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WOMEN IN INDIAN POLICE: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The role of women in law enforcement has changed over time, as they have become more involved in the police force in a number of countries. Nevertheless, the well-being and job efficacy of female police officers are still impacted by a variety of obstacles. Women have made significant improvements in the pursuit of gender equality in the field of policing, however, obstacles persist. Discrimination, harassment, and entry barriers continue to be encountered by women in the workplace today.

Keywords: Women, NPC, Community –Policing, Gender equality.

Introduction

The necessity for female police officers was first realized in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century, when 'Police Matrons' were appointed in New York City in 1845 to handle women and girls kept in police custody. The Ramayana, Mahabharata, Kautilya's 'Arthashastra', and the Ashokan edicts all provide an early history of women policing in India.

The Ramayana describes how Sita was put under the watchful eye of police ladies who kept a constant vigil. Similarly, the Ashokan edicts regularly mention to the 'Prativedikas' who safeguarded the Royal Chamber from invaders and kept the king informed of day-to-day activities.

In India, the necessity for female police officers was first realized during the 1938 labor unrest in Kanpur. In 1933, the State of Travancore experimented with the appointment of women as Special Police Constables, appointing one female head constable and twelve female police constables.

“As a result of the Partition, and its aftermath, a number of women's organizations emerged that required women's police officers. Riots, atrocities against women, kidnapping, abduction, and other sex felonies were deemed to justify increasing the number of women in law enforcement. In 1948, the Delhi Police Force was the first to regularly hire police women.”

According to the “BPRD (1975), some of the principal duties performed by women police in India are:

- Helping in the investigation of crimes involving women and children.
- Providing assistance to the local police in tracing missing women and children.
- Recovering minor girls from brothels and escorting them to rescue homes, courts, and hospitals.
- Recovery of women and girls involved in abduction and kidnapping cases.
- Search and escort of women offenders.
- VIP and security duties.
- Work relating to women passengers at airports such as in-person security check and their belongings.
- Helping local police in evacuating women and children from disturbed areas and in emergencies like a natural disaster, calamity, etc.
- Maintaining order in women meetings and processions.
- Dealing with women agitators, satyagrahis and labour troubles in which women are involved.
- Looking after women and children in fairs and places of worship and in festivals.”



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Recommendation of the National Police Commission (NPC) says: “The presence of women police station would help in getting trust and confidence in the police. Women police can also help in giving better attention to the “Service” aspects of police work. The entire philosophy, culture and attitude of police should be such as to make a police station appear and function as a ready source of relief for persons in distress.”

Women's roles in policing are becoming more important in modern democratic societies. In India, women police officers play an important role in preserving law and order, dealing with crimes against women and children, community policing, intelligence collecting, and dispute mediation. Their presence serves to make policing more sensitive, inclusive, and people-centered.

Women police have superior communication abilities and can gain the public's cooperation and trust. Several female police officers have gone above and beyond their traditional roles. Ms. Kiran Bedi, the first female IPS officer to enter what was traditionally a male-dominated field. She has made significant advances in the lives of convicts at Tihar jail in New Delhi. With such accomplishments, she has become the symbol of an independent woman in India.

The Importance of Women Leaders in Policing

Historically, policing has been a male-dominated profession, and women have frequently encountered obstacles to entry and advancement within police agencies. Consequently, there is an urgent need for female police officers. Initially, the inclusion of a greater number of female police personnel in the police force can enhance the level of trust and cooperation within the community. According to studies, women officers outperform their male counterparts in terms of calming potentially violent situations and developing positive relationships within communities, particularly with marginalized and vulnerable populations such as women, children, and ethnic minorities.

Women Police officers play important role in following as:-

1. **Handling Crime Against Women:** Women victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, harassment and human trafficking often feel more comfortable in reporting crimes to female officers.
2. **Community Policing:** Women officers are generally considered more approachable and effective in counselling, building public trust and conflict management.
3. **Improving Policing Image:** Greater female officer’s participation promotes i.e. gender equality, human rights, democratic policing and public confidence in law enforcement.
4. **Child Protection:** Women Police officers are essential in cases involving juvenile justice, Child abuse and trafficking.

Major issues and challenges faced by Women in Policing

Modern society has overcome difficulties between old and modern values, as well as rational and irrational beliefs. Due to these new changes and transformations of a new society, women all over the world have had to battle hard, to make a breakthrough into the police force.

1. **Gender Discrimination:** The male-dominated profession has had an impact on women who have chosen to pursue a career in law enforcement. Despite the existence of laws that prohibit discrimination, women who are employed in the police force continue to experience discrimination and are viewed as a marginalized, unaccepted minority counterparts. They are generally not allowed to take part in core policing activities and have to work doubly hard to expel such notions. Several researchers have concluded that “women have gradually acculturated into the police



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sub-culture while still experiencing varying degrees of sexual discrimination and harassment” (Heidensohn,1992; Gosset and Williams, 1998).“ Jharkhand’s state police manual had stated that women police officers shall not be substituted for male police and should be appointed tasks that they alone can perform better. Women generally entrusted with tasks like escorting female prisoners, helping male police in the investigations which concerns female victims or watches the duty of female suspects.”

2. **Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment is prevalent in all jobs, including law enforcement. It induces physical and mental stress, which results in depression and job dissatisfaction. Women police personnel have also confronted sexual harassment at the workplace. It affects the dignity and performance of women personnel in this profession. In general, female officers refrain from reporting sexual harassment due to the fact that they are either suspended or their account is discredited. Women Police officers often face Sexism and stereotypes, including being perceived as less capable or less authoritative than their male colleagues.
3. **Low Representation of Women:** One of the biggest challenges is the low percentage of women in the police force. Women are undisputedly underrepresented in the Police force across India. Although women have increasingly entered law enforcement over the years, their proportion in the total police strength remains comparatively low. This imbalance affects efficiency, inclusiveness, and gender-sensitive policing.
4. **Work- life balance difficulties:** Women facing the "dual roles" of managing family and profession experience more problems in balancing both. They get less support from their family and hence mostly avoid night duty .Thus, they are often accused of taking advantage of their gender as also physical frailty to escape hard duty, to get less duty and avoid night duty. All these factors ultimately portray a negative image.
5. **Prejudices and Biases of Male Police Officers:** Women in the police force have not been entirely accepted by their male colleagues. Along with negative views from co-workers, women in the police force confront a variety of other challenges on a daily basis that hamper their smooth integration. Male-dominated cultures can make it difficult for women to be considered as equals, despite their qualifications and expertise. Male employees still oppose integrating women into mainstream policing.
6. **Recruitment and Promotion Barriers:** Policing is a profession that has traditionally been male dominated, with women facing significant barriers to recruitment and promotion. These barriers can take many forms, including discrimination, gender disparity, and institutional biases.
7. **Lack of support and mentorship:** Women in Police enforcement may experience challenges in progressing their careers due to a lack of support and mentoring from their male colleagues. “Without the guidance and advice of more experienced colleagues, women may be less likely to receive promotions or be given special assignments that can help them gain valuable experience and skills.”
8. **Role Ambiguity and Role Conflict:** As the number of women in the police has increased, issues such as role conflicts, multiple roles, and role ambiguity have become more severe. Most women in the police are confused about the way they should conduct themselves.



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Suggestions:

To address these issues and challenges of Women Policing in law enforcement, several strategies have been proposed as follows as:-

1. One strategy is to increase the representation of women in police agencies. This can be done through targeted recruitment efforts and by creating a more welcoming and inclusive environment for women in these agencies.
2. Another approach is to implement policies that promote gender equality and diversity within law enforcement agencies.
3. Change in organisational culture by eliminating stereotypes and bias, by encouraging inclusive leadership.
4. Strengthen safety mechanism by taking strict actions against harassment and providing better security arrangements during duty.
5. Promote leadership and decision making roles by encourage leadership development programs for women.

Conclusion

“Women in policing faced a range of barriers from recruitment and promotion to discrimination and gender disparity. To address these issues and create a more diverse and inclusive workforce, it is important that police agencies and organizations take a holistic approach, implementing policies and procedures that promote diversity and inclusion, and provide training and support for women. By doing so, organizations can benefit from the diverse perspectives and skills of women in policing to create a more effective and responsive workforce.”

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