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## Perspectives of Women Police Officers in the Union Territory of Puducherry, India

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## **Perspectives of Women Police Officers in the Union Territory of Puducherry, India**

By Chemmalar S.<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Women face unprecedented challenges of gender inequality despite representing half of the world's population, yet increasingly, they are entering physically demanding professions such as policing. Underlying police culture is a normative power structure defined by hegemonic masculinity. Discrimination, sexual harassment, and inadequate maternity and parental leave are some of the issues that women police officers face. Despite these limitations, there is a growing demand for women police officers. This study contributes to a better understanding of the issues that women police officers face in their work. It also sheds light on the psychology of women police officers and their approach in confronting these issues. A review of the existing statistics reveals that women are underrepresented and undervalued in policing in the Union Territory of Puducherry. To understand their experiences and viewpoints, the author conducted interviews with women police officers in the Union Territory of Puducherry.

*Keywords:* Women police, Policing, Gender inclusiveness, Leadership roles, India, Puducherry

“Law enforcement is most effective when it reflects the communities it serves, and a gender-inclusive workforce is a fundamental part of strategic policing” (INTERPOL, 2021)

### **Introduction**

In India, female police officers represent 10.30% of the total police force, and the number is steadily increasing. The female population per policewoman in 2020 was 3,026.8, while the total number of women police officers in the country rested at 215,504 (Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), 2020). The National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2019) shows that women make up less than 13% of all police officers and hold a much smaller percentage of leadership positions. These figures clearly show that women are underrepresented in law enforcement.

In 2009, the Indian government set a target of 33% representation for women. Apart from Union Territories, the state of Bihar adopted a reservation of 38%, while nine states adopted 33% (Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Telangana). Ten other states set lower targets, while nine states set no targets at all (Tata Trusts, 2020).

The presence of women in policing would enhance the ability of police to address the unique needs of female victims and contribute to community safety, crime prevention, and crime control. The representation and meaningful participation of women in policing is critical to achieving gender equality and improving the operational capabilities of law enforcement (UN Women, 2020). The presence of a female police force builds public confidence, thereby increasing

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the overall legitimacy of law enforcement. According to the BPRD study, the increased presence of women police officers enables a better response to gender-based crimes such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse (2020). Often, marginalized groups such as women and children are neglected and abused by those who are supposed to protect them. Gender stereotypes that create rigid ideas about the roles and expectations of men and women exacerbate such experiences. These stereotypes contribute to the underrepresentation of women in the police force and the perception that policing is unfeminine. This means that police departments are missing out on valuable skills that could help them deliver more gender-equitable and higher quality policing and create a safer world for all (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, 2019). Police work is closely associated with danger, crime, and coercion and is generally considered men's work. In addition, law enforcement is commonly associated with aggression and strength, which fuels a belief that masculinity is essential for policing. According to studies, men and women are equally capable of taking on the role of a police officer. Despite these studies, women have faced and continue to face external and internal obstacles when it comes to achieving equality in policing (Fernandes, 2011). This is because policing is dominated by a patriarchal structure that perpetuates gender inequality. The other problem is the discrepancy in access. Women entering the police service must contend with the male-dominated structure that dictates inequalities in access. Because men have determined the nature of policing, the structure itself prevents women from breaking into this male-dominated system.

In a survey conducted by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and presented at the 7th National Conference on Women in Police (2016), it was found that women in the police force still face hygiene issues such as lack of toilets, sanitation facilities, and privacy. Most police stations do not have a separate restroom for women, forcing them to use the male police restrooms, and even lack a trash can to dispose of their sanitary napkins. A wide-ranging survey was conducted on the work-related barriers faced by women in the police force. This survey was discussed at the conference and resulted in a detailed recommendation being submitted to the government (Press Trust of India, 2016).

## Literature Review

Despite the fact that numerous studies have been conducted in other areas of gender studies, critical studies on the challenges faced by Indian women in this profession are scarce and the subject is inadequately addressed. However, several international and United Nations-backed studies can contextualize the experiences of Indian women in law enforcement. The Tata Trusts (2020), in its India's Justice Report 2020, examines the structural capacity of the country's justice system, emphasizing police diversity as a practical necessity and a legal requirement. The report shows that the percentage of women police officers in each of India's states ranges from 10 to 38%. Capacity deficit data shows that women make up more than 10% of the police force in 13 of 36 states and union territories. The report provides comprehensive data on women in policing in the Union Territory of Puducherry. According to the data on police organizations published in the Bureau of Police Research and Development (2020) (as of January 01, 2020), the actual total strength of women police officers in the UT of Puducherry is only 260, which is 7.58% of the total number of police officers in the Union Territory. The 7th National Conference of Women in Law Enforcement (NCWP), held under the auspices of the Bureau of Police Research and Development, found that women face a glass ceiling in promotions due to the segregated cadre system for men and women in subordinate ranks (CRPF, 2016). Women are assigned only a limited number of positions at the chief of police, sub-inspector, and inspector levels. The number of

women in leadership positions in the Indian Police Service paints a negative picture. Despite efforts to increase the representation of women, the percentage of women in the police force has remained largely stagnant over the years. Women make up less than a quarter of all police officers and have a much smaller share of leadership positions (National Institute of Justice, 2019). According to Fernandes (2011), gender discrimination in the police force is widespread and can persist due to variables such as structural exclusion, emotional labor, problems in recruiting and retaining women, and socially constructed rhetoric. Increasing the number of women in law enforcement is not the only way to achieve gender equality. It is about changing the power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality and violence. While women remain underrepresented in police organizations worldwide, as of February 2019, 15% of police officers deployed on UN missions were female. This is due to a number of international and national initiatives aimed at increasing women's engagement in peacekeeping (DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, 2019). Dedicated gender units in the police can help improve public perceptions and encourage better reporting. They can influence the views of male and female police officers alike (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2004).

Crimes against women and girls can be prevented and reduced by enhancing the value and contribution of women in law enforcement. An equitable, competent, and representative police force respects the fundamental rights of all citizens and adheres to national and international commitments to gender equality and women's rights (Sethi & Iram, 2012). According to research by Miller and Segal (2019), two important elements are captured by primary quality measures: crime reporting rates and escalation of domestic violence. Research shows that increasing the proportion of women officers improves outcomes on both dimensions. When analyzing other crimes and victims, the researchers found no evidence that women officers have a significant impact on reported rapes.

### **Legal Requirements Regarding Women Officers in the Criminal Procedure Code in India**

All countries are aware of the need for women officers to deal with women and children who are victims or in conflict with the law, as evidenced by legislation and/or standard operating procedures (INTERPOL, UNODC, 2020). A number of sections of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.P.C.) in India describe the legal conditions for the use of women officers. It is uncertain how well these conditions are met in practice. In India, the law requires that women police officers be deployed in all crimes involving women and children, such as cases involving the protection of children from sexual offenses (POCSO), domestic violence, or the arrest of a female offender. A number of provisions in the Indian Criminal Procedure Code, 1973, set out the legal requirements for the use of women police officers. Women police officers must be deployed in the investigation and trial of rape cases, the preparation of witness statements, and the medical examination of the victim. According to the amended provisions of the IPC relating to the commission of sexual offenses against women under Section 154 of the Cr.P.C., First Information Reports (FIR) must be recorded by a female police officer (Das., 2016).

Section 46(4) of the Cr.P.C. provides that the arrest of a woman shall be made by a woman police officer. In exceptional cases, women may be arrested after sunrise and before sunset only by a woman police officer after obtaining permission from the 1<sup>st</sup> class judicial magistrate. Section 51(2) of Cr. PC provides that an accused woman should be searched by another woman. As per Section 164 of Cr. PC, the statement of a rape victim must be taken by a woman police officer at an appropriate place, in addition to the statement taken before the District Magistrate. According to Section 160 (1), women under the age of 15 should be guarded by women police officers and

questioned in the presence of women police officers (Maheshwary, 2020). Section 24 and 26 of the POCSO Act requires a woman police officer not below the rank of sub-inspector to take the child's statement. It also stipulates that the woman police officer cannot wear a uniform while taking the statement. According to the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act of 1956, the SPO or Trafficking Police Officer (TPO) should be accompanied by at least two women police officers, and if a woman or girl is required to be interrogated, it should be done by a woman police officer (Nair,2018).

### **Method, Objectives, and Scope**

This is a socio-legal study that is qualitative in nature. Primary data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire from a representative sample that was randomly selected. 143 women police officers were part of this study. The data collection was based on semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions in different police stations of the Union Territory of Puducherry.

This study sought to identify the barriers women face in policing and the factors that contribute to women's limited participation in policing based on the views expressed in the interviews. Similarly, this study aims to provide a snapshot of the status quo of women's position in law enforcement and to examine the importance of women's presence in policing. The survey questions aimed to elicit opinions and insights on a number of standardized measures related to work perspectives and experiences, as well as welfare measures, safety concerns, hygiene issues, work-life balance, maternity benefits and promotion experiences, peer support, organizational support, and training needs.

As of yet, there has been insufficient empirical research on the limited participation of women in policing and on ways to improve their participation. There is insufficient research on understanding the challenges faced by women police officers and ways to overcome them. This study examines the issues facing women law enforcement in India and proposes solutions to improve their representation.

### **Analysis of Data on Women in Policing in UT of Puducherry**

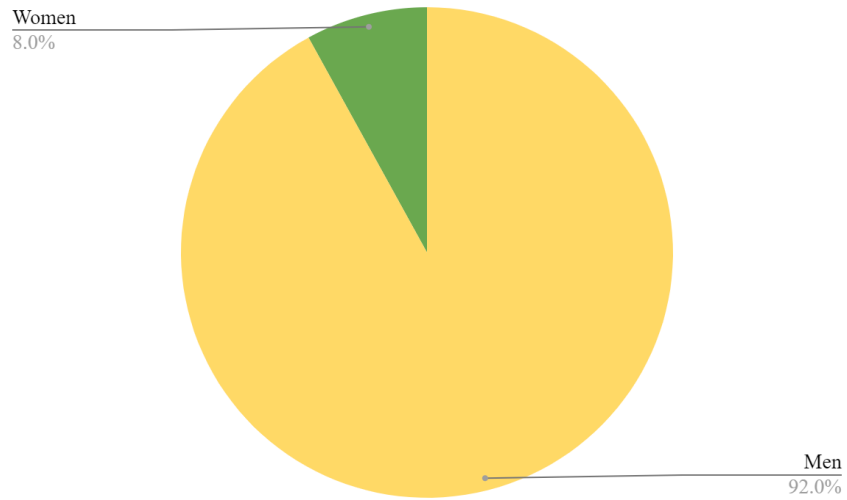
Puducherry is 489.97 square kilometers and has 3,431 police officers in 54 police stations. Of the total number of police stations, there are three that deal with crimes against women and children. The total number of police officers is 4,462, with 1,031 positions still unfilled. With 260 police officers, women make up 7.58% of the total police force. With the female population of Puducherry being around 791,000, the ratio of women per female police officer is 3,042.31. Notably, the allowable reservation rate for women police officers is 33%. The actual number of women in the Civil Police is 204, with only three women holding the rank of AIGP/SSP/SP/Commandant,<sup>2</sup> while eight women hold the rank of SI/RSI.<sup>3</sup> A total of 35 head constables and 158 other constables work as civilian police officers. The actual number of women in the armed special police battalions is 56, of whom three serve as S.I./RSIs, eight as Head Constables, and 45 as Constables (BPRD, 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> AIGP - Assistant Inspector General of Police / SSP - Senior Superintendent of Police / SP - Superintendent of Police

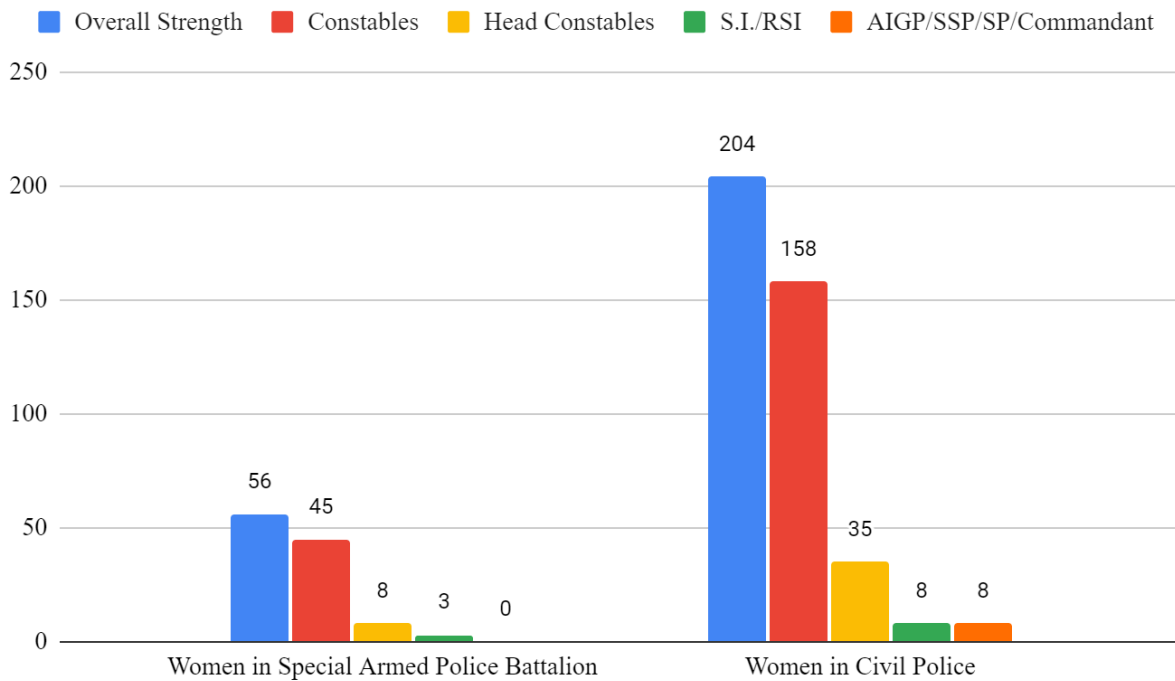
<sup>3</sup> SI - Sub Inspector / RSI - Reserve Sub Inspector

**Figure 1: Percentage of Women in Policing in Puducherry**



Source: BPRD (2020)

**Figure 2: Positions Held by Policewomen in Puducherry**



Source: BPRD (2020)

## Gender-Inclusive Policing

In-depth study and research led by 30x30 initiative<sup>4</sup> revealed in a National Institute of Justice report that women officers are beneficial for communities and law enforcement. Women police are viewed positively by communities as being more genuine and sympathetic, and communities expect better outcomes for crime victims when women police are involved, particularly in cases of sexual assault (Fritsvold, 2023). In the view of Vera Tkachenko, UNODC international manager, “Building the capacity of women in police, in particular in the field of community policing, is essential to ensuring the protection of women's rights and effectively addressing security challenges across the country” (UNODC, 2023). In a 1985 study, female police officers were shown to respond to domestic violence complaints with greater care, patience, and understanding than their male counterparts. The same study reveals that victims of domestic violence who communicated with a female officer perceived the police as being more supportive and rated female police officers favorably (Homant & Daniel, 1985). As per the research conducted by National Centre for Women & Policing (NCWP) in the United States as well as internationally, female officers responded with greater proficiency to situations of child abuse and domestic violence, and they were more involved in the community (Harrington, 2000).

The presence of women officers in policing is an essential aspect of law enforcement, as women officers are required by law to be deployed in the arrest of a female offender. Despite countries' expressed commitment to increasing the number of women officers in their ranks, persistent barriers to inclusion and progressive change hinder attempts to recruit, retain, and promote women officers. Structural and cultural barriers impede inclusion and advocacy for progressive change.

Meaningful participation is at the core of gender-responsive policing. The concept of meaningful participation requires that women not only be present, but that their concerns be acknowledged and addressed. They should be able to express their views and needs based on their experience and expertise. Gender-responsive policing must be inclusive and representative and should include the following factors: availability (all needed services must be provided in appropriate quantity and quality, regardless of gender), accessibility (all essential services must be accessible to all women without prejudice. They must be both cost-effective and physically accessible, i.e., safely accessible to all women), informed consent, and confidentiality (women need to know that they are being listened to and that their needs are being acknowledged and met) (United Nations Women, 2021). To promote equality, the police as an institution must address the diverse needs and concerns of men and women by providing effective policing services and promoting an enabling culture and structure.

Analysis of available data shows that women are very poorly represented at the leadership levels, and the majority of women police officers in Puducherry are working as constables (BPRD, 2020). The underrepresentation of women in the police force has proven to be a major barrier to gender mainstreaming. Women are underrepresented in the police service for a variety of reasons, including the lack of impact of gender norms and inadequate regulatory initiatives, as well as lack of recruitment and promotion. Although the central government has implemented a 33% employment quota for women, policies vary across police organizations and the integration of

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<sup>4</sup> 30x30 Initiative is an association of police leaders and professionals who aim to enhance inclusive participation of women in various ranks of policing. The initiative is intended to advance women in policing by adding 30% more women recruits by 2030.

women is gradual. There is concern that quota policies are not adequately planned and implemented nationwide.

In a global context, the study shows that identical recruitment and selection criteria, such as physical requirements, appear to be a limiting factor in the recruitment of women to the police force. The lack of gender-sensitive criteria, the lack of a standardized recruitment technique, and the lack of representation of women on selection committees are seen as barriers to implementing a cohesive recruitment process (Shephard et al., 2002). Women's career choices are hindered by the social construction of gender roles and relations. Societal influences are a major barrier to women's participation and involvement in law enforcement. They force women to avoid careers in law enforcement, or if they do, it is typically in a less demanding role due to stereotypes (Foley et al., 2019). Despite longer service, women are often denied promotion to higher positions because of a lack of vacancies, especially at the management level, failure to complete mandatory courses, and inability to meet promotion standards. Belonging to a specific area is one of the requirements, and women are often denied assignment to an area. The promotion criteria appear to be the same for men and women. Yet, there are underlying biases, even if they are not seen as potential barriers to women's career advancement (McLeod, 2018). The deployment of women police officers in the field is discouraged. Women are often excluded from performing specialized duties such as investigations, interrogations, and forensic evidence collection in traditional police stations. Women are rarely assigned to Station House Officer (SHO) at regular police stations, with the exception of Women Police Stations (WPS), which are staffed exclusively by women. Women officers are often viewed by the police as restrictive and not as full-fledged personnel who perform a variety of police duties. Working conditions in police stations, such as the lack of basic facilities and an often-unsympathetic working atmosphere, discourage women from joining these units. The lack of flexible work hours impacts work-life balance for both men and women. It has ramifications for women who have young children or other responsibilities (Sethi & Iram, 2012).

### **Women Police and Crimes against Women**

Gender bias in policing has significant implications for service delivery. In particular, male-dominated law enforcement has a negative impact on women as criminals and victims (Bull et al., 2021). According to empirical research by Miller and Segal (2019), greater representation of women in the police increases the quality of law enforcement in two ways. First, a higher proportion of women police officers in a given location increases the reporting rate of violent crimes against women in that area. Second, increasing the number of women police officers helps prevent the spread of domestic violence. A higher proportion of women police officers at the local level reduces the likelihood of future domestic violence and lowers the rate of homicides by women's intimate partners.

### **Interview Excerpts: Factors Affecting Women's Involvement in Policing**

The survey provides a unique look at how police officers perceive their role in the community, how they view the impact of their work, and what they face on a daily basis. There are a number of factors that account for women's low participation in policing, including the nature of the work, work-life balance, sanitation issues, and hiring practices. In this context, 98 women police officers in the Puducherry region were surveyed. The survey was conducted with the intention of identifying variables that contribute to limited women's participation in policing and suggesting ways to mitigate the problem.

Vanitha, who holds the post of Women Police Constable (WPC), has a degree in Commerce and joined the police service in 2007. She is currently working at the All-Women Police



Station in Puducherry. In her personal communication (January 9th, 2021), she shared revealing information. When asked about the reason for the low representation of women in the police force, she said that Puducherry is in dire need of a female inspector because there are hardly any women in leadership positions at present. She pointed out that Krishnaveny, the last known women police inspector, retired in 2011, and no one has been appointed to the position since. She claims that there is no reservation for women in promotions, so the most senior male police officer always ends up receiving the leadership positions. She believes that the reservation rules should be changed to increase women's participation in policing and that women should be promoted not only at the lower level but also to higher positions. When asked about the ease with which she dresses and equips herself, she explained that she was recruited in 2007 and was part of the 18th cohort, which included 64 women officers, resulting in a higher percentage of women in the police force than previous cohorts. She went on to say that since 2007, women police officers have been required to wear leather belts identical to those worn by the Tamil Nadu Police, whereas previously they were required to wear cotton cloth belts with adjustable thin metal buckles that were more comfortable and user-friendly. Vanitha introduced me to a colleague who had joined the police in 1991 and wore a bush shirt with a cloth belt.<sup>5</sup> She admitted that wearing the leather belt was really difficult, especially during the postpartum period. Vanitha explained that she had to have two cesarean sections for her two children, which put her in a terrible situation every day while working with the rough leather belt. She claimed that workplace harassment was commonplace for women in the police force until Dr. Kiran Bedi took office as Pondicherry's Lt. Governor in 2016. Since then, harassment has virtually disappeared. Moreover, the attitude of male police officers towards women police officers has changed drastically. She further stated that during the tenure of Her Excellency Dr. Kiran Bedi in Puducherry, there was a noticeable difference in the advancement of women police officers. For example, women police officers were given responsibility for routine patrols and provided with vehicles. Vanitha believes that women should be placed at the top of the police hierarchy as only women can understand their specific needs.

Nadiya (WPC) has a master's degree in commerce and has been in police service since 2013 (personal communication, January 9th, 2021). Observing that she was wearing a khaki saree and a white blouse, I inquired whether police officers are free to dress as they please. She replied that she was two months pregnant and that women police officers were usually allowed to wear a saree or a bush shirt during pregnancy and in the postpartum period. She explained that every woman police officer can take 180 days of maternity leave (ML) and 720 days of childcare leave (CCL) for two children if approved by the Superintendent of Police (SP). She expressed her dissatisfaction that women do not have easy access to this benefit. They have to apply to SP through the superintendent after giving birth, which usually takes 20 days to be approved, and they have to report for duty until then with great difficulty. During these 20 days, they must either obtain authorization to feed their children or find another solution. However, the leave approval is granted for two months, after which they have to apply for a new one. She added that she is pregnant for the second time and was only granted 60 days of CCL for the birth of her first child. She claims that the lack of women police officers is the main cause of the problem. She went on to say that despite sufficient reservation, only nine candidates from her batch were welcomed into police service and that male police officers were filling the positions reserved for women due to the lack of female candidates.

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<sup>5</sup> Section 25 of The Indian Police Service (Uniform) Rules, 1954 defines "bush shirt" as Infantry pattern, of khaki drill with khaki bone buttons, two breast pockets with point flaps, plain back without pleats, adjustable shoulder straps, detachable cloth belt and length down to the level of the knuckles.

Women Home Guard (WHG) Thilagam, who completed tenth grade, joined the police service in 2013 and is not a permanent employee (personal communication, September 1st, 2021). She claims WHGs do not receive the same benefits as other police officers. They were paid on a per diem basis and endured much mental and physical suffering during pregnancy and postpartum. Thilagam appeared despondent and hesitated to answer the questions.

Praneshwari, an Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) with 29 years of experience, was awarded the Chief Minister Reward in 2016 for her outstanding service (personal communication, January 9th, 2021). She was reluctant to talk to me at first, but eventually answered some questions succinctly. When asked about the pros and cons of being a senior police officer, she replied, "I like this job and it's the only job that pays 13 months a year." She shared her experience with special training in martial arts such as judo and karate in Delhi. "Police service is not suitable for married life," she said frankly when asked about work-life balance.

Saranya (WPC), who has a postgraduate degree in Zoology, has been a member of the police since 2015 (personal correspondence, August 28th, 2021). In her interview, she expressed her desire to patrol ever since she joined the police, but she has always been assigned administrative tasks since patrolling is considered a man's job. She acknowledged that the situation started to change in 2016 when Dr. Kiran Bedi was appointed as Lt. Governor of Pondicherry. She thanked the Lieutenant Governor for highlighting the importance of developing the skills and careers of women police officers. Saranya recalled Lieutenant Governor Kiran Bedi's conversation with a police officer about the need for operational work/patrol for women police officers and the career development it entails. She added that the Lt. Governor has instructed officers to inquire about the willingness of women police officers to participate in patrol duty, provided that no coercion is used. When asked about the comfort of the uniform and accessories, Saranya expressed that she felt confident in the uniform and never felt any discomfort with the outfit and accessories. Saranya reported that her male colleagues were mostly supportive of her. However, she was annoyed by one male police officer who is close to retirement and frequently asked women police officers to wash tea cups.

Sumathi (WPC), who has a degree in laboratory technology, was a fellow student of Saranya. Sumathi joined the police in 2015 and expressed interest in crime scene visits and investigations (personal communication, August 28th, 2021). When asked about any notable and memorable crime scenes she had visited, she replied, "I have never accompanied a specialized response team or police officer on a serious crime but have only been assigned to petty crimes such as theft." She appreciates the friendly interaction of male colleagues with female officers not only inside the station, but also outside the station during operational work at events such as campaigns and VIP visits. She further explained that although there are one or two men at each station who stereotype women and call them ineffective, women officers have overcome this obstacle and never hesitate to fight for their rights. Regarding transportation options for women police officers in the event of a delay in returning home, Sumathi said, "Normally, female police officers are not assigned to night duty...but in extraordinary circumstances like New Year's Eve and Diwali, female police officers stay in the station itself, where sleeping facilities are available." She went on to say that women police officers are provided white motor scooters and gasoline is paid for them, but that there are no transportation facilities.

When Ashwini was questioned about the appropriateness of the uniform and accessories, she stated that the uniform was only appropriate for unmarried women, not for married women who had given birth to a child. While expressing the plight of mothers in uniform, Ashwini pointed out that the huge belt buckle is deeply resented by mothers. Ashwini suggested I interview a

married female police officer with children to learn more about the challenges female officers face. When asked about the quality and suitability of the shoes that women police officers wear, she replied, “The shoes we got this year are very soft and comfortable, but before that we wore shoes with hard soles that were unsuitable for female police officers.” When asked about her most interesting and memorable crime scene investigation, she admitted that she had never been to a crime scene, but she had recently accompanied a special police team to arrest a female suspect in a murder case, as it was required by law to take women police officers to arrest a female perpetrator. When asked about the health problems of women police officers, she expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of a separate women's restroom in police stations. Concerning the availability of a separate bedroom and dressing room, she replied, “A separate room is available, but it is not used because all the materials are dumped in the room.”

### Focus Group Discussions

A focus group discussion was held on July 28, 2021. Questions focused on the officers' experiences, maternity benefits and work-life balance, comfort with the uniform and interest in patrolling, hygiene issues, policies, and practices. A total of 109 women police officers participated in the focus group discussion, with the group consisting of officers between the ages of 24 and 58. Policewomen over the age of 40 complained about work-life balance. They expressed concern about their in-laws' attitudes toward their work. The women police officers were unable to take care of their children due to their work schedules and had to miss attending family events such as weddings or parties. Their absence from family gatherings often resulted in social disruption. They regularly received work-related late-night phone calls from their male colleagues, prompting their possessive or jealous spouses to start an argument. Their biggest hygiene concern was the lack of separate restrooms for women officers in the police station. Since there is no changing room for women police officers, they are forced to change in a common restroom. Since most toilets do not have locks, they have to be careful when using the toilet. There were many opinions among the group when asked about the comfort of the uniform. Young women police agreed that the uniform (khaki shirt and trousers/slacks)<sup>6</sup> is comfortable and makes them feel confident while performing their duties. However, pregnant police women and women over the age of 40 years feel that khaki shirts and trousers are not comfortable for them due to obesity and factors associated with menstruation. They feel that the existing uniform is gender insensitive and seek a more woman-friendly uniform. For their biological and physical comfort, the women officers request modifications to the present uniform's design.

When questioned about work life-balance, most women police officers indicated that they would prefer shift-based work since the fast-paced nature of the police profession and the unusually long hours make it difficult to balance work and family. When further questioned about the nature of an ideal shift, they expressed their interest in a system of three shifts of 8 hours (day, evening, and night shifts) with the day shift from 06:00-14:00, evening shift from 14:00-22:00, and the night shift from 22:00-06:00. Furthermore, half of the women in the group would prefer working in morning and evening shifts rather than night shifts.

When asked about access to counseling services for women police officers, they responded that counseling is held once a year for all women officers, including superiors. In this setting, policewomen cannot voice their complaints because they feel uncomfortable voicing their

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<sup>6</sup> Section 802 of Pondicherry UT police manual requires every police officer to wear khaki colored pants and shirt (bush shirt and slacks). The provision has no separate categorization for women; however, the description of articles to be worn by women police alone is mentioned under section 809.

concerns in the presence of their superiors. When a group of policewomen have a problem at work or at home, they offer support to each other. Mutual support makes it easier for women to work and stay in the police force.

### **Findings**

The investigation revealed the following results: Women police officers face a variety of obstacles both at work and at home. Married women police officers struggle more than unmarried women police officers when it comes to uniform appropriateness, access to benefits, and work-life balance. Women in higher positions prevent harassment in the workplace and facilitate career advancement for other women. Women's opportunities are limited by the lack of reservations for women in promotion and by selection processes based on seniority. Below is a summary of the findings:

- About 97% of policewomen have a university degree and hold the post of constable or head constable.
- About half of women police officers (53%) want to work in systems of three shifts of 8 hours each (day, evening, or night shifts). Of these, 98% of the married women would prefer to work in day and evening shifts.
- About 6% of women police officers say they have been assigned to patrol work. 95% say they were not allowed to conduct crime scene investigations, while 5% say they were allowed to accompany other officers only because it was required by law, such as when a female offender was arrested. However, 85% expressed a desire to go on patrol and investigate at the crime scene.
- The vast majority of married policewomen (98%) expressed that they were uncomfortable with the inappropriate uniform, while 99% of unmarried women police officers had no problems with the uniform or accessories and were even proud to wear the uniform.
- 99% of women police officers in post and prenatal service said that lack of access to benefits was a major problem. 55% said that the lack of women police officers was the reason for not being granted leave.
- 35% of policewomen said they were body shamed by the public.
- About 87% of women police officers said that having women in a higher position reduces harassment in the workplace and also facilitates career advancement.
- Nearly 96% of women police officers said that they lack restrooms and face hygiene problems.
- 67% of policewomen complain about the lack of reservations for women in the promotion policy and are not satisfied with the seniority system. This is due to the fact that the majority of senior police officers are men, so women have little chance of advancement.
- 93% of married women complained about work-life balance, while 63% were concerned about harassment by spouses and in-laws.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The survey conducted in Puducherry police stations shows that the vast majority of officers are committed to the efficiency of their station regardless of work-related constraints. Women police officers are less likely to be involved in operational work unless required by law. Legal requirements mandate that women officers participate in certain kinds of policing, but this results in an overload of work for the existing female police officers. The study shows that increased representation of women in policing would reduce the workload of the current policewomen and

allow for other benefits such as maternity leave. On one hand, better working conditions for women in the police service could lead to more women entering the police service. On the other hand, improving working conditions depends entirely on increasing the participation of women in the police force. Considering the current scenario, women police officers continue to serve wholeheartedly despite their discomfort with their working conditions.

The need of the hour is to revise law enforcement policy to allow part-time work, develop reservation procedures for promotion, redesign the matching uniform/accessories, approve maternity leave by a reasonable date, and provide special hygiene facilities for women. The state government was empowered under Section 2 of the Police Act of 1861 to regulate all conditions of service for police officers in the lower ranks. Both the central and state governments provide funds for the development of police infrastructure. The existing Police Act of 1861, enacted during the colonial period, is considered outdated in light of current problems. Various attempts to enact a new law have proved unsuccessful. There is an urgent need for a new police law that includes provisions to address current policing problems.

Institutional policy reform must adhere to the principle of equitable but differential treatment. Since the legislature requires the participation of women in the police force, the policy must be redesigned to give preferential treatment to women officers. Women should not be forced to work in the same conditions as their male counterparts, even if equal pay for equal work is adopted. Given the nature of police work, timely counseling support must be provided to both policemen and policewomen. This will not only improve their effectiveness, but also encourage male colleagues to support women in the workplace. There is insufficient research and statistics to identify the unique challenges women face in policing and solutions to mitigate these challenges, both in a national and global context, and this paper contributes to that need.

The Guide to Promoting Women's Participation in the Police was released during the CRPF's 7th National Conference on Women in the Police in 2016, and my qualitative research confirms their recommendations. The following approaches are included in the recommendation (CRPF, 2016):

- The creation of a new syncretic recruitment program that takes a gender-sensitive approach to the recruitment process, and greater spending on advertising job openings that appeal to female candidates.
- 33 percent reservation for women in the police service to be implemented as directed by the Ministry of Home Affairs
- Participation of women in decision-making
- Gender-specific training for male police officers
- The provision of gender-sensitive infrastructure such as crèches, shelters, and educational opportunities for women, budget allocations and technology to achieve a better work-life balance, and a more compassionate treatment of maternity leave.
- Changing uniform regulations to include appropriately fitting uniforms and accessories
- Mandating one restroom per six people with a sanitary pad dispenser and waste receptacles, and providing training on hygiene and sanitation
- A government-funded annual medical checkup for all female police officers
- Introducing a shift system of 8-hour work periods (day, evening and night shift) to retain women
- Creating an open online platform for recording women officers' complaints, grievances, feedback, and suggestions.

Undoubtedly, effective implementation of the recommendations would improve the status of women in law enforcement. It can be concluded that resources, political will, and action (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2015) are the three important components to ensure change in women's participation in policing.

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