

An Assessment Of Police Culture On Career Progression Of Female Police Officers In Nyeri County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Women under-representation in the police service as well as their limited career progression opportunities is a global challenge. In Kenya, women make up a small percentage of the police service, and they face various challenges that may hinder their career advancement. This study sought to assess police culture and career progression of female police officers in Nyeri County, Kenya. The study was guided by Feminist theory and the theory of tokenism. A descriptive survey design was used in carrying out this study. The target population was 1,352 police officers working in Nyeri County, Kenya. To obtain the participants of the study, stratified, purposive and simple random sampling were used. Solvin's Formula was used to determine a sample size of 93 respondents. Questionnaires and interview guides were the main tools for collection of data. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative data while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. The study revealed that female officers were not given equal opportunity as their male counterparts in operational areas. The study concluded that police culture impinges on career progression of female police officers. The study recommended that the police organization reviews the gender-blind policies and regulations, that seem to encourage masculinity.

Keywords: *Career Progression, Male psyche, Masculinity, Police Culture*

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I. Introduction:

Police work is viewed as a profession that require masculinity, best performed by men since history (Yalley, 2020). The profession is mainly connected with aggressiveness, energy and seclusion, entirely bound to the conventional masculinity norms and the greater explanation that police work was and is perhaps viewed as a male-dominated profession. According to Lockwood & Prohaska (2015), the security force has been recognized among the most masculine profession worldwide, built on demeaning practices. The adoration of toughness and masculinity is an integral part to the masculine culture of policing (Silva, 2023), but, female police officers do not live up to this masculinity and physical strength. Due to this, female police officers gain limited acceptance by male police officers in performance of their duties. To this end, very few women are recruited leading to their under-representation in the police service.

In recent years however, globally, women's participation in policing has been steadily increasing, but they are still underrepresented in police services worldwide, particularly in leadership positions. In England, women only translate to 30.4% of police officers, in America 27.8% (Statista, 2021), and they make up to only around 1.5 percent of the total police force in Pakistan (UNODC, 2021). Though the figures represent general population of the female officers, they allude to the low numbers of officers in leadership. This withstanding few studies examines the impact of police culture on career progression of police officers.

In Africa, women representation in the police force is generally low, with only a few countries approaching the 30% benchmark set by the United Nations for women's participation in decision-making positions. A study conducted by Olutayo and Yalley (2020) on masculinity, gender and policing, by doing an assessment of the implications of masculinised culture of police on domestic violence policing in Southern Ghana and Nigeria, found out that female police officers in Ghana are 26% of the police force and 10% in Nigeria. Similarly, the United Nations estimates indicated that female police officers in Uganda were 14% and in Tanzania, 20%. Though the figures are not aggregated by rank, they nonetheless speak of the possible low levels of female officers in leadership positions.

In Kenya, women represent only about 6.9% of the total police force, and their representation in senior positions is even lower (UN Women, 2023). Specifically, female police officers in Kenya Police Service (KPS) stand at 16%, Administration Police Service (APS) 5% and Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI) 16%

(NPSC Annual Report, 2022). In terms of promotion of officers to higher ranks, statistics in Nyeri County for the past five years show that women who were promoted across all ranks are 16% in 2017 and 21% in 2021. Despite the efforts by the Kenyan government to raise participation of women in policing, the challenges that hinder their career progression seem to outpace the efforts. However, there has been little reflection on the effect on cultural biases and a male-dominated police culture. This study sought to analyze what effect police culture has on career progression of female officers.

II. Literature Review: Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the feminist theory and tokenism theory. Feminist theory posits that gender inequality is a result of patriarchal societal structures and gender roles that limit women's opportunities for advancement. The theory was used to understand the patriarchal norms and gender roles and their influence in career progression of female police officers in Kenya. Tokenism theory, on the other hand, argues that women and other underrepresented groups are often included in organizations in small numbers, but their presence is only symbolic and does not lead to substantive change or equal representation. The theory was used to analyze the extent to which the inclusion of women officers in the National Police Service is merely symbolic, or whether it leads to substantive change in terms of gender equity and equal representation.

III. Empirical Review: Male Psyche And Deployment Of Female Police Officers

Cromwell (2022) conducted an anonymous online survey about the enlistment of female police officers from five police departments. His aim was to explore the reasons leading to the low representation of women police officers in America. The survey results pointed to police culture as being a bigger obstacle to gender equality in police departments than institutional policy.

Onyango and Natarajan (2021) conducted a study on gender equity approach to police work in Kenya. They used data obtained from surveying 455 Kenya Police Service officers of both gender. The study looked at the difficulties faced by women in policing. Apart from a little portion of task assignments, results showed policewomen could tackle most of the duties just like or better than policemen.

Ong'ale (2021) carried out a study on the work-life balance and how officers from the Kenya police service in Nakuru County conduct themselves in the performance of their duties. According to the findings, female officers faced issues with work-life balance. Social unfairness and gender stereotypes partly simulated their productiveness. The study came to the conclusion that social injustices against female officers at work, such as denials of promotions, sexual harassment, and discrimination, had an impact on their productivity.

Ashlyn (2020) carried out a study to examine how women in policing career preserved a work-life balance with family obligations. Findings were that women representation in authority roles in law enforcement was quite low when correlated with other fields like public relations. Results showed that majority nursing mothers often put on hold their career advancement to family responsibilities, and maternity leave was a barrier for one's capability to balance family responsibilities. The study revealed that cultural factors that require toughness, such as long and irregular work hours, lack of workplace flexibility and high levels of stress created barriers to the progression of women police officers.

All the studies discussed above failed to examine how police culture affects the progression of female police officers in the police service. Therefore, the problem that provided motivation for this study was that although women have been integrated in the police service, the service is heavily dominated by masculinity culture and women lag behind in career progression. This study therefore sought to assess police culture on career progression of female police officers in Kenya with a focus on Nyeri County.

IV. Research Methodology

The study embraced a descriptive survey research design. As defined by Kombo and Orodho (2002), a descriptive research design is a type of research method used when one wants to acquire information on the current state of an object, person, or situation. The research design was suitable for this study as it helped to identify patterns and trends in the data, such as differences in experiences and outcomes between male and female police officers, which provided a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon being surveyed.

The target population was 1,352 officers comprising of all female police officers currently working in Nyeri County, Kenya, male police officers as well as police commanders. The number of police officers in Nyeri County determined the sample size. Data collection methods included sources from both primary and secondary. Interview guides and questionnaires and were used as tools for collecting primary data. Secondary data sources included training and promotion records in the police stations and other relevant materials related to police service culture and career progression of female police officers in Nyeri County, Kenya. The data collection methods were chosen to ensure that both qualitative and quantitative data was collected from a representative sample of the target population.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) involved gathering together individuals of experiences or backgrounds that were to discuss a specific topic. One FGD comprising 10 police officers was formed in each of the 4 sub counties, which resulted in a total of four FGDs with 40 participants in total. This approach captured the experiences and perspectives of participants from each sub-county and identified differences and similarities in the experiences of female police officers across sub-counties.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee and approval obtained from Kenyatta University review board. Consent to collect data was sought from the Nyeri County Police Commander. Informed consent as well was obtained from all participants before data collection, and participants were assured that their privacy and confidentiality would be protected throughout the study.

V. Data Presentation And Discussion

Research Question 1: How does male psyche influence deployment on career progression of female police officers in Nyeri County, Kenya?

Participants' responses are shown on Table 4.4 (*where SD=Strongly Disagree, DA=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree and D=Strongly Agree*)

Statement	Responses (%)				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
Female officers are given equal deployment opportunities as male officers and this enhances their career progression	37.1	38.5	10.3	6.4	7.7
Male officers are given more opportunities for deployment than female officers and this negatively affects female officers' career progression	9.0	3.8	1.3	38.5	47.4
The male psyche has a negative influence on deployment of female police officers which hinders their career progression	2.6	2.6	0.0	59	35.8
Male officers are more likely to be deployed in high ranking positions than female officers hindering career progression for female officers	1.3	0.0	12.8	62.8	23.1
Male officers are more confident in their areas of deployment than female officers and this affects career progression of female officers	44.9	20.5	12.8	19.2	2.6
Male officers are more likely to be favoured by supervisors on promotions and this negatively affects progression of female officers	61.5	11.6	0.0	26.9	0.0
Aggregate Score (%)	26.1	12.8	6.2	35.5	19.4

Source: Author, 2024

Overall the data appeared to demonstrate that there was unequal opportunity for deployment in the distribution of duties that appeared to give the male gender an upper hand when it comes to promotion. As seen from the data 75.8% (SD and D), male and female officers have equal opportunities with 85.9% (A and SA) participants suggesting that male officers are given more opportunities. This approach in deployment informed by the male psyche not only denies female officers opportunity to demonstrate their capability but also prevents them from getting opportunity for promotion. The quantitative data is supported by views from qualitative data as captured from one of the unit heads as in the quote below:

“..... At the field, I am more likely to deploy a male officer over a female officer..... If I have to assign female officers to the fieldwork, it has to be violence free.” From the quote, it is clear that the officer associates battle with the male and female working in the field where there is no violence. This is not surprising as aggression and violence, especially use of weapons is associated with images of maleness violence hence masculinity (see Greig 2022). Notably, this is against the police training and work policy in the National Police Service. Accordingly, police officers work as profession having acquired skills in all areas of the police work. This has the implication that women police officers are exposed to training that equip them with knowledge and skills to handle violent situations. Despite the fact that all officers received the same kind of training and took the same oath to work anywhere and perform all police functions, regardless of gender, the female officers were assigned mainly desk jobs.

Arguably, the National Police Service in Kenya does not have gender disaggregated training. To this end, to enable quality service, the training ensures that both men and women are well equipped with desired skills and knowledge to counter any situation. The policy on promotion is also gender blind. In line with this, Denney (2019) observed that a more representative police service draws more effectively on the breadth of available skills and qualities, enhancing overall police quality. Relatedly, the deployment of the police officers as captured in National Police Act 2011 emphasizes skills rather than gender. Therefore, the perception as reflected in the quote can be attributed to stereotypical thoughts based on traditional culture. In line with the feminist theory that guided this study, such cultures propagated male chauvinism which denigrates females in the belief that they are inferior to males and thus deserve less than equal treatment or benefit. It is therefore, possible to argue that denial to assign women challenging duties is a scheme to deny them career progression in National Police service. As such, rather than being guided by modern policing needs, the National Police Service is guided by retrogressive cultures that compromise career progression of female police officers. Arguably, women who choose to join the service are well aware of the nature of police work, therefore take

training seriously as a capability building to be able to do their work and also grow in service. Challenging the stereotypical thoughts as advanced by male officers, one female officer had this to say:

"We also want experience in the field. We have the same training with the male officers. What is the use of the training we got if we never get to use it in the field and just get the 'soft' cases within the station?" As seen from the quote, the female officer appeared to exude the confidence associated with the training which to her is not gender based. To this end, this questions the rationality of training if the skills the female officers acquire are invalid. In line with this view, police services are reflective of the societies of which they are a part, but they can challenge gender biases and stereotypes, to ensure police service that is representative of the diverse community it serves. This would enhance trust making it easy for the community members to cooperate with them (Denney, 2019) enhancing their chances of promotion. However, Failure to be given a chance to go to the battle field denies the female officers chance to have field work experience which could negatively impact on their promotions.

It is evident from the responses that female officers getting fewer deployment opportunities can diminish their chances for promotion. The few deployment opportunities for female police officers could be due to their under-representation in the law enforcement which starts at the recruitment level. The gender difference in deployment starts right from recruitment. There are very few females recruited in the force and at times, none is recruited. This means that there are fewer females to work with and deploy. It was also revealed that female officers mainly tackled desk jobs while the male offices were sent to the field. From the FGD one respondent reported that,

"..... You cannot send a breast feeding mother to the field at night, they will not perform well, and it may not even be safe for them." As seen from the quote, the biological roles of female officers are used as justification for discrimination. Accordingly, while it is true that sending a breast feeding lady to work at night may be inhuman, it is possible to argue that it is unlikely that all police officers in a station would be lactating mothers at the same time. The officer is silent on why they are not able to send other women who are freer to the field. To this end, the female officers in the FGD were in agreement that they were mainly excused from working at night and during the day they were given light duties like secretarial, reception, clerical, and customer care, depending on the bosses' discretion. Notably, however, while it appears that the senior police officers demonstrate human acts to women police officers, they negate their career progression as one officer noted;

"Recommendations from seniors come after performing well in handling tough cases like arresting a bhang peddler or a robber with violence. Working at the desk jobs never gets you recommendations that hasten promotions". As seen from the quote, recommendations of seniors for promotion are only based on performance of tough cases. Failure to deploy female police officers could be seen as a design to lock them out of career progression. The NPSC regulations list experience and knowledge of the job as one of the key requirements for promotions in the police service and therefore, female police officers may lack this requirement. It is through experience that officers get exposed to various work related areas as reported by Path, (2019) report. However, as seen from the data, male psyche that discriminates against women has a significant influence on the deployment of female officers and this in turn affected their career progression negatively.

The unit female heads reported that male officers do not believe that female officers can work on their own and they can only be promoted due to favouritism. One female officer from FGD had this to say, *"Male officers say that female officers are weak so they are given the 'soft' jobs that they can handle like desk jobs."* Another one added,

"Male officers don't like being partnered with female officers in the operation field. When that happens the male officer says that they have been assigned the duty alone, yet he has the female officer....." From the statement, it is evident that male officers didn't have confidence in the female officers, because they were women and were not dependable in the battlefield. Most of the female police officers raised the concern that the male officers don't recognize them as qualified officers and treat them as just women. They are demeaned and not recognized as fully trained officers. This affected their work morale and productivity negatively. Reflecting on feminist theory that guided this study, Usmani, Ali, Kottaparamban and Hadi (2023) observed that inequalities against gender diversity can be observed in several places such as workplace discrimination between men and women, prioritizing male over female. This infringes on the human rights of women. To this end, perceived patriarchal beliefs and attitude continue to sustain injustice on women career progression in National Police Service. Another female officer bitterly said,

"Apart from demeaning us in the assignment of duties, many of the seniors and colleagues also expect sexual favour from us..... If you require recommendation letter from a male boss whose sexual advances you refused, they can deny and give us the condition that we have to engage sexually for them to write the recommendation letters for us....." As seen from the quote, it is not just about the capabilities, but the injustice on women that has been reported against women. Usmani, et al 2023, observed that women continue to endure sexual abuses with the society including work places. Similarly United Nations (2019) observed that women are

targets of sexual and gender-based violence. In line with this finding, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (2021) observed that female military personnel are more likely to be sexually assaulted by a fellow soldier than killed in combat.

Deployment in high ranking positions begets police officers experience which is one of the requirements in promotion. As Ashlyn (2020) who observes that women representation in authority roles in law enforcement was quite low when correlated with other fields like public relations, in order to counter the issue of deployment, it is advisable that female police officers be deployed in all areas without looking at their gender and the numbers they represent in the police service. Accordingly, masculinity is integral to police culture which gives men the structural advantages in terms of numbers, opportunities, division of labor, and hierarchical divisions of power (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2021) thus undermining women capabilities to deny them promotions.

From the data, 65.4% (SD and D) respondents disagreed that male officers are more confident in their areas of deployment than female officers and this affects career progression of female officers. This implies that the gender of the police officer didn't affect their level of confidence in their areas of deployment as some men are also fearful more than women. A quote from a female officer in the FGD evidenced this by saying that, *"Even if we are deployed to the desk jobs, we are confident in the work we do there."* to support this, a key informant added that,

"Men cannot handle some assignments like sexual assault among girls and women. When such cases come to the police station, they are automatically assigned to the female officers. They are more comfortable talking to the female officers and these officers handle such cases exemplary." As seen from the quote, diversity of security needs cannot be addressed by male officers alone. Scholars have indicated that women who have been sexually abused are best handled by female police officers. In line with this view, the NPS has put in place a Policare policy that is gender sensitive to address such issues. Denney (2019) observed that a diverse police service has a deeper understanding of communities' needs and so can build stronger relationships with them. This facilitates the provision of more effective policing that is gender sensitive.

Majority, that is, 73.1% (SD and D) that male officers are more likely to be favoured by supervisors on promotions and this negatively affects progression of female officers. The findings implied that male officers were not promoted on the basis of favouritism by their bosses hence this could not have affected the progression of female officers in their careers. In the FGD, a male officer reported that:

"The police force is a man-eat-man world and only the officers (male and female) who can afford to 'buy' the favours with money or sex are actually favoured." According to the officer, it implied that favouritism is at play for promotions for those who can afford and this affected the promotions of those with integrity negatively and they were by passed by their juniors who could offer money and/or sex. This could be true to those who do not conduct themselves with dignity, as corruption is not part of police culture.

VI. Summary, Conclusions And Recommendations

On summary, the study found out that more men than women were deployed outside the station while female officers were mainly assigned desk jobs. Majority agreed that male officers are given more opportunities for deployment than female officers. While the male officers were sent for operation duties and had night assignments, female officers had desk jobs and were excused from working at night. Most of the police officers agreed that male psyche had a negative influence on deployment of female police officers and this hindered their career progression.

On conclusion, the study revealed that female police officers experienced biases due to male dominated culture which affected decision making processes related to deployment, promotions and assignments. Male officers were given more opportunities for deployment than female officers and this negatively affected female officers' career progression. This was coupled with male attitudes that female officers are not fit for some job assignments. Majority of female officers reported that they were demeaned during duty assignments and faced discrimination during promotions for refusal to offer sexual favors to some of their bosses. This shows that discrimination against female officers is not just about capabilities but injustice.

This study recommends that:

- a) The National Police Service should be guided by modern policing needs rather than cultures that are retrogressive. In this regard, all officers regardless of gender, be deployed in all areas of work in the police service so as to give female officers a vast experience and better knowledge of the job of a police officer as these are requirements for promotion.
- b) There is need to revisit the qualifications and promotion process. There is need to give an operational definition to the meaning of experience and merit as indicated in the qualifications required for progression in a manner that embraces gender concerns.

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