants' responses. If repeated by other researchers, this study could produce the same findings. In addition, the study used an inquiry audit to establish dependability. Though the study was conducted, establishing trustworthiness, a few challenges were encountered while collecting data. Some participants were reluctant to cooperate because of trust issues. Some were not readily available due to their busy schedules. The researcher managed to overcome trust issues by spending more time with the participants, explaining the purpose of the interviews until trust was gained.

Data Interpretation

Core themes were identified and analysed for the interpretation of data. All participants who took part in this study, managers, vetting officers and subjects, were coded as P1–P 21, Below, the data is presented according to themes.

The Provision of Effective Security Vetting at ASBs

Participants had different views regarding the provision of security vetting at ASBs and within the DOD at large. Responding to the question about the provision of effective security vetting at ASBs, participants responded as follows:

Participant 1, a manager, said:

> Currently, I can't tell you that; the reality of the matter is because of those who are supposed to apply these measures. They are will always going to say that they have no manpower. For that reason, reality is not to everybody; sometimes it depends to who you are and where you come from… actually, you will do all your power to make sure that your people are vetted, because of manpower; they will tell you that there is no manpower… You may find he is vetted, but vetting process was not appropriately done…

Participant 2, also a manager, said:

> …I think it is lack of personnel that is the main thing; we do not have enough personnel that can be able to monitor the clearance that have been issued…" "…In short I can say there are not enough vetting members within the SANDF who can do the monitoring…

> The difference is that things that is lacking currently is that there is no continuous vetting process which is done after the clearances are issued to members. I will just give you example that's when they are issued to the members; they've got a time frame. But what is lacking currently is that in that time frame whereby the members are given; is there any follow-up which is done when they are issued until the time when they expire. Because a human being something that can change overnight. So, when clearances are issued, they need to be monitored so that they can be revoked…

Furthermore, Participant 3 said:

> …Currently you know I won't say it is effective. But it needs support especially from, another element to understand especially from DI environment; I can tell you people apply for the security classification. Remember you still have to use them, but that waiting period is too long, the turnaround time to get feedback about the whole security process it takes time. …

It is evident from all participants in management that the provision of security vetting at ASBs is not effective. Shezi (2019,np) indicated that "vetting is carried out according to set guidelines in order to determine the eligibility of an individual or entity to access classified information." This paper further argues that to ensure consistency and fairness in the security process, standardised guidelines play a pivotal role. The feedback problem from the Defence Intelligence (DI) is a major contributing factor. It also emerged that currently, there are no continuous vetting processes and monitoring within the DOD. Participant 3 further said:

> …As I mentioned previously there is something that is running short, which is that when issued, the monitoring process is lacking as to make sure that they are still living according to the norms that we expect them to be doing, yes. …

Thus, since vetting should be a continuous process in the military, not conducting it as per prescriptions poses a security risk that, if not realised, will breed ground for other threats that may undermine national security.

Attitudes of Employees towards Security Vetting

Attitude involves emotions and behaviours towards a concept or tasks, which can have a powerful influence on the behaviour of employees. Attitudes of employees towards anything in an organisational context play a big role in the execution of every task. Employees' attitudes are dampened and lifted by many factors that are out of their control. This includes the general working conditions and how members react to security vetting processes. In response to the question, "What in your view should be in place for security vetting to be effective in ASBs?" attitudes and morale emerged as key factors. Another factor contributing to making security vetting processes ineffective is the fact that most of the members at ASBs are demoralised. Most of the participants indicated that most members in the units were not happy, especially the older members. For example, Participant 4, a subject, revealed that:

> …who can do that for us, education per se, members are old and are not educated. They are lazy now; he becomes a burden; he becomes as if he's not looked after; that's the complaint that we are having. People become negative and he's no more as willingly as he started. When they see the privileges that are being given to those that are seen as our future leaders maybe they look at that and they become negative…

Participant 5, a subject responded:

The thing is you know what is happening because "neh", this people they are old and if I come here as I am and get a rank of let's say maybe Lieutenant at the end when they were here for quite some time. I think they just came here, they never worked anywhere, they know everything the respect, the more you spend time like when you by the bars, like people will start to tell you do not call me by staff or what, just call me "Dumisani "or "Maria", something like that…

participant 6, a subject, said:

Like I indicated, some of them it is a problem. Like I indicated some of them are demoralised by the fact that their peers' members, they are saying I will apply for my security clearance last year, but if even now I have not received it, so why must I do that. But the MS is trying the level best to inform them during the conference to say "please guys come and do the security clearance" then you find that they are 2, 3, 4. Then they give it to him then, he sends them to Pretoria but to receive it is a problem… More especially the senior people; they're the ones that are, there's other ones. The protection element and all those other ones. They do not worry about the security clearance you give the form you will not get it back…

Participant 7, responded by saying:

…No, because I remember there was a list that was done so that people can go onto the security clearances but not everyone was there. A couple of people called over and over and over again, but they didn't complete those forms. Some they complete them; some they do not return them; some they have a lot of mistakes and discrepancies on the forms. So, it's a process that goes on the whole year a person trying to do the security clearance…

The other issue that emerged from the responses is that many people were too lazy to fill in the security clearance form because of its length and the many questions a person has to answer. Furthermore, members at the ASBs are old and have lost hope for many reasons, such as favouritism and lack of career development. This makes members reluctant to complete the security clearance form, and if they do complete it, they repeat mistakes. After the question was asked about the adherence of members to security vetting, a few participants indicated that some members still adhered to security vetting processes. Participant 3 from Johannesburg said:

From my point of view; in the unit it is totally effective. However, even if it has its own shortcomings; here now the people who are more brilliant can understand. Can I upgrade it? But to me it makes life easier for us members that are now in command and to ensure that we are now being appointed according to that…

Participant 8 from Potchefstroom said:

I do not think they are feeling better or feeling happy because some of them I have to drag them in order to fill the security clearance. They say it's a lot of work because

there's a lot of information. So, let me just be honest and say they are negative because is a lot of information…

It was also revealed that when some of the members were given the security clearance questionnaire to complete, it took a long time for them to complete and return. Furthermore, it was established that enforcement was a problem because military disciplinary procedures cannot be applied to such matters. It is evident from the data that another problem emanates from the officers who are deployed in the units as IOs to perform security duties. There is no guidance to members at ASBs on how to complete a security clearance form. The next section discusses the importance of security vetting as a security measure.

The Importance of Security Vetting as a Security Measure

Security vetting generally has distinct functions related to counter-intelligence measures. In essence, this refers to the protective measures applied to prevent any person from committing criminal activities in an organisation. The process is imperative for assessing the members in an organisation. It became clear during the interviews that most of the participants viewed security vetting as a tool that could minimise and address the problems that the units are facing. Responding to the question, "Do you support the process of the proposed vetting of every member in the ASBs?" many of the participants indicated that they believed that security vetting, if conducted properly, can assist in solving all the challenges.

Participant 9 responded thus:

> …Yes, but I think if what we've identified in terms of, you know, the security vetting, as it is thorough security vetting and maybe minimising the period of validity of security vetting. Yes, I believe it will address the challenges that we are currently experiencing if those are there…

Participant 10 said:

> …I think it's very important that you know what you're working with or who you are working with in the ASBs. In the ASBs we have money that is brought in this unit daily. The money used to be here then something happened, and the money went missing so by who you wonder…

Participant 11 responded thus:

> …Yes, they will see the seriousness of the questionnaire or whatever these people that went there for told to do this thing the impotence of it. They will not just underestimate it for, you know, whether someone have clearance or is not having a clearance is just the same… I think that is injection that can give life to our organisation. There when it said is not only for certain members are for each and every member in this organisation.

The seriousness of it when they implemented it then that's where now it will be an eye opener…"

Participant 12 said:

Because remember, if this individual is now vetted and must be security vetted, you can see that he knows or she knows exactly what is expected of her, what they think that arise he needs or she needs to be doing, what are the things that she or he must not do? It can assist a lot…

Furthermore, Participant 13, stated that:

…For example, we've got weapons in the unit; we've got rations in the unit; we've got very important documents, and hence why I'm saying that I think it depends on the unit. But at the end of the day, those documents that say ok today will be transporting ammunition to Messina. If somebody else sees that information; they can, what do you call that ambush you on the road and take those weapons everyone must be security conscious and yeah…

It is important to note that most participants believed that if security vetting could be fully implemented as a security measure, it would be a good deterrent to criminal activities at ASBs. To support the above findings, Garnham (2025, np) is of the view that inclusive vetting is not only aimed at regulatory compliance but also at elevating the institution's image or status, safety, and credibility. Most of them are in support of full vetting being conducted on all members in the units since they house weapons and other important materials. Participants indicated that it would also assist the management to know all employees better, rather than housing people they do not know.

Participant 14, who was from Potchefstroom, indicated that:

…Vetting picks up corrupt officials, that is identified, that is made known to management. Management output in plans and plans and measures to eliminate the risk, or to counter this risk you understand. What plans or measurements to put in place to eliminate or to minimise the risk is dependable of what is the risk do you understand…

Participant 10 emphasised that:

The criminal does not just come from the sky, identity and go and break from within our backyard. Does this person really is it suitable person to be here or must we shift this person to this unit, so that this person stays there based on what. We are doing and what is history says he is, because we will definitely be the same people in the same backyard…

Most of the participants believed that security vetting could assist by identifying the corrupt officials and eliminating the risk of having criminals in the units. Stephenson

and Rimmer (2024, 542) highlighted the purpose of the security vetting process as legit and important in determining the suitability of potential employees to demonstrate an appropriate level of integrity. Participants believed that security vetting, together with other strategic plans, can help solve some problems that managers at the ASBs encounter.

Discussion of Findings

The main finding of this study indicated that security vetting was not being conducted on everyone in the SANDF due to a lack of personnel. This challenge leads to the department resorting to conducting security screening that only focuses on credit, educational verification, and criminal record checks. If security vetting could be conducted on everyone in the DOD according to the level of clearance classification, it would deter criminal activities. Security vetting is the first line of defence in the SANDF. Therefore, it is imperative for security vetting to be conducted on personnel deployed in critical areas such as ASBs, and according to their grades. This study also revealed that some participants at ASBs, especially junior-ranking ones, have no idea of what security vetting is. Some actually heard of the word "vetting" and the processes for the first time during the conduct of this study. Every OC is a custodian of security matters, which security vetting is part of their unit, which entails that they should at all times be responsible for the maintenance of all security-related matters within a unit. (RSA 2004).

Clearly, junior ranking participants lack knowledge of security vetting, which contributes to their behaviour towards the vetting concept itself. In the military, the OC is responsible for ensuring that security awareness programmes are implemented to sensitise members about any security policies and measures of the SANDF (RSA 2004). Feedback from the DI to ASBs regarding security vetting outcomes is also a problem, and ASBs, managers, and VO participants also identified a lack of personnel in the Directorate Vetting and the need to follow up on vetting progress as pressing issues. Participants (p1–3) from ASBs indicated that the most pressing causes of ineffectiveness in the security vetting processes also include the Unit Military Security Officer (UMSO) structures deployed at ASBs, which are also not effective owing to personnel shortages. Security vetting is important because it detects, prevents, or mitigates risks inherent in the security cluster

In this study, unexpected insights were revealed by the findings, which indicated that junior ranking members in units were not being treated well in terms of incentives and career development, and they served under poor working conditions. This also contributes negatively to the morale of members. Factors such as lack of discipline and unethical behaviours are some of the problems contributing to the failure of the implementation of security vetting at ASBs and the DOD at large. It was also indicated that in other instances, members are utilised in the posts without valid security clearances, which itself is a threat to security. For example, such a member is susceptible

to acts that endanger security. This includes the level of security clearance awarded according to the level of access to information that members have.

The security vetting dilemma has infested the SANDF. Most participants indicated that the decentralisation of security vetting systems in the form of sub-offices in units to fast-track the backlog DI is currently ongoing. Decentralisation is defined as the re-organisation or transfer of competencies originally owned and controlled by the central or main office of the organisation, with corresponding resources provided to sub-offices of such organisations (UNDP Germany 1999, 2). All Participants also suggested the delegation of some vetting processes. Delegation is an administrative decentralisation that refers to the redistribution of responsibilities towards units, but maintaining accountability to the central department (UNDP Germany, 1999,2). Decentralisation may create more effective, open, and responsive results to enhance security vetting processes.

It also emerged from P9–13 that they are not given sufficient information about the importance of security vetting by their units. Most participants indicated that DI is not open about security vetting processes, which also instils fear in members because they do not know the purpose of security vetting. Most participants indicated that when UMSOs in the units present on security matters, they do not include security vetting. Dissemination is part of information management in the security cluster. It enables people in the organisational setting to use their time, resources, and expertise effectively to fulfil their roles. Dissemination is defined as the process of communication that happens with the broadcasting of information without feedback. Properly communicated information is critical to the successful implementation and management of any operation (Zhang et al. 2014). The majority indicated that security vetting was not being conducted according to standard because of the number of units that depend on a few vetting officers at DI. Most of the delays experienced in units are a result of the shortage of personnel in DI, a problem that hinders effective security vetting in the entire DOD. P4–7 indicated that backlogs in security vetting processes are a burning issue at Directorate Vetting. The participants indicated that all the problems that Directorate Vetting is experiencing emanate from a massive shortage of personnel. Security vetting alleviates any form of threat in an organisation by deploying relevant people to sensitive posts, minimising the threat of sensitive information landing on irrelevant hands.

Recommendations

This study explored the implementation of security vetting processes in the South African National Defence Force. The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study and give a broader definition of the acronym PEOPLE-D to enhance the implementation of security vetting in the entire DOD.

Partnership: Internal collaboration of the OCs, UMSOs, and Directorate Vetting personnel should be encouraged to maximise strengths and minimise weaknesses within security vetting processes. UMSOs should ensure that security vetting matters are adhered to by continuously working as the nodal point between DI and the units.

Outcome-focused approach: Continuous communication and education about security vetting should be conducted every two weeks in the ASBs and for a period of a year; afterwards, it can be conducted on a monthly basis until members are familiar with the security vetting concept and its importance in the ASBs.

Inter-departmental intervention: SANDF should work with other government departments and stakeholders to develop consistency in the definition of security vetting. Modest changes in risk factor levels of members after security clearance have been issued can be revealed through inter-departmental interventions. This can thus yield improvements to security vetting processes.

Life-course security vetting awareness approach: The DI could conduct security vetting awareness roadshows monthly to different units to promote adherence by members of the Defence community. It is also essential to address the effects and promote awareness of member-to-member safety.

Decentralisation of security vetting functions: It is recommended that DI consider administrative decentralisation and delegate the administrative phase of the security vetting processes to the Technical Headquarters (Tac HQs) across the provinces. This can be done by using all trained security vetting officials, OCs, and UMSOs in the Tac HQs. This should encompass issuing of all "confidential" security clearances in the Tac HQs to minimise backlogs at the DI.

Conclusion

The enhancement of the South African National Defence Force Army Support Bases' reputations through a robust implementation of employee security vetting to minimise the security risk and protect sensitive information. This paper provided a critical analysis of the implementation of security vetting policies/regulations at SANDF's ASBs. Furthermore, this paper's findings revealed or identified several contributory factors, such as career management, lack of knowledge about the concept of security vetting, lack of cooperation by members, and several other problems prohibiting the effective implementation of security vetting at ASBs. Security vetting should not be perceived as something punitive but should be regarded as a concept that will continuously help in the development of members within the DOD. Internal stakeholders should leverage existing departmental programmes to address some of the discrepancies identified as hindering the implementation of security vetting processes at ASBs. This paper further recommends that the Directorate Vetting establish partnerships with both internal and external stakeholders to overcome the challenges

they face. Nonetheless, this paper further argues that senior management must commit to PEOPLE-D to implement security vetting effectively at ASBs and across the DOD at large.

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