

Career Barriers of Female Police Officer's and Their Effect on Crime Management in Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract:

The study has been motivated by increased crimes and insecurity especially in the Nakuru County that was according to this research attributed to the barriers that affect female police officers in their call of duty. The broad objective of this research was to explore personal, organizational, and socio-cultural barriers affecting female police officer's careers in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya. The study adopted mixed methods approach utilizing stratified random and purposive sampling techniques to enlist 144 female police officers; 136 main participants and 8 key informants. Data collection involved administering questionnaires to the main participants and conducting in-depth interviews with key informants. Quantitative data was analysed via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). According to the study, personal-level barriers significantly impacting female police officers' careers in crime management include work-life balance, work experience, and education. Organizational barriers affect female police officers' careers in crime management, included leadership culture, policies, and police recognition systems. Further, according to this study police leadership is often characterized by authoritarianism, where command is strictly based on obedience to orders from above (a military-like approach), exerting full control over the team, and subordinates are expected to simply follow and obey rather than offer feedback or contribute ideas. Socio-cultural barriers that affected female police officers' careers in crime management, include societal perception around gender roles and workplace dynamics. Key recommendations, include formation of a robust human resource framework that provides a holistic approach to police staffing and welfare. Furthermore, the study recommends continued structured reforms prioritizing mental wellness like stress management and work-life balance programs.

Key words: Career barriers. Female police officers. Personal level barriers, Organizational barriers, social cultural barriers.

Introduction:

The landscape of policing globally is undergoing continuous evolution. This evolution includes the increasing participation of women in a profession

historically dominated by men. Research conducted in the United States has highlighted numerous challenges faced by women upon entering the police force, primarily stemming from negative attitudes held by their male

counterparts (Onyango & Natarajan, 2022). Male officers often perceive female officers as inferior, questioning their competence in comparison to men (Breci, 2017), and doubting their contribution to the core duties of policing (Taylor, 2014). Additionally, stereotypes suggesting that women lack emotional suitability for police work have been perpetuated (Oruta & Gaunya, 2016).

In Pakistan, a notable deficiency of women in law enforcement roles was observed (ProPakistani, 2017). Cultural and traditional gender-based barriers impeded the inclusion of women in these roles, limiting community engagement. Problems including sexual assault, corruption, and uneven access to opportunities have impeded efforts to improve career chances for policewomen (Ongale, 2021). Furthermore, because the police force was seen as a male-dominated field at all levels, from senior to junior officers, and in policymaking, religious convictions and sociocultural norms deterred women from seeking professions in the force (Ahmad, 2022). Conversely, masculine wants and interests were given priority in the Pakistani police force's workplace. Men made up an astounding 99% of Pakistan's police force, while women made up only 1% and were mostly assigned to non-senior roles (Ahmad, 2022).

In Rwanda, the number of policewomen has significantly increased, according to Ongale (2012). However, they faced a number of difficulties, including unfavourable attitudes from male coworkers, institutional impediments, and gender hurdles. A patriarchal societal system in which males were viewed as superior was reflected in Rwandan society's uneven gender power relations. Police personnel in Tanzania voiced their dissatisfaction with a number of problems, including poor interpersonal skills, inadequate accommodation, inadequate retirement and pension schemes, inadequate insurance coverage, bad staff training, and maltreatment by superiors (Ongale, 2021). Comparably, in Uganda, female police officers experienced sexual assault, workplace discrimination, unfavourable public

and colleague perceptions, and challenges juggling work and family obligations, which resulted in disputes with superiors and few opportunities for advancement (Masinga, 2021).

For a number of years, the proportion of female officers in Kenya has been steadily rising. However, their effectiveness in various roles is often hindered by challenges similar to those faced by female officers worldwide. Currently, out of approximately 106,830 police officers in Kenya, only 16% are women, as reported by the Police Service Report of 2023. To address this gender disparity, the Kenyan constitution mandates the National Police Service Commission to ensure that up to thirty per cent of officers are female. Despite these efforts, the representation of female officers remains low, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equality in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Efforts to increase the involvement of female officers in police work have been made through reforms in the National Police Service, including the implementation of a National Action Plan. Furthermore, additional reforms are being pursued, initiated by the retired chief justice of Kenya between 2022 and 2023 under a presidential executive order of 2022, aligning with the new government's policy to improve the terms of service within the National Police Service. The under-representation of women in the police service underscores the challenges they face in achieving success in their profession. These challenges not only affect their individual performance but also influence overall service delivery. This study aims to delve deeper into these challenges and their implications for crime management, focusing specifically on Nakuru East Sub-County.

All police officers encounter physical and psychological strains during their duties, with their actions consistently scrutinized. However, research suggests that coping mechanisms differ between men and women (Ola & Mathur, 2016). Gender variations in psychology cause this disparity, which results in different approaches to

problem-solving. Gender stereotypes cause a great deal of stress for women in particular, which might impair their performance in comparison to males. According to Ongale (2021), women are often perceived as the weaker gender since they are less prone to employ excessive or lethal force. Rather, they are praised for better de-escalating potentially violent situations than male cops by using their interpersonal abilities.

Jonyo (2015) defines "performance" as the amount of valuable work completed, akin to achieving success. High performance is achieved when services surpass expectations. Moreover, the quality of an individual's task execution is considered a measure of work performance, comparing their outcomes to expected results. This evaluation determines whether organizational objectives have been accomplished effectively and efficiently. Factors such as promotion opportunities, skills, motivation, resources for service delivery, and environmental conditions influence an individual's performance (Chebet & Njoroge, 2019).

Despite the fact that different organizations have different ideas about how to measure performance, Ong'ale (2021) claimed that the Kenya Police Service or any police service, for that matter can be evaluated on the basis of standards like upholding law and order, safeguarding human rights, and providing services with accountability and integrity. According to Ong'ale (2021), additional non-financial metrics used to evaluate corporate performance include customer satisfaction, the effectiveness of systems, and the efficiency of service delivery, technology adoption, change management, employee morale, corporate reputation, transparency, accountability, governance, and product innovation. Similarly, Transparency International (2016) contended that metrics like customer satisfaction, timely offender investigation and prosecution, community policing initiatives, legal process transparency, victim satisfaction, accountability, lower crime rates, and heightened public confidence in law enforcement organizations can all be used to

assess how well crime management is performing globally.

Problem Analysis:

In Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya, female police officers face significant barriers in their work despite their critical role in crime management. These barriers have according to this study been associated with increased crime rates because of their capacity to impede policing by female officers. Understandably, the role of female police officers cannot be understated; carrying out undercover operations, collection of criminal intelligence with no or less suspicion, to disarm hard core female criminals, and to investigate indecent assaults of women and minors who in most cases requires more attention of female police officers during interviews, amongst other crimes. This study assumes that barriers that tend to impede female police officers work affect effectiveness of law enforcement leading to high crime rates. Addressing these barriers is crucial for promoting police effectiveness and credibility of law enforcement agencies. Despite several existing legal and policy frameworks female police career barriers still persists. Besides, there no documented study that has attempted to investigate this problem. Given that crimes are on the rise in the Nakuru County, this study assumed that these are likely to be the underlying barriers undermining the management of criminal activities, in Nakuru County, Kenya, hence the rationale for this study.

Methodology:

The study adopted a mixed method research design which by its nature is best suited for studies that aim at exploring the prevalence of a phenomenon, situation, attitude or problem, in this case personal, organizational, and socio-cultural barriers affecting female police officer's careers in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya. The quantitative approach helped to generate statistical data that was easy to systematically aggregate to the main findings. The qualitative approach helped in gaining in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study

especially by generating data that was not easily translatable into numbers such as opinions, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions (Mugenda, 2008). The study comprised of 144 respondents; 136 main participants and 8 Key Informants who were purposefully selected to inform the study based on their knowledge and experience of security issues under the study. Questionnaires and Interviews were used to collect data utilizing stratified random and purposive sampling techniques (Silverman, 2001)

Results and Discussions:

Response Rate:

The expected sample size for the research was 136 participants. Nevertheless, the researcher only received 86 study questionnaires, or 63.3% of the total distributed. A response rate of over 70% is deemed very well, 60% is deemed good, and 50% of the answer is deemed sufficient for analysis as per the Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). Therefore, the 63.3% response rate was deemed appropriate and optimal for this research. Notably, the study reached out to all 8 Key informants who were interviewed and their findings used to enrich the study.

Personal Level Barriers that Affect Female Police Officer's Career in Crime Management

The first objective of this study aimed to establish the personal-level barriers affecting female police officers' careers. The key variables examined were work-life balance, work experience, and education. The findings indicated that work experience was perceived as the most significant personal-level barrier, followed by work-life balance, and finally, the officers' education level. These results clearly indicate that personal factors are a substantial impediment to career progression for female police officers.

Work-Life Balance as a Critical Barrier: The study delved deeper into the specific work-life balance aspects that impacted female police officers. Key stressors identified include frequent transfers, excessively long working hours, lack of flexibility in working schedules, and the

unavailability of adequate stress management and work-life balance programs. The implications of these findings are profound. For instance, frequent transfers were reported to cause significant separation of female police officers from their families. As one participant poignantly stated, this familial disruption has "contributed to infidelity in many officers' marriages leading to high STD's and HIV-AIDS infection rates. This absolutely crushes our morale." This direct testimony highlights how work-life imbalances contribute not only to personal distress but also to broader social issues within the police force, severely undermining morale.

Furthermore, the absence of stress management and work-life balance programs was consistently reported as a major impediment. This lack of support contributes to increased mental health complications, higher absenteeism rates, and depression among officers. The potential for such issues, particularly among armed officers, poses a significant risk to public safety. Arming an officer who is struggling with severe mental health challenges is inherently risky to themselves, their colleagues, and the public at large. This finding exposes critical systemic flaws with potential implications for mental well-being and underscores the urgent need for structured reforms that prioritize mental wellness through comprehensive stress management and work-life balance initiatives. While prior studies by Ong'ale and Masiga (2021) noted employee stress and depression stemming from work-personal life conflicts, and Ombaka and Merecia (2021) highlighted the importance of work-life balance for organizational productivity, this study specifically identifies the concrete stressors unique to female police officers in kwale and reveals the extent of their devastating consequences, moving beyond general observations to pinpoint specific areas for intervention. **Impact of Work Experience and Deployment Biases:** Despite the general understanding that work experience is crucial for career progression, the findings suggest a paradox for female police officers. While factors like

enhanced skill and knowledge, efficiency, decision-making ability, and confidence and motivation were identified as key benefits of work experience the qualitative data revealed a significant barrier: skewed deployments that discriminate against female police officers.

This discriminatory deployment practice limits female officers' exposure to diverse tasks and critical situations, thereby hindering their ability to fully develop the very skills and knowledge that lead to efficiency and confidence. As articulated by a key informant: "Ideally, repeated exposure to tasks and situations enables employees to gain a deeper understanding of their job responsibilities, technical skills, and problem-solving strategies, allowing them to perform tasks more effectively. This is largely lacking for female police officers due to gender biases in deployments." This qualitative insight explains why work experience is perceived as a barrier despite its intrinsic value; it's not the lack of experience itself, but the unequal opportunity to gain relevant experience due to gender bias. This exposes deep systemic flaws with far-reaching implications for female police officers' careers in crime management. It necessitates continued structured reforms that prioritize a formidable human resource base, ensuring a holistic approach to police staffing and welfare, including realistic workloads and flexible working schedules to manage stress and maximize skill acquisition. This finding directly supports the study's objective by revealing the specific mechanisms through which work experience becomes a barrier for female officers.

Education as a Professionalization Factor: The study further explored the role of education as a personal-level barrier. Consistent with findings by Chelagat and Ruto (2014), this study validated the notion that higher education fosters a high degree of intellect, tact, and impartiality, which are essential for quality investigations and reports. Highly educated police officers were found to be more courteous, possess stronger community relations, exhibit independent problem-solving skills, have a stronger regard for human rights, and generate fewer civilian complaints. These

attributes collectively improve accountability and legitimacy within police institutions.

However, a significant challenge identified is that most female police officers currently lack university-level education, and when opportunities for on-job training for professional courses arise, male police officers are often preferred. This systemic denial of opportunities for higher learning is synonymous with denying female officers opportunities for growth and, by implication, hindering the much-needed reforms to professionalize the police force, which this study links to increased higher education levels. Therefore, while education is recognized as a facilitator, its limited access becomes a barrier, directly impacting the professional development and effectiveness of female police officers.

Organizational Level Barriers that Affect Female Police Officer's Career in Crime Management

The second objective for this study sought to establish organizational level barriers that affect female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya. The variables of interest that were assessed include; leadership culture, policies, and police recognition systems. A significant number of the study participants strongly disagreed while the rest disagreed with the notion that leadership culture had any effect on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. Whereas a significant number of the study participants were not sure the agreed and strongly agreed that leadership culture had an effect on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. Observably, the sum of the participants who agreed and that of those who strongly agreed was more compared to that of those who disagreed in addition to those who strongly disagreed.

As argued by Wu et al. (2016) police leadership is dotted with authoritarianism, where leadership is strictly rules based with preference for order and sometimes military like approach. This style of leadership culture exerts full control over the team

where subordinates are expected to simply follow and obey rather than to offer feedback or contribute ideas. Whereas most previous studies such as by Schuck & Amie (2021) and Archbold & Hassel (2009) mostly focused on promotional barriers especially resistance by male Peers. This study however explored on challenges viewed through masculinized lenses, with roles segregated according to genders. These include police patrols, operations such as police raids, investigations and collection of intelligence, handing gender based violence and sexual offender's suspects. Hence this study found that female police officers are given duties that were socially thought to fit the female gender such as searching female criminals, dealing with female sex offenders, clerical work in records and escorting female suspects to court and dealing with gender based violence.

The above finding is an indication that police reform should be made continuous so that policing is benchmarked and aligned with best practices in the developed world. As observed, police leadership culture that masculinized attitudes towards policing and looks down on female police officers still persists in Nakuru. However, this according to this study has implication on effective policing. Internationally best investigators and criminal intelligence officers are females. Further, given that police patrols have been motorized there should be no reasons why female police officers cannot be part of the patrol contingents. To enhance institutional capacity of policing in Kenya, key focus area of police reform should be looking at partnerships and collaborations with policing institutions in developed county for best practices, policing capability and culture exchange. The implication of above finding is weakened policing because important policing potential from female police officers remain untapped. The net effect is ineffective policing. This study therefore finds a need to initiate integration of all genders in policing as they are functionally interdependent so that whether male or female are given equal chances and opportunities of handling cases.

Existing Policies

According to this study, there are so many policies, though unwritten that have an effect on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. As argued by Rabe-Hemp et al. (2023). These include glass cliff and glass ceiling phenomenon. Glass cliff phenomenon was explained in this study as a situation where female police officers are appointed to high risk leadership positions or roles, to potentially set them up for failure. The second is the glass ceiling issue, which involves several systemic barriers, such as the perception of female police officers as tokens, sexual harassment, and promotion based on gender rather than qualifications. Further, female police officers are expected to manage parenting of children but is not accounted for in law enforcement. In such contexts female officers experience more difficulties than males in ascending the professional or managerial hierarchy. Further more even police uniforms and protective gears are designed with the masculine body in mind, meaning that the architects of this career didn't have female police officers in mind.

The above finding may have several implications; one, women who receive negative feedback from male supervisors decrease women's career aspirations because female officers by their very nature have propensity to respond to male officers appraisal of their abilities. Observably, female police officers potential in terms of their investigative prowess and problem solving skill has largely not been exploited, perhaps the reason why policing in Nakuru Sub County is seemingly ineffective evidenced by increasing cases of insecurity, also an indicator of a plateau effect in the police human resource.

Police recognition systems

The third area investigated under organizational barriers was the effect of police recognition systems on female police officers' careers in crime management. The findings from Table 13 suggest important perspective on this barrier. While a slight majority of participants (43%) disagreed or

strongly disagreed that police recognition systems significantly affected female officers' career progression, a substantial minority (41.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that such systems did, in fact, have an impact. The remaining 15.1% were unsure, highlighting a lack of clear consensus or understanding among officers.

This mixed finding is particularly insightful. The fact that a larger proportion of participants perceived no effect initially might suggest that formal recognition systems are, on the surface, perceived as gender-neutral or ineffective in either positively or negatively influencing female careers. However, the considerable proportion of officers who do believe these systems have an effect cannot be overlooked. This divergence in opinion indicates that while explicit, documented recognition policies might exist (such as the National Police Service Gender Policy 2020-2025 mentioned by a key informant), their implementation or underlying cultural interpretations may still be problematic or insufficient to address gender biases fully.

A key informant shed light on the prevailing mindset: "Mostly it is the National Police Service Gender Policy (2020-2025) that the police currently uses to correct gender biases in the national police service. Most police officers' thinking is still clouded by the traditional lenses which view female police officers, especially in the African context, through masculinized lenses, with roles segregated according to genders." This statement is crucial because it explains why despite formal policies, a significant portion of female officers might still feel affected. It suggests that the spirit of gender-equitable recognition, promotion, and deployment is often undermined by deeply ingrained traditional biases and a masculinized police culture. Therefore, even if a policy exists, if it's not implemented fairly or if the underlying culture devalues female contributions in certain roles, the recognition system will inherently have an adverse effect on female officers' careers.

In essence, while the formal structures of police recognition systems may appear neutral to some, their practical application and perception are clearly influenced by deeply rooted gender stereotypes. This implies that the effectiveness of current recognition systems in promoting female police officers is severely hampered by cultural inertia. Consequently, merely forming gender policies, while necessary, is insufficient to address gender-based biases affecting female officers' careers. More profound efforts are required to demystify traditional myths and challenge masculinized perceptions that continue to impact female police officers' career advancement in crime management, thereby ensuring that recognition is based truly on merit and not overshadowed by gender-segregated roles. This finding highlights a critical challenge for police professionalization and equitable career progression for female officers.

Social-cultural Barriers that Affect Female Police Officer's Career in Crime Management.

The third objective for this study sought to establish social-cultural barriers that affect female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County, Kenya. The variables of interest that were assessed include; societal perception around gender roles, and work place dynamics. Majority of the participants had overwhelming view that societal perceptions around gender roles affected female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. A significant proportion of the participants however viewed work place dynamics as the main barrier affecting female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. The first aspect of societal perceptions to be assessed was the effect of gender stereotyping on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. As depicted in Table 13 above, a significant number of the study participants strongly disagreed while 22.1% disagreed with the notion that gender stereotyping had an effect on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County.

Whereas a significant number of the study participants were not sure the rest is respectively agreed and strongly agreed that gender stereotyping had an effect on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County. Observably, the sum of the participants who agreed and that of those who strongly agreed was more compared to that of those who disagreed and those who strongly disagreed combined. As revealed by this study, the general perception is that gender stereotyping is a serious barrier on female police officer's career in crime management in Nakuru East Sub-County.

A belief that female police officers are more emotional than males and better at nurturing and caring children or only perceived as good wives and mothers disadvantages them when it comes to certain deployments. For example, even female police drivers are not deployed in some operational assignments that are exclusively associated with male gender. This already perpetuates inequality, limit opportunities and negatively impacts self-perception and behaviour. Further, gender discrimination also has permeated many employers too including the police where employees are hired or promoted based on sexual orientation. In some instances the employers decide to hire or promote male employees over another assuming that females of a certain age range may become pregnant and cause work to suffer. When female employees are preferred however over males because they are sexually appealing may later lead to sexual harassment.

The foregoing observation implies that these prejudices can be especially harmful when decision-makers have a poor opinion of women due to their gender or sexual orientation. The social environment is where policing takes place. When a society is not gender flexible, nonconforming persons will always be the ones who suffer the most from social and economic marginalization as a result of discrimination. Some community members could even choose not to report crimes to female police officers, although there are consequences associated with

this choice, particularly if the female officer has specific knowledge of the reported incident.

As argued by Rief and Clinkinbeard (2020), Alkus & Padesky (1983), Burke (1996) different aspects of workplace dynamics had effect on female police officer's career in crime management. In the context of Nakuru police these included, police officers uniforms and working equipment's designed for male gender but without female gender in sight. Most trainings were considered appropriate for male gender as opposed to the minority. In addition, the perception of policing as a male-dominated profession often causes the public to lose faith in female police personnel. Furthermore, cultural beliefs have permeated the police force, with female personnel being underutilized in specific positions or tasks. Furthermore, because they are perceived as weak, female police officers are typically excluded from tasks requiring the use of physical force. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult to strike a balance between work and family obligations since there is no framework of policies that assist female police officers' family lives, which leads to constant dispute with their bosses. According to this study, the issue of working for long hours than required has really affected police officers careers because according to internationally required standards police officers are few, hence, overstretched with pressure of work. Last but not least, high workload, high rates of bias, sexual discrimination and insufficient support was reported to result to psychosocial issues like stress, depression, burnout, and work family conflict.

The above findings generally depicts collateral effects that undermine the role of female officers and by extension the security management role of the said officers. While female police officers remain important due to the fact that they handle sensitive cases such as sexual harassment and offenses especially of victims who are minors, work place dynamics remain a serious problem that plagues their effectiveness in the management of such cases and therefore an area where policy

makers need to focus as an important area in the ongoing police reform.

Recommendations

To mitigate personal-level barriers, particularly those related to work-life balance and mental wellness, the police service should implement continued structured reforms that prioritize officers' mental well-being. These reforms must include comprehensive stress management programs and flexible work-life balance initiatives to effectively support female officers in managing their professional and personal responsibilities. To overcome organizational barriers and maximize the potential of female police officers, it is recommended to establish a formidable human resource base that adopts a holistic approach to police staffing and welfare. This involves reviewing and reforming existing policies to promote gender-neutral deployment strategies, ensuring female officers are assigned duties based on merit and skills rather than gender stereotypes. Additionally, fostering a leadership culture that encourages feedback and recognizes diverse contributions beyond traditional authoritarian models is essential. Finally, to overcome socio-cultural barriers and improve female officers' effectiveness, policymakers should prioritize and integrate specific interventions within ongoing police reforms. This includes sensitization programs for all officers to counter harmful stereotypes and foster a more inclusive work environment, thereby ensuring female officers can effectively manage sensitive cases and contribute fully across all operational assignments

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