

# Gender Discrimination as Determinants of Stress in Police Profession



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## Abstract

**Background:** Societal prejudices are often carried to workplace through gender discrimination, various occupations mirror these social inequalities and biases based on gender, race etc at workplace. Like many other public institutions, the police reproduce the stereotypes and prejudices of their society with respect to women.

**Objectives:** To understand women and gender issues as determinants of stress in police profession.

**Methods:** Literature review.

**Results:** Men oppose women's entry into the police force due to their anxiety over the self-declared right to manage law and order that is perceived to be their forte. Gender experts are of the opinion that such masculine concerns are borne out of their type casted idea that women are to be inferior to men. Entry of women into police have effect on the felinity of woman that make her aggressive, authoritarian, and less emotional. It also affects masculinity of men as they feel lowered in status to be commanded over by women superior.

**Conclusion:** Female gender has inherent superiority over men when it comes to interpersonal communication skills and ability to empathize with others. To harness this attribute there are efforts to set up all women institutions like jails, police stations. Gender sensitive police reforms will benefit society at large as it would be help in developing police institution that are responsive to people's needs.

**Keywords:** Police; women; Gender sensitivity; Discrimination; Stress

## Introduction

Societal prejudices are often carried to workplace through gender discrimination, various occupations mirror these social inequalities and biases based on gender, race etc at workplace. Like many other public institutions, the police reproduce the stereotypes and prejudices of their society with respect to women and men. Gender inequity is conspicuous in Police profession as it is popularly perceived to be one of the most masculine jobs [1]. Yet it is heartening to see women breaking new grounds and entering into police profession that was hitherto considered as exclusive male jobs [2,3]. However, the representation of women in police force remain dismal. Statistics suggest that women composition in police force globally is less than 10%. While developed countries and sub Saharan countries show marginally better representation with 12-13% proportion being women, yet in developing countries like India women constitute less than 3 % of police force. From equity point of view this gender discrimination at work place is disheartening as women comprise half of world population and take on two thirds of work burden and yet end up being owners of 10% of world property [4]. Gender equity is considered to be

the prerequisite for achieving women empowerment. The United Nations Charter recognized gender equality and called for the rights of individuals to be respected regardless of sex, and whether they come from large or small nations. This recognition is clearly enshrined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [5]. (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. This Convention marked the advent of globalization of the rights to equality for all women and guaranteed equal access to opportunities Owing to it paramount importance it has been incorporated as one of the eight goals under Millenium Development (MDGs) Goals set by United nations and do believe that unless the third goal gender equity is achieved the remaining of MDG goals are unlikely to be achieved. MDG [6].

## Discrimination in Assignments

It has been observed that women have gained entry into masculine police force but their struggle for equity continues.

They are being hired in inconsequential positions, are given uninteresting assignment, suffer from inadequate job training and face resistance from male colleagues [7]. While women have made good progress in the police force by way of increasing their share in terms of absolute number, yet they remain in less powerful occupational positions that are often boring, low paying and with very little advancement for promotions [8]. Discrepancies can be seen in female under representation in prestigious specialist roles such as firearms, combat deployment etc carrying with its possible implications for lateral and upwards progression. One of the researchers suggest women vulnerability in police force can be mitigated by substantially increasing the representation of women and it is believed that a critical mass of 35% representation would be desirable. But it important to understand that mere numeric representation as mandated by legal directions may not be an effective intervention unless the very culture and mind set in police force is changed by promoting women friendly policies. It is well documented that while women may be successful in getting entry into police force but very often she remains stagnated career wise struggling to get promoted to higher positions hence Law driven hiring may help women in recruitment but does not ensure equality in promotion [9-11].

### Perception of Men

One of the most important barriers that the women face in the police force is the fixed ideas and deep-rooted prejudices that their male co-workers have towards them. Women colleagues are considered to be physically weak, docile, lack in aggression and are considered inefficient in commanding respect among the public [12-14]. Some researchers have analyzed deeper roots of men opposing women's entry into the police force. The explanation essentially boils down to their anxiety over the self-declared right to manage law and order [15]. Gender experts are of the opinion that such masculine concerns are borne out of their type casted idea that women are basically not suited to be officers as they are inferior to men. It is also feared that women in commanding positions will undermine the solidarity among men. Such perceptions among men officers prevent them talking to lady officers and deliberately make them feel isolated and unwanted. Sometimes this insecurity drives men to bully or even terrorize lady officers by way of rude and derogatory comments in repulsive tone [16].

### Barriers

Once into the police force, women are faced with multiple impediments that can be broadly classified as intrinsic and extrinsic barriers. Intrinsic factors are related to job related factors namely work place environment, confrontational male colleague, negative appraisal by superiors [17] They essentially all sum up the prejudices and biases that target women and are systematically aimed at displacing women from positions or assignments that

place them in commanding positions. This is evidently reflected in denial of prestigious transfers and high-profile assignments such as narcotics, gang units, foreign assignments etc but instead are relegated to what is considered to be typically feminine units i.e., community relationship, domestic violence, child abuse etc [18]. This differential treatment make women officers feel unfairly discriminated. Besides women are often topics of sex jokes that make them feel highly uncomfortable in the company of male colleagues [19]. Extrinsic factors are the barriers that come to the fore due to double burden of work and family. It revolves around stress relating managing family and work-related pressures. Women are expected to be the primary care givers in majority of homes that leads to double burden of work and home. Policewomen are stressed given their unpredictable demands of their duty calls that invariably lead to conflicts at home.

### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment at workplace is very often downplayed and dismissed in the name of friendly flattering between man and women among police colleagues. While this kind of relationship is acceptable when the couple is dating or while in the private places that couples go with mutual consent, but it would be highly inappropriate at the workplaces [20] But have to continue with harassment. One of the main reasons why sexual harassment go unreported in police work force is due to peculiarities of policing in itself like subordination, solidarity etc. [21]. Workplace sexual harassment is very common in police where men and women work together. The vulnerability is heightened in the police due to strict subordination and nature of group work that require women teaming up with male colleagues. This proximity to male colleagues increases woman's vulnerability for sexual exploitation. Many policewomen also blame it on excessive concentration of power of discretion in the hands of their superiors. Higher ranking male officers often abuse power by enraging the modesty of women during the course of work. It sometimes takes other extreme of over patronization of women by putting on them unreasonable restrictions. The situation is compounded by lack of well laid systems and procedures for women grievance redressal mechanism. The existing systems for reporting sexual misconduct are so cumbersome that it deters any proactive step by the women in reporting workplace sexual harassment [22]. It is also ironical that due to protocols of reporting many times the petition of the victim has to pass through the very superior who has perpetrated the sexual crime. In traditional contexts, both the police and society at large generally favor negotiation and compromise as the appropriate ways to deal with sexual violence. This can lead to situations in which men forgive men for violence committed against women. Such culturally determined behaviors are very hard to alter through institutional reforms unless society is engaged as a whole. Stereotyped behaviors have direct bearing on the institutional culture, affecting mandates, operations and

resource allocation [23]. Legal and social change is required for increasing men's awareness of women's rights by use of media and popular culture [4].

### Stress

Police personnel are confronted with two distinct types of stress that could be categorized as static stress and dynamic stress. Static stress mainly involve social structures and systems that are related to individual background such as Caste, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender and age. Women police personnel have to particularly deal with gender role and demands for gender appropriate behavior that is often major source of static stress [24]. Dynamic stress are attributable to work environment and ability of police personnel in coping with work related stress. It is well known that policing profession puts the person in the face of grave dangers. Police personnel have to be contend with violence and death at crime scenes, [25] loss of life of a colleague or to be firing line personally to save lives of civilians or some time are forced to take lives of criminals all of which get remain embedded as haunting memories [26]. The unpredictability and violent work environment of policing profession prove to be major source of stress.

### Maternity Related Issues

Police establishment have been less than sensitive in treating women during their pregnancy period or once they are back from maternity leave. There is absence of clarity on role allocation during pregnancy period, while some women are relegated to clerical work where as some pregnant women are forced to carry out their regular duty without any concession e.g., patrolling late into their pregnancy, [27] Pregnant women have to very often utilize their personal leave, exhaust all the sick leave or forced to take leave with loss of pay for routine and mandatory ante natal care that require regular hospital visits. Exceeding mandated entitled leave and loss of pay leaves results into loss of seniority which adversely affect their career prospectus. Fear of jeopardizing career prospectus often prevent policewomen to disclose their pregnancy status to their colleagues and reporting officers consequently putting themselves and their unborn child to great dangers. The culmination of pregnancy resulting into successful delivery brings in fresh set of problems with childcare issues, managing work and family conflicts all of which adversely affect job satisfaction. The stress gets acute for the breast-feeding mothers once they return back to duty for the constant need to visit their infant. Lack of private and hygienic place to express and store milk at workplace adds to the stressful experience of police women [9,28,29]. There are unfair regulations that requires policewomen to resign if she became pregnant on duty without being married. Unjust victimization of unmarried policewomen happens when they become pregnant out of wed lock consequently, they are unceremoniously suspended or dismissed from the work. In the backdrop of the high incidence

of sexual abuse and exploitation at workplace by male colleagues, unmarried policewomen very often tend to become pregnant. Due to unjust regulations women are forced to terminate their pregnancies without revealing the perpetrator of sexual crime at workplace for the the fear of dismissal or loss of job [30].

### Retention

It is observed that lady police officers are more likely to resign from the job for family reasons as compared to their men counterparts which is vindicated by the exit interviews. Management of home and family, child rearing responsibilities and resultant maternity leave etc are cited as the major reasons. Resignation rates of women police officers remain low, and broadly comparable between men and women. However, female officers are more likely than male officers to leave for domestic reasons [9]. Pointers to police reforms specially to enhance retention of women personnel can be gathered from exit interviews which are important indicators to widespread discrimination at workplace that women have to put up with. Retention strategies can also be devised by implementing flexible working time to ensure the police service remains an employer of choice. Family support-oriented policies that include maternity leave, flexi timings on working days for woman officers having fed and infant babies will go long way to retain women in police force [4,31,32].

### Effect of Women on Men - Demusculinization of Men

In evolutionary scheme of things provision of security has always been perceived to be the responsibility of male members be it in animal world or human society. The association of security provision with musculanity is ingrained very deeply into male psyche. Since Police profession is an institution to provide security and men take upon themselves it as natural duty of men to be their duty [33]. Traditionally men have dominated over women in society, so when women enter the police profession on equal footing, staking claim for equal power, men experience an acute discomfort psychologically to share the plat form at the workplace and responsibilities as equals [34]. There is not only sense of loss of power but also loss of their masculinity in itself [35]. It is these reasons that explain why men in police profession find it difficult to accept women as coworker as it requires them to accord equal status [36]. Men find it very difficult to accept police women officers as their boss which is an demusculinising experience for them to be commanded over by a women. Men feel further demusculanised when they witness women passing the very same physical and mental standards mandated to get recruited into police profession there by demonstrating objectively equality of women with men. The fact that women can do the same work as men, make men reduced in status [37]. and depowered exploding their myth of men being superior over women. Men find it agonizingly difficult to accept the fact that their role as protector is being replaced by women which they would have liked it to be primarily a masculine mandate [21].

### Effect of Police Profession on Woman's Personality

There are two ways in which women inducted into police force may react, they either completely get coopted by the police subculture or tend to acquire masculine attributes in their personality e.g., tough, unemotional etc [34]. The other extreme is that they choose not to pursue the policing career. Women who do choose to take up policing as their profession, are always under personality conflict in deciding when and how to behave as a tough police cop and when should she assume lady like behavior [38]. Very often women enter male dominant profession on male terms without realizing their inherent superior feminine strength. When women enters police profession, she is faced with unique personality dilemma, while she is born as female but is expected to excel like male in discharging her duties. Police socialization and acculturation leads to women taking up more aggressive attributes and tend to be authoritarian in her dealings [39]. Police work is extremely demanding and often emotionally draining requiring women to mask their emotions. In an effort to excel like her male counterparts she takes on and internalize certain attributes like not backing down being over assertive [40,41]. These attributes are more pronounced when one is uncertain about the correctness of their stand but has to push their point of view only because she is police official, lest they can't be seen to be giving into an argument when engaging with public. It is such acculturation of policewomen that will lead to progressively erode inherently natural and superior feminine attributes. The role demands of policing will increasingly acquire masculine attributes in their efforts to prove their equality in efficiency in policing duties at par with their male counterparts. [9] The result of embracing police culture women undergo DE feminization in their behavior and leads to personality conflict on whether to stay their natural self or undergo total personality transformation to be recognized and respected in their profession [21].

### Masculine and Feminine Attribute Display During Work

Behavior at workplace called as occupational behavior is largely determined by the prescribed norms guiding people to do or enact gender within the larger parameters of social structures. Gender does not have a standard, rigid or defined attribute [41]. but it is either reflected or is actually enacted in everyday interactions. The show of masculinity by men or for that matter display of femininity by women can be seen to be emerging from social interactions at workplace [35]. Since norms expect women to behave in certain appropriate manner in society in relation to men, the same is expected by men at the workplace. Demands of authoritarian behavior from police profession from women is totally in contrast to socially prescribed behavior from women, this gender conflict is acutely felt by both by men and women alike [21].

### Sociological Effect on Women Police

#### Marriage

In some countries newly recruited policewomen are confronted with unfair departmental rules that governs their personal decision like marriage. There are mandatory two year wait period before newly recruited policewomen obtain permission to get married. There are similar unfair rules and practices that undermine woman's freedom to decide on the personal issues of pregnancy and childbirth after the marriage. Policewomen face social problem when it comes to marriage as their prospective husbands are officially scrutinized for suitability to marry a policewoman. Often such verification include personal interrogation of prospective husbands and verification of his background to make sure that he has no criminal record or tendencies. On the contrary policemen are free to marry any women of their choice without going through any police verification of their antecedents. Such stipulations are not only discriminatory in nature but are potentially very exploitative as male superiors might delay the process of approval, prolonging the investigations and making women vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation in order to speed up verification process. Socially policewomen find it difficult find prospective husbands for themselves because men find the process of police verification of their background as demeaning and humiliating. Civilian men who are already intimidated by the police are further discouraged by the prospects of being interrogated and investigated [30,42].

#### Sociological Issues

Social Isolation is part of police profession and the avoidance to intermingle with society is mutual. Civilians tend to avoid police personnel either for the fear or intimidation that the profession inspires in the public. On the other hand, police personnel avoid socialization for professional reasons. Police by profession have to work under thick veil of secrecy, the professional unity and loyalty in the face of threat perception from certain sections of society tend to bind them together to form their own social gathering hence isolating them further away from the society [43]. The process of Defeminization of women is accentuated by the specific dressing code that women have to adhere by making it mandatory to wear typical trousers and tucked in shirts. They are also barred from wearing any jewelry, that are symbols of being married women in certain societies. In some country's policewomen are required to place the alphabet "W" before their rank and are provided with special type of identification number for easier recognition of them as women. some countries there are discriminatory accommodation and welfare regulation that bars policewomen with civilian spouses to take accommodation and reside in police barracks. Policewomen married to civilian spouses are there by deprived of having the security that police

barracks offer and there by exposing them to the public dangers. [30,44].

### Benefits of Women in Police

Female gender has inherent superiority over men when it comes to interpersonal communication skills and ability to empathize with others [21]. To harness this attribute there are efforts to set up all women institution like jails, police stations etc. The idea is that convicted women inmates would receive sympathetic care from women police officials which would catalyze the transformation of criminal women to shun illegal means and lead a normal law-abiding life [45]. Policewomen are in a better position resolve and calm down possible violent and acrimonious scene, they also are less likely behave inappropriately in public places as compared to their male counter parts. Policewomen show less inclination to use firearms there by reducing fatal outcomes, they receive lesser resistance from the male offenders and have better cooperation during interrogation [46].

### UN Initiatives: Benefit of gender sensitization

United Nations is taking an initiative in promoting gender sensitive reforms in police profession across the world to bring in gender equity within the police force. Gender sensitive police reforms will benefit society at large as it would be help in developing police institution that are responsive to people's needs. Gender sensitization also will help police to be fair, just and free from any discriminatory approach to crime in society. Sensitization of police will also help them remain committed to their primary mandate to uphold the rule of law in the society. Gender sensitive police reforms have catalyzed the process of establishing exclusive police stations. Specially designated police units have been established to check sexual violence, prostitution, human trafficking and domestic violence in the society. Dedicated gender units in the police force are brought into existence with the larger goal of bringing in the attitudinal change in the society and promote improved reporting of gender-based crimes. It is expected that by pushing gender reforms in police stations will in itself have positive influence of gender equation within the police force. The gender sensitization process is also expected to bring in many administrative and operating procedures amendments within police profession. Making gender equality as an institutional value of police force can revolutionize the entire process of recruitment, promotion and retirement that would be nondiscriminatory in nature [4].

### Benefits of Gender Sensitization

One of the indicators for the gender sensitization of police reform is to increase the representation of women in the police force. The idea is to make the police force more community oriented and unless more women are inducted into police it would not get legitimacy in reflecting the population composition.

Presence of women in police will also help to moderate extreme use of deadly weapons and force in dealing with volatile situation. One of the biggest gains of gender sensitization would be to reduce crime against women by the way of giving them greater security and reducing their vulnerability to sexual violence against women. Recruiting a greater number of women into police force, providing them with equal opportunity and rewarding them for excellence would pave the way for women rising up in the hierarchy of police ranking. A Successful woman in police would command higher respect in the society there by help in bring in change in public perception towards women [30,47,48].

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