

Women in policing



The Evolving Role of Women in Policing Gender barriers in employment are gradually disappearing. This is conspicuous in the field of policing, with its forcibly visible nature. Women in increasing numbers are taking to the policing profession, and this has been deemed a welcome change. The advancement of society and technology, have wrought fundamental changes in the nature of work of the police force. These changes have indicated a special role for female police officers.

Police work entails considerable risk and at times even the use of considerable physical force. Naturally, the question arises, as to why the fairer and gentler sex finds such work attractive. There are several reasons: first, this job offers financial security; second, there is significant inspiration from the peer group; and acquaintanceship with police work (Price, 1996).

Nevertheless, women police officers, face considerable discrimination.

Initially, they were not permitted to undertake patrolling duties, because of their perceived physical shortcomings, Vis - a - Vis their male counterparts on the force. This was a double-edged sword employed by the chauvinistic superior police officers, who were exclusively men. Since, patrol duty was a prerequisite for promotions, women were effectively, prevented from obtaining promotions (Price, 1996).

Women police officers, have fewer opportunities to progress in their career, and obtain promotions and rewards. Their distribution throughout the force is irregular and there are specialized units, which are conspicuous for the near total absence of women. It is an indisputable fact that men dominate the police force, and that they ensure that women face several hurdles in achieving career advancement and job satisfaction.

Professional and social life necessitates a commingling of attitudinal,

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structural and technical changes. This is essential for engendering social change; and is all the more relevant in ushering in gender equality. The police department is no exception to this notion, and the US has brought about fundamental changes to its laws (Price, 1996). These changes have served to enhance the importance of women in policing

In addition, the US initiated moves to better the educational and employment opportunities of women and minorities, by according them privileged treatment in admissions to educational institutions, employment, award of contracts and the conferral of social benefits. This constitutes affirmative action, and it was the consequence of the enactment of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Teaching With Documents: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission).

These legal changes had their effect on the police profession. Unfortunately, many women lost their jobs, on account of urban economic difficulties. The concentration of women in the police force is mainly in the lower ranks of the hierarchy. This disparity is on account of the obstacles placed in the career path of women police officers. These hurdles are the consequence of structural and attitudinal barriers. It is believed by some scholars that with the passage of time, these hindrances will no longer be in existence. On the other hand, there are quite a few authorities, who contend that prejudice will continue to hold sway, in respect of promotions, job security, salaries and analogous assignments (Price, 1996).

Women have been serving the nation as members of the police force from a century. All the same, they have been looked upon with derision by their male colleagues and superiors. Nevertheless, public opinion has generally been quite favorable towards women police officers. Women had been

discriminated against, and even after having had to satisfy higher eligibility criteria, in comparison to their male counterparts; they were paid lower wages, allotted duties of lesser importance. It was common for women to be allotted to guard, clerical and juvenile duties. They were disallowed to take the promotion examinations taken by their male colleagues and were precluded from patrol duty. The latter was essential for exhibiting usefulness to the police department, and such exclusion served to irreparably damage their career prospects (Price, 1996).

Subsequently, Federal Law made it mandatory to provide women with equal opportunities. This enabled female police officers to undertake patrol duty and thereby establish their suitability for police work.

Albeit, the US police are required to employ individuals without displaying any bias towards race or gender, women are relegated to the background, when it comes to formulating policy and in gender integration. Women have had to struggle hard to transform their initial role of social workers, in the police, to that of police officers. This change has however, not been accepted by their male colleagues. Female police officers are either ignored or treated with hostility (Price, 1996). However, these discouraging issues have had the least effect on women, who continue to join the police force in increased numbers.

The National Center for Women and Policing has recommended increase in the number of women, across the hierarchy of the police organization. This will serve to mitigate police brutality, improve the response to violence towards women and reinforce changes to community policing (US:

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN POLICE OFFICERS RAMPANT,
Summer2002).

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The advent of women in policing connotes much more than satisfying the requirements of equal opportunity in employment. It has brought in a refreshing change to the areas of public safety and criminal justice, which had hitherto been the sole preserve of the brutal male. This measure has served to humanize service that had perforce to rely on the strict rule of the law. It had been assumed that police work was beyond the capacity of the gentle and physically inferior female. This false notion has been decisively refuted by the exemplary manner in which female police officers have discharged their duty (Zhao & Leigh, July 2001). These redoubtable females have equaled their male colleagues, and at times, even surpassed them. Therefore, woman has emerged victorious even in this difficult and dangerous avocation.

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