

GENDER DIVERSITY IN SRI LANKAN POLICE SERVICES

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Abstract

Sri Lankan police service is playing a pivotal role in maintaining law and order within the island. SL police service was a historical male centric institution and recently it has been marching to gender imbalance within its institutional structure. The general objective of this study was to get an understanding on nature of gender diversity within institutional structure of Sri Lanka police service along with reviewing gender composition, policies pertaining to gender inequality and challenges faced by female officers. Throughout the study the researchers have strived to answer the research problem Does Sri Lankan police service has equal grounds to both male and female officers? There had been 56 police officers selected to the sample using purposive sampling technique among the registered students for postgraduate diploma in criminology for 5 years from 2018 to 2023. the study elaborated that only 12% of female representation remains out of total workforce of SL police service. There are many gendered issues existing in policies related to recruitment, training and other career advancements. additionally female police officers often undergo with the challenges like patriarchal assumptions rooted in the policing structure, inadequacy of facilities and sexual harassments. as addressing a holistic approach to overcome gender inequality issue within police service long term and short term recommendations have introduced like developing physical and human resources, implying annual performance evaluation and merit based promotion system and necessity of establishing fair cadre system despite the gender.

Keywords: Diversity, Gender, Inequality, Institution, Police

Introduction

In modern societies, the maintenance of law and order is a paramount concern, ensuring the safety, security, and well-being of citizens. At the forefront of this critical endeavor stands the police service, a cornerstone institution entrusted with the responsibility of upholding and enforcing the law. As a law enforcement agency, police services play a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony, preventing and investigating crimes, and fostering a sense of security within communities.

Functioning as a dynamic and multifaceted entity, police services are vested with the authority to intervene in various situations, ranging from minor incidents to major criminal activities. Their primary mandate revolves around preventing crime, apprehending offenders, and ensuring that justice is served through the proper channels. This involves a delicate balance between enforcing the law and respecting the rights and freedoms of individuals.

The evolution of police services spans centuries, adapting to the changing landscapes

of societies and technological advancements. While their fundamental mission remains consistent—protecting the public from harm—police services have continually adapted their strategies, tactics, and methods to address new challenges such as cybercrime, terrorism, and transnational criminal activities. This adaptability underscores their crucial role in safeguarding communities in an ever-changing world.

The Sri Lankan Police, established under the Ministry of Law and Order, operates as the primary law enforcement agency within the country. Its foundation is rooted in the Police Ordinance of 1865, a legislative framework that outlines its functions and powers. While the 13th Constitutional Amendment has allocated police powers to provincial authorities, this provision has yet to be fully enacted.

The National Police Commission (NPC), established in 2002 under the 17th Amendment of the Constitution, plays a crucial role in overseeing the Police Department's operations. This independent body ensures that the police provide a professional and responsive service to the public while upholding the principles of the rule of law and citizens' human rights, as stipulated in the Sri Lankan Constitution.

At the helm of the Sri Lanka Police is the Inspector General of Police, who is appointed by the President with the approval of the Constitutional Council. This leadership position carries significant responsibility for maintaining law and order across the nation. The organizational structure of the Sri Lanka Police is characterized by territorial and functional departmentalization, employing both vertical and horizontal lines of authority. The effectiveness of this structure is currently under review by the Police Reforms Commission,

which is actively assessing its efficiency and potential for improvement.

Over the years, the Sri Lanka Police has developed specialized units to address various challenges. Notably, the paramilitary Special Task Force (STF) was established in 1983 to counter terrorist threats and maintain security in critical situations. This unit showcases the police force's adaptability and commitment to addressing evolving security concerns.

In summary, the Sri Lankan Police, established under the Ministry of Law and Order and governed by the Police Ordinance of 1865, plays a vital role in maintaining law and order within the country. While the 13th Constitutional Amendment devolved police powers to provinces, its full implementation is pending. The National Police Commission ensures the police operate professionally and respect citizens' rights, with leadership provided by the Inspector General of Police. The organizational structure is undergoing scrutiny, while specialized units like the Special Task Force underscore the police's ability to address contemporary security challenges.

Gender diversity within the Sri Lankan police force has been a topic of concern due to the historically male-centric nature of the police ordinance and the significant gender imbalance that persists within its ranks. While there has been progress in increasing female representation since 1952, the current state of gender diversity within the force remains imbalanced, highlighting the need for more inclusive policies and initiatives.

As of December 31st, 2017, the number of women in the Sri Lanka Police had risen to 8,640, constituting 11.4% of the total cadre of both gazetted and non-gazetted officers. However, it's crucial to note that this

proportion falls short of the 13.4% approved cadre for women, indicating an existing disparity in gender representation. This underrepresentation of women becomes even more pronounced when considering the lack of equitable distribution across ranks.

The gender disparity issue becomes evident in senior positions, where women are significantly underrepresented compared to their male counterparts. This disparity is underscored by the fact that, despite the increasing recruitment of women into the police service, there hasn't been a proportional expansion of cadre positions available to them, particularly in senior roles. This skewed distribution not only hampers the career advancement of female officers but also perpetuates a gender-based imbalance within the police hierarchy.

In recognition of the need for greater gender parity, the Sri Lankan Cabinet approved a 15% quota for women in the police force in 2015. While this represents a step in the right direction, the gap between the approved quota and the actual representation of women within the force emphasizes the persistence of challenges in achieving gender diversity goals.

The gender disparity within the Sri Lankan police force carries broader implications. A lack of gender diversity can impact the effectiveness of law enforcement, as diverse perspectives contribute to more holistic and comprehensive decision-making. Moreover, it can deter potential female candidates from considering law enforcement careers, further perpetuating the gender imbalance.

The gender diversity gap within the Sri Lankan police force is a complex issue that demands attention and concerted efforts to rectify. Addressing this disparity not only aligns with principles of equality and social justice but also

has the potential to enhance the overall effectiveness and credibility of law enforcement in the country.

Objectives of the Study

- Review the gender composition within Sri Lankan Police Service
- Review policies & process related to recruitment, career advancement and privileges
- Discuss the challenges faced by women police officers within institutional organization
- Present recommendation to reduce gender discrimination within SL police

Literature Review

Initial police responsibilities for women were limited and aligned with gender stereotypes for both men and women. They were viewed as clerks and typists in many nations (Schulz,2004). When women were hired as "Matrons" in 1845 to help with cases involving women and children, to provide custodial care for women and children who came into touch with the police, and to safeguard women, it was the first indication that there was a need for women in law enforcement. In India, the necessity for women in law enforcement arose as a result of activists' arguments for expanded responsibilities and their conviction that women were best suited to deal with both children and women (Schulz&Dorothy,1993). A number of developments, including anti-discrimination legislation in the US, Canada, UK, and Australia, the suffragette movement, and later the feminist movement, as well as the adoption of international conventions on the elimination of discrimination against women, had an impact on the recruitment and entry of women into the police service.

In light of the disproportionately high number of women and children affected by armed

conflict and violence, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 urged for an enhanced role for women in civilian police services more recently.

Despite these advancements and decades of agitation, there are only 15.4% of women in the world's police forces on average. The Netherlands and Sweden followed with 30%, followed by the three Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia with over 30% of women in the police force (The women in public services,2017). In South Asia, the highest percentage of women was in the Maldives (9.30%): India had 6.11% (Women in the police force,2015). Due to the pervasive discrimination women experience in society and the resulting vulnerabilities, the full integration of women into the police force has been progressing slowly. The history of the police department, the idea that policing is a coercive activity, and the idea that policing is about "fighting crime" have all contributed to the view that policing is primarily a man's profession (Parvin, 2017).

Women face discrimination and marginalization as a result of male attitudes and power, sexist jokes and harassment, gender role stereotyping, and the belief that they are incapable of carrying out all aspects of law enforcement. Men also face resistance from men who are afraid that women will expose corruption and violence (Hunt,1990).

Methodology

In this Study both quantitative and Qualitative methodologies utilized. sample of the study was police officers who were registered in postgraduate diploma in criminology and criminal justice over 5 years as 2018 to 2023. 56 of sample selected using the purposive sampling technique.

Table 1: Number of police officers registered in Postgraduate Diploma in Criminology from 2018-2022 (n=56)

Intake	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023
Number of students	47	42	51	47	45
Number of students who are police officers	10	12	10	13	11

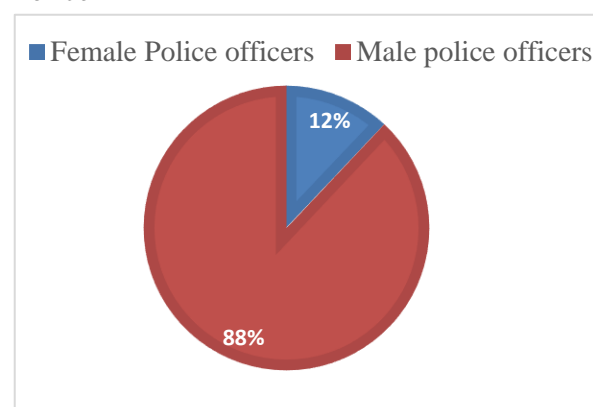
Source: Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Sri Jayewardenepura

Primary data collected using interviews, focussed group discussions and questionnaires. Secondary data as policies, ordinance and other statistical documents have utilized in the research to answer the research problem does Sri Lankan police service has equal grounds to both male and female officers? Quantitative data analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysed as content analysis.

Results and Discussion

Female representation in Sri Lankan Police

Figure 1: Gender Composition of Sri Lanka Police



Source: National police commission bulletin board 2022.

There 10634 female officers exist from the 86000 police service in the island as 12% of the total workforce. The representation of

women within the Sri Lanka Police Service remains notably low. Despite efforts to encourage women to join law enforcement and improve their participation, the numbers are still disproportionately skewed towards male officers. This underrepresentation is evident across various ranks, from constables to senior officers, creating a hierarchical structure where women remain significantly underrepresented.

Table 2: Ranks distribution and Female representation in Police Service 2022

Rank	Number of female officers	Percentage from whole female officers
Deputy Inspector of Police	4	0.03%
Senior Superintendent of Police	4	0.03%
Assistant Superintendent of Police	13	0.12%
Inspector Grade of Police	1149	10.80%
Non-Gazetted officers	9464	88%

Source: National Police Commission Bulletin Board 2022

Currently, there are four Woman Deputy Inspectors General of Police, four Woman Senior Superintendents of Police, 13 Woman Assistant Superintendents of Police, 1,149 female officers of the Inspectors’ grade, 9,464 female officers of Police Sergeant and Police Constable Grade serving in all areas of the island while performing duties admirably along with the male officers. for the first time in history, four Woman Deputy Inspectors General of Police were appointed while providing them with the opportunity to reach up to the position of Inspector General of Police.

Policy implications effect on gender diversity Recruitment

The recruitment policy for women in the Sri Lankan Police is marred by inherent gender-based discrimination, particularly regarding height specifications for different ranks. Despite the fact that women candidates undergo the same entrance tests as men, including the endurance test, the height requirements for various ranks significantly disadvantage women officers. This unfair policy, which stipulates higher height standards for women than men, systematically obstructs qualified women from applying for certain positions and attaining promotions, ultimately limiting gender diversity and equality within the police force.

The current policy mandates varying height specifications for different ranks based on gender. For instance, women applying for the rank of Constable are required to be 5'2", while men are required to be 5'4". Moreover, these requirements are more skewed at higher ranks – for Sub-Inspectors (SI), women need to be 5'4" and men 5'6". The criteria further escalate for the position of Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP), requiring both men and women officers to be at least 5'6". These discriminatory height specifications disproportionately affect women, as the average height of women in Sri Lanka is generally lower than that of men. Consequently, many capable and qualified women are denied the opportunity to join the police force or to progress to higher ranks solely due to their physical height

Training

The training of police officers is a crucial aspect of preparing them for the demanding tasks they will face in their careers. In Sri Lanka, both male and female police officers are required to undergo basic mandatory training

upon joining the police force. This training encompasses various aspects, including physical training and weapons proficiency. While there were no reports of overt discrimination or special provisions during basic training, disparities between the training programs for male and female officers have emerged, particularly in terms of physical evaluations and prioritization of sporting achievements.

Junior officers within the police force have observed a discrepancy in the treatment of sporting achievements between male and female officers. It has been noted that male officers' sporting accomplishments are given precedence over those of their female counterparts. This bias extends even after recruitment, with male athletes often enjoying a privileged position within the police service. Such disparity raises concerns about gender equality and the potential for a lack of recognition for the achievements of female officers.

Benefits and privileges

Maternity benefits for women officers of the Sri Lanka Police are the same as for other state officials. The full allocation is 252 working days for the first and second child. Of this, 84 days is fully-paid, 84 days is on half-pay, and the remaining 84 days of maternity leave can be taken on the basis of no-pay. Only 42 days maternity leave is allowed for the third child and any other subsequent children a woman chooses to have (Maternity Benefits Ordinance I).73 Maternity leave is granted to all officers without discrimination. However, maternity leave is often cited as the main reason for women not being promoted to higher ranks. Maternity leave is considered time away from service and, therefore, cited as a reason for not gaining as much experience as their male counterparts during the same period. When

women are pregnant or return from maternity leave, there is a perception that they do not engage in frontline work. Under the Maternity Benefits Ordinance two 30-minute paid breaks are allocated for breast feeding during a nine-hour working day until the child is one year old. Many women reported that they were unable to take these breaks as police work often required them to work longer hours and often report to duty by 6.30am for traffic duty.

According to the Pensions Circular (17/2009) of the Department of Pensions a woman police officer of any rank is allowed to retire after completing 20 years of service or if she is older than 50 years. The Circular does not explain the reasons for this special provision for women.

Gendered Challenges faced by female officers in police service

Assumptions on gender status

Gender status within the police service in Sri Lanka is often influenced by deep-seated assumptions and stereotypes that can shape perceptions of women officers. These assumptions often revolve around notions of women being weak, unambitious, prioritizing familial obligations over professional responsibilities, and being suited mainly for administrative and desk-based roles. This brief explores these assumptions and their impact on gender dynamics within the Sri Lankan police service.

Women are Regarded as Weak and Unambitious: One prevailing assumption in Sri Lanka's police service is that women are inherently weaker physically and emotionally, which is believed to affect their ability to perform demanding law enforcement duties effectively. Additionally, there may be a perception that women lack the ambition

required for higher-ranking positions due to a perceived lack of competitive drive.

Impact: These assumptions limit women's opportunities for career advancement within the police service, leading to fewer women in leadership roles and decision-making positions. Such biases also contribute to a work environment that discourages women from pursuing career growth, perpetuating a gender imbalance in the service.

Women Prioritize Familial Obligations over Professional Responsibilities: Another assumption is that women prioritize their familial roles and responsibilities over their professional commitments. This belief may lead to skepticism about women's commitment to their careers, particularly in roles that demand irregular or demanding hours.

Impact: Women in the police service might face resistance or doubt from colleagues and supervisors regarding their dedication to the job. This assumption can hinder their access to opportunities for career advancement and leadership roles, as they may be passed over for such roles due to concerns about their availability and commitment.

Women are Suited for Administration and Desk-Based Roles: A prevalent stereotype is that women are better suited for administrative and desk-based roles within the police service, rather than operational or fieldwork positions. This assumption reflects a bias that undermines women's capability to handle physically demanding or confrontational situations.

Impact: Women may be pigeonholed into roles that are seen as more "suitable" for them based on these assumptions. This can limit their exposure to diverse experiences and skill development, restricting their potential to

contribute effectively across various aspects of policing.

These biases result in restricted career growth opportunities, a gender imbalance in leadership positions, and the reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Addressing these assumptions is crucial for creating a more inclusive and equitable police service that values the diverse talents and perspectives that both men and women bring to law enforcement.

Day to day discrimination

Female police officers in Sri Lanka encounter various forms of day-to-day discrimination that can hinder their professional performance and overall well-being. One critical aspect of this discrimination is the lack of adequate facilities, including changing rooms, washrooms, and properly furnished quarters.

When reporting to on-call-duty at night times Female police officers often face difficulties in accessing reliable and safe transportation to and from their duty locations. Inadequate public transportation options and safety concerns can result in officers being vulnerable to harassment or unsafe situations. The shortage of female police officers available during night shifts can be a significant challenge when dealing with cases related to children and women abuse. Female victims often feel more comfortable sharing their experiences and concerns with female officers, who are better equipped to provide empathy and support.

Limited access to trainings and overseas exposure

Women officers complained that they were often overlooked when opportunities for overseas training or special trainings was offered. Very often women were verbally discouraged from applying for training

programs by their Divisional heads on the grounds that women were not eligible for this particular training. However, no written confirmation of such unwritten rules and guidelines were shared. Women did not dare challenge these verbal instructions as they would be penalized at a later date. Senior Police officers talked about being overlooked when trainings specific to their areas of expertise came up. Male officers who were less than a year away from retiring or un-deserving male officers were given the opportunity to travel overseas. Women officers saw these as 'special favors' police did for their male colleagues.

Sexual Harassments within police service

Women in the younger ranks talked about police stations being male spaces where women were made to feel uncomfortable by male ways of joking and use of bad language. Although not necessarily aimed at women, such jokes, language, and ways of socializing made women feel uncomfortable and not part of the same group. Hence, camaraderie between men and women officers was undermined by this masculine culture. Some lower ranking officers talked about how male officers approached them for sexual favors, but when refused would resort to harassing and bullying them. One junior officer talked about how after her husband passed away, several officers approached her hoping for a physical relationship.

Conclusion

Addressing the gender equality challenges within the Sri Lanka Police Service requires a comprehensive approach that involves transforming organizational culture, implementing gender-sensitive policies and practices, and providing opportunities for professional growth and leadership development for women officers. Embracing

diversity and recognizing the value of women's contributions to law enforcement will not only enhance the effectiveness of the police service but also contribute to building a more equitable and just society.

Some recommendations have presented through the study are,

- Cadre should not be differentiated on the basis of sex
- Introducing short and mi- term promotion schemes that reduce institutional discrimination
- Developing physical resources which are favorable to both male and female officers
- introducing policies against sexual harassment
- Introducing annual performance evaluation and merit-based promotion system

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