

Personal Perspectives: Challenges for Women in Policing within the Caribbean

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Abstract

Female police officers in the Caribbean have faced the same challenges as their counterparts in North America and other democratic nations. Sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and organizational reservations to assigning females to many patrol or investigative assignments and promoting them to decision making and executive positions continue to pose challenges to women law enforcement officials in this region. One benefit however has been the trend for female police officers to not engage in corrupt, deviant, or abusive activities. The author, a practitioner, will share her perspectives and experiences.

Keywords: Women in Policing; Caribbean; Sexual Harassment

Introduction

As the opportunity presented itself to write this paper, many ideas flowed, with thoughts of the most pressing concerns in law enforcement. However, one could not escape the need to address the challenges for female police officers in the Caribbean, many of which have been personally experienced by the author. Although the number of females in police agencies is still few in number, women are now represented in greater numbers at all levels within police departments including those positions involved in strategic decision making, which clearly represents a paradigm shift. According to Brown-Campbell (1999), in every area of the Jamaica Constabulary Force, there is a representation of women, many of whom are division, section and station commanders. On the other hand, St. Kitts and Nevis appointed their first female Inspector in 1998, which represented the highest rank achieved by any woman in the St. Kitts and Nevis Police Force. It was therefore not strange for UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon in his message for the 2007 International Women's Day to suggest that "empowering women is not only a goal in itself. It is a condition for building better lives for everyone on the planet." Ban Ki Moon in his 2007 message also advanced that "women continue to be under represented in decision making positions. Women's work continues to be undervalued, underpaid or not paid at all." Therefore, the problems of inequity are not only local or regional but global in scope and in spite of greater female representation in this new millennium, inequity still exists between women police and their male counterparts (Lonsway, 2003).

Some regard policing not as a profession (Byron, 2001), and it is generally viewed as an occupation for men who are possessed with the somatic characteristics with which women are not endowed. Consequently, women

were not viewed as being able to effectively carry out the responsibilities of a police officer. Historically, women police were consigned to the role of ‘spear carriers’ with little or no input in the decision-making process. The token number of women in the Caribbean recruited in police agencies in the early days carried out primarily gender-specific roles. The rationale for recruiting women into law enforcement organizations within the Caribbean arose out of the need to deal with female and juvenile prisoners. This initial role later expanded to include issues relating to sexual offences, domestic violence, and public relation interactions with academic institutions. Despite an imperative for those essential roles, women’s contributions have been looked upon as trivial, which by default, their gender has always been a contributing factor. This view is epitomized in a calypso song entitled “Woman Police” by Lord Spoiler in which he advanced:

*“.....And when she carry me inside the charge room
I coupling up me police like a
bridegroom
the female Sergeant ask me anything
Is a heap of doodoo darling I answering
Honey chooks my
love please forget
I know by the way she would start to fret
But she can beat me, she can
butt me
Tear down
my clothes
I ain’t retreating, I advancing for my blows.....”*

Women have been traditionally conceptualized in stereotypical jobs, but, this image is now being appropriately overhauled to allow for dynamic policing careers.

Historical Background

The science of policing occupies a space in the historical landscape of the Caribbean, where law enforcement was adopted from the colonialists who sought to ensure that law and order was maintained. With the introduction of justice administration in the Caribbean, a centralized policing structure with colonial archetypes was adopted. Therefore, criminal justice in the Caribbean did not develop spontaneously but instead emerged from the relics of colonialism. Consequently, in the initial stages, police agencies in the Caribbean were led by the colonialists who commandeered their forces, which consisted of a great number of police officers who were descendants of slaves and indentured labourers. Traditionally, when one spoke of policing it usually referred to the aspect of social regulation of communities, which involved not only justice agencies but also families, educational institutions, businesses,

churches, governments and communities. This perspective was supported by Brent (1974) who provides the rationale for the emergence of police officers to guard against societal deviance when he suggested that,

"if men were perfect, there would be no need for formal agencies to guard against human behaviour detrimental to lives, property and well-being of society. But the human race is not made up of angels; it depends on the civilizing influence of the family, the church, schools and other institutions to regulate behaviour. And where those institutions prove inadequate and incapable of filling their role, especially amid the socially dysfunctional stresses of urban society, the maintenance of order and safety necessitated the creation of police agencies by the state."

However, Brent's view was contra to the purpose of establishing law enforcement agencies in the Caribbean. According to Danns (1979), police agencies in the Caribbean were set up to regulate the actions of the colonized who sought to eliminate their torture and prevent their abuse. Today, the police service is a dynamic organization and when one speaks of law enforcement, it generally refers to the crime control organization involved in dispensing the services associated with detecting, preventing, deterring and reducing crime, the fear of crime, and criminal offending. These services are dispensed when the police execute their role and function which include the maintenance of social order and enforcement of the law.

Now, while our history defines who we are in the current state of law enforcement, it is probably a fitting time to revert to that traditional manner of policing communities with due consideration to our contemporary environment. Of course, it requires that the policing demarcation be redefined to incorporate some contemporary and traditional issues, inclusive of the role of females in policing. Although there is a paucity of literature with respect to Caribbean women in policing, there is data which suggests that the first intake of women police officers occurred across police departments in the Caribbean somewhere between the 1950's and 1960's. The Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) recruited its first batch of women police in 1955, numbering twelve (12). In Jamaica the recruitment of women police in the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) commenced in 1947. In the Royal Bahamas Police Force, 122 women applied for employment in 1964 but only 6 of them commenced training. However, prior to the recruitment of women police officers, female matrons had been used in law enforcement agencies to carry out the delineated functions of women police personnel. Currently in many agencies throughout

the world, female police officers represent between 10% and 15% of the general police population, and this is reflected within law enforcement agencies across the Caribbean.

Women police officers are inherently endowed with natural nurturing and management abilities, and by virtue of these characteristics, they must now take the initiative to play a pivotal role within their police organizations. According to Lonsway et al (2003), female officers have the tendency to be better communicators and more meticulous, which therefore suggests that they are equipped with special skills which allow for proper investigations. Past studies have consistently concluded that women police are *sui generis* and their services have been quite valuable in the agencies in which they serve (Lonsway et al, 2003). Rarely, would a woman police engage in an act of violence, criminal conduct or police brutality. Research has also shown that women police officers are much better than their male counterparts in treating with domestic violence incidents and sexual offences (Lonsway et al, 2003). In addition, with community-oriented policing as a strategic option for many police agencies in the Caribbean, female police officers have always been thought to be far more effective than male officers in dispensing community-oriented policing services (Lonsway et al, 2003). As a consequence, if women police officers are inherently possessed of natural abilities to manage, then it stands to reason that all police agencies should advocate for more female police personnel to reach the pinnacle of their careers. In doing so, greater dynamism and effective leadership would be achieved which would assist with the transformation of several police agencies throughout the Caribbean to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. According to Trinidad and Tobago's former Minister of National Security Martin Joseph in his address to the Caribbean Association of Women Police (CAWP) conference in 2007, he suggested that dynamic and effective leadership by senior police officials is fundamental to the reformation of justice services. He further contended that leadership was the most important resource for police institutions. The demand for women in police executive positions is epitomized in the number of female successes at secondary and tertiary institutions, and the inimitability that women bring to every level of the law enforcement organization must be underscored. Therefore, it cannot be merely an option for an increase in the hiring of female officers, but rather an obligation.

However, female law enforcement officers must overcome the challenges if the police organization is to progress. These challenges are many and significant and one may recognize some are quite unique to women police personnel in the Caribbean. While the challenges for women police are more so associated with administrative decisions rather than the operational aspects of policing, it obviously affects the efficient and effective operations of the police in the Caribbean. Notwithstanding the fact that many criminal justice

challenges affect all police officers, many of them are gender-specific, experienced predominantly by female police officers.

While male officers dominate law enforcement globally because they are in the majority, females are still taking the initial steps to attain leadership roles in police agencies. The fact that women are now assuming leadership roles was supported by Joseph (2007) who asserted that “the traditional image of women as typecast in stereotypical jobs is now being repaved in a suitable arena for a dynamic profession in policing.” Despite the fact that this developing trend should be lauded, a critical analysis is required however to ascertain the reason for this change without drawing opinionated conclusions which may not reflect a true position on the subject matter.

Over the years female police officers have been disparaged and have seemingly been obscured from the annals of law enforcement history. The establishment of the Caribbean Association of Women Police (CAWP) in March 2006, which arose out of a meeting held with Commissioner of Police Paul Farquharson, the President of the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP), and female representatives of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), should therefore serve to correct this fallacy. This meeting was admittedly in recognition of the need for a voice for female officers in the Caribbean through which they can together advance their concerns and make credible recommendations.

Although in the past there have been female police officials occupying senior positions in various law enforcement agencies, even at the executive level, they have not been able to generate the level of Caribbean integration like the CAWP. Moreover, although women police personnel in the region may have been eager to form an alliance much earlier than 2006, the lack of support from some executive officers at the various justice agencies in the Caribbean may have inhibited such cooperation. While many opportunities, particularly in terms of training and promotion, are available for all police officers in every sphere of criminal justice in the Caribbean, there are still high and unacceptable levels of inequity and bias against female police officers. Although some of the challenges experienced by women are unique to a particular role or rank, others are generic and experienced at every rank. There are many other surmountable but testing challenges which women police officials face in the work environment, such as:

- Difficulties in balancing work and family life;
- Sexuality & Sexual Harassment;
- Gender Discrimination;
- Lack of Support for Women Police;
- Sexual Orientations: and
- Police Criminality

Therefore, the creation of the CAWP must be regarded as an idyllic strategic decision to overcome the many challenges faced by female police officers throughout the Caribbean with the expectation that addressing their concerns and challenges would serve to improve police organizations throughout the territory.

Major Challenges for Female Police Officers: Balancing Work & Family Life

While more women are being recruited into police agencies, they must still carry out their private roles as wife, mother and/or homemaker. However, female police officers are challenged by the very fact that several of them are unmarried and in many instances have to substitute for the male parent in their children's lives, while simultaneously having to cope with the stress of the policing profession. In addition, having to work rotating shifts frequently separates women from their children and spouse and then the upbringing and socialization of their children is delegated to others. The rotating shifts, unplanned tours of duty, court attendance on scheduled days off, and excessively long hours quite often limits the participation of female officers in social and extracurricular activities. This disruption in work/personal life balance has the potential to lead to delinquency among the children of female officers, the tendency for officers to experience elevated levels of stress, and runs the risk of the officer developing other lifestyle stressors and illnesses. The demands of policing can be difficult for female officers, and those who find themselves in situations described above may encounter difficulties with their children and their spouses, which may result in separation or divorce. These challenges may lead to illness and anxiety, which can have a negative effect on work productivity. Despite a female officer's marital status or social circumstances, she must be allowed to attend to her domestic and social responsibilities.

In balancing work and family life some women police are forced to make a choice which at times can be unconsciously made, as some female officers, oblivious of their action, neglect their families. In other instances, some women police officers knowingly neglect their families to commit to their work responsibilities, but yet still hope for the best results. There are also instances where female officers intentionally neglect their job in favor of their family and the expected result is poor work performance. The neglect of family or job can both result in negative consequences. Therefore, the challenge for female police officers lies in balancing their work and family life to ensure that neither their job nor their family is negatively affected. Female officers must properly manage their time between work and family to ensure the optimum efficiency and the most desirable outcome is achieved in both situations. However, the onus is not only on the female officer; the employer too has a

vital role to play. In understanding the importance of the role of women in the police agency and in the home, employers must also make the necessary adjustments to ensure all facilities and options are made available for female officers.

Promotion

In an address to the 2nd Annual Caribbean Association of Women Police Conference in 2007, Trinidad and Tobago's past Minister of National Security, the honourable Senator Martin Joseph agreed that promotion and opportunities for women police officers was long and limited but contended that the transformation in the TTPS would seek to address this by increasing the opportunities for women to advance to leadership roles. Even with the changing role and the versatility that women police officers are now expected to bring to the table, there is seemingly no tangential representation of women police officers in the hierarchy of the police services, although a nominal number of women have occupied senior positions in some services within the Caribbean. There is a perception held by many women police officers that they are now required to work twice as hard than their male counterparts if they are to receive any deserving recognition, opportunity, or career advancement.

In some cases, the standard operating procedures and legislation for many police forces throughout the Caribbean are skewed to the extent where it could be interpreted that women police officers must give more effort than their male colleagues. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, Section 105 of the Police Service Regulations provides for female police officers to take charge of the children of prisoners who have no relatives or other persons to take charge of them. This regulation is provided regardless of the gender of the children or the prisoner. Therefore, while other regulations identify roles for male and female officers in specific situations, in others it clearly spells out the role for female officers only. However, performance management systems do not take these gender-specific roles into consideration in assessing an officer's performance.

With the publication of new legislation regarding the governance of police services, the recruitment of a greater percentage of female officers, increased emphasis on training and development, and purposeful decisions to promote based on performance and merit and not seniority certainly provide better opportunities for women police officers in the Caribbean. The criterion for promotion in some police agencies has been based mainly on seniority. Essentially, this presents a great disadvantage to women police as many of them have joined their agency only after measures were taken to increase female recruitment and hiring. Consequently, the most senior officers are males

and where changes as it relates to the performance management system have been made to utilize merit rather than seniority, it certainly will be many years before one will likely see a greater representation of women at the executive levels. Therefore, in police agencies where promotion is based on seniority, women police would not present a threat to breaking the proverbial glass ceiling as they would obviously retire from their agencies before they had the opportunity to attain an executive position. This position was also supported by Lonsway et al (2003) who suggested that female officers could never attain equality in police agencies at the current rate. Whether the biases against women are intentional or unintentional, one must admit that women police personnel seldom get the recognition that they deserve with male officers seemingly being valued more than their female colleagues.

Consequently, a promotion system which places emphasis both on merit and seniority may generate the best leaders and should provide an ample opportunity for all persons regardless of gender. The question now is whether there should be a percentage representation of female officers at every rank that more closely resembles the percentage of women police in the entire service? This question requires further and more comprehensive analysis and research.

Sexuality & Sexual Harassment

By the mere gender classification, sexual harassment has always plagued women in the work place and this behavior has also been prevalent in police agencies, thus requiring extra attention. It is quite common for male and female police officers working in the same police agency to become involved in relationships. While some have contended that such relationships are inappropriate, others have supported officers who form these alliances. One reason put forward for the lack of support is the opinion that the senior officer in the relationship would sometimes use his or her position of authority to unfairly discriminate against others in favour of his/her spouse or friend. On the other hand, such relationships have been supported with the claim that officers in these relationships can better understand and accept the demands placed on their partner by the organization. Regardless of the position that one adopts, it is quite understandable that for there to be shared mutual respect, officers must observe the highest standard of professionalism and decency in the workplace. The police agency in the Caribbean can be considered as a law enforcement community, with its own culture and many close relationships, some of which emerged when the officers were drafted into the service at their respective training academies. However, some of these relationships have been so unstable that the persons involved go from one partner to the next. In addition, there have been many instances where the person or persons involved are married or share a common-law union with another person. This has been

quite common with young women police who get into relationships with experienced male officers upon leaving the police training academies.

On the other hand, sexual harassment in the workplace is nothing unusual in the police service and it is one of the more important challenges with which law enforcement agencies must deal with. The claims made by women police officers of their usually senior male counterparts making sexual advances to them are quite common but, some female officers are still not aware that certain gestures or suggestions constitute sexual harassment. However, the prevalence of reports of sexual harassment of female officers is dependent on various factors, among which are the victim's tolerance level, the virtues of the victim, the level of authority of the offender and rank of the victim, the character of the offender, and the victim's sexual prowess. One could be considered ignorant if it was not admitted that some female officers invite sexual harassment by their male counterparts. This is done to either impose the assumed authority of their molester or to do as she so pleases. This behaviour therefore protects her position thus preventing any officer senior to her but junior to her molester from taking disciplinary action against her or detailing her for duties which she perceives as unfair.

To deal with the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace within the Caribbean, female police personnel have within the last few years been exposed to several training workshops and have received educational material on sexual harassment aimed at encouraging them to report such abuses. In addition, some police agencies have developed guidelines to deter and prevent officers from carrying out acts of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, some female officers are apprehensive to report incidents of sexual harassment fearing acts of vindictiveness from the molester or other person. While women have begun to come forward to report such cases, police agencies must take decisive action to prevent these incidents. Therefore, law enforcement organizations must consider not only the need to develop sexual harassment policies but other situational preventative techniques to avert such acts. It may require audio and video surveillance in all police departments or telephone analyses, but whatever policy is implemented, it must also look at female officers who intentionally use their sexuality to advance their personal causes.

Gender Discrimination

In 2010, Secretary General of United Nations Women, Michelle Bachelet, told delegates at the Third Summit of UN Women that *“gender equality and women's empowerment are goals in their own right and central to all other goals — must be more than a mantra. It must become a lived reality for women ...in all countries.”* Therefore, if gender equality and women's empowerment is to become a reality, then governments and police services

must examine their policies and the legislative framework that guide their operations to achieve this ideal. In Trinidad and Tobago, the draft National Policy on Gender and Development provides an avenue that includes perspectives on gender. This therefore lays the framework to prevent discrimination across all sectors based on gender and other characteristics.

Among police agencies in the Caribbean, these ideals can seem elusive and if one were to achieve such objectives, there are many critical changes which will be required. It will be necessary to first overcome the hurdle of 'gender tribalism' and 'traditionalism' where important strategic decisions are made based on one's gender or the modes of operation which have been rooted in tradition. For far too long, women police officers have been discriminated against by their male counterparts, many of whom have been favoured to carry out various tasks, to receive specialized training, and for upward mobility in their careers. While women have slowly been able to gain entry into some units which traditionally had never recruited female officers, there still exist some police organizations in the Caribbean with units which comprise only male officers. Some agencies contend that due to the lack of accommodation for female officers, they have implemented a quota of female candidates. As such, some recruitment policies constrain the employment of female officers. Similarly, police agencies prescribe certain physical characteristics for employment which can also serve to deter some women from being recruited. Hence, police agencies are becoming less effective as their basic goals of preventing, deterring, reducing and detecting crime, the fear of crime, and criminal offending are not being achieved. This is quite visible when one examines the crime data of police agencies throughout the Caribbean.

Although gender discrimination is not limited to police agencies, it is clearly evident when one examines the role and function of women police officers in the Caribbean. Women have seldom been given the responsibility to command operational squads. Many women police officers would agree that they are usually directed by their shift supervisor or other senior administrator to perform either station security duties or clerical tasks while their male counterparts are assigned to carry out mobile and foot patrol duties or even field investigations. This bias is clearly evident when one examines the gender composition of the various operational units, such as task forces and special operation squads. The gender parity in these units is seldom representative of the breakdown in the wider police agency in which these units function. There is however an implicit perception that some senior women police officers are weak and ineffective by virtue of their gender. While this notion may be a view held by some, it is unfounded and a misnomer which has not been supported by research. Similarly, there are senior male officers who are also viewed as weak leaders, but the claim that their gender is consequential to their vulnerabilities has never been made. In fact, what some have construed as the weakness of a

female officer was in many instances the effective use of her womanly guiles to diffuse potentially violent situations and deescalating citizen confrontations without being aggressive. This certainly has to be the unique psychological and emotional strength with which female officers are endowed. In support of this view, Brown-Campbell (1999) in her study found that female police supervisors exhibited sterner dispositions than their male colleagues.

However, police officers on a whole can only be as effective as the support they receive from their colleagues regardless of their rank. This brings to mind the appointment of the Caribbean's first female Commissioner of Police (COP) in the Royal Police Force of Antigua & Barbuda (RPFAB), Ms. Delano Christopher. Christopher's tenure lasted only three (3) years from 2005 to 2008 when she was removed from office following a review of the RPFAB. Her appointment, although somewhat controversial (like her dismissal) was testament to the slowly changing face of police leadership in the Caribbean.

Following Christopher's removal, Canadian citizen, Gary Nelson was appointed to the position. To assist him in the execution of his duties he engaged three (3) other Canadian Mounties. Upon his appointment, Commissioner Nelson complained about the lack of the basic amenities, suffice it to say, his appointment lasted mere months, as he was fired the same year in which he was appointed. However, Ms. Christopher during her appointment displayed the tenacity to get the job done regardless of the circumstances or the availability of the physical resources. While she did not get the level of support from her colleagues, she seemingly was committed to do her job against all odds. The lack of support for Ms. Christopher was ideally personified in a report by Hadeed (2005) which suggested that officers saw the appointment as a "political move" and felt that the RPFAB was being turned into a "petticoat force."

One may therefore be tempted to ask why women are not considered as capable as men to carry out any task in a police agency. Following Ms. Christopher's removal, several other male Commissioners of Police have been appointed and terminated, which clearly shows that gender could not have been an issue. Deputy Police Commissioner and Deputy Director of Police Reforms in Kenya, King'ori Mwangi, in a United Nations (2012) report answered in the affirmative to this question and this view was also supported by Martin and Jurik (1996). Mwangi (2012) suggested that universally, while discussions have contended that women are the mothers of nations, this has been contradicted as some levels of hostility in the way women are treated still exist. He further suggested that, just like men, women can cope with difficult law enforcement operations. One must accept the fact that women have been intruders in a male-dominated profession and have been making significant contributions. Therefore, police agencies must do all in its power to ensure that

substantive equality and equality of agency as advanced by Kabeer (2003) is achieved not only for women but for both genders.

“It’s a Man’s World” - Lack of Support for Women in Policing

Although women’s span of control in police departments have increased over time, with many of them being promoted to senior ranks commanding a great deal of authority, unsupportive peers of both genders provide a fertile ground for their subsequent failure. It has been at times perceived that male police officers seldom lend their support to their senior female colleagues. Male officers usually feel threatened by senior female managers who they view as occupying positions suited to them and to which they should have been appointed. In such circumstances, the competency of female officers is usually not an issue, as the lack of support is primarily based on gender and not on her competency level. Sometimes, despite these feelings of animosity towards women police, male officers would generally prefer to have the support of female officers, but not in the capacity of a more senior women colleague. Musical icon James Brown best expresses this fact in his hit song “It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s World” when he sang:

“This is a man’s world, this is a man’s world

But it wouldn’t be nothing, nothing without a woman or a girl.....”

Part of the mandate of women police bureaus and associations is to promote and support women in law enforcement. However, while this obligation may form part of their stated policies, it evidently is not yet achieving this objective. There are ostensibly levels of antagonism towards female police officers in the Caribbean by their junior and senior male officers particularly when the woman concerned occupies a management position or one in which a lot of trust and confidence is bestowed upon her.

Therefore, the lack of support is a great challenge for women police, particularly where they occupy positions of great responsibility and for which accountability is a prerequisite. For example, a senior superintendent of police who is required to manage a division must account for the increase in crime that has occurred within that division. With such an increase, the divisional commander must ensure that there is a unity of direction with all sections, units and departments that fall under her purview if the crime problem is to be dealt with adequately. However, if officers in that division lack the respect for the divisional commander, it is quite likely that they would pay little heed to the strategic direction in which the division is being guided.

Diversity in the Workplace

Owing to pressures from various civil liberty organizations, diversity in the workplace has become an imperative. However, Caribbean governments are seemingly not enthusiastic to condone alternative lifestyles. This is manifested

in the National Policy on Gender and Development in Trinidad and Tobago which states that the policy document does not provide measures for treating with lesbianism, homosexuality, or same sex unions. However, alternative sexual preferences (homosexuality, lesbianism and bi-sexuality) are now more readily accepted in the workplace only because civil rules forbid discrimination against this category of individuals (Nelson, 2012). Therefore, in the Caribbean where Christianity is the framework for most religious denominations (e.g. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Seventh Day Adventists, Protestants, Presbyterians, etc.), many congregations accept officers who adopt such a lifestyle.

Due to the diversity in culture among the various Caribbean police departments, the acceptance or rejection of alternative lifestyle varies. In Jamaica, where the culture is predominantly homo-phobic, police officers who have non-traditional relationships must be very discreet in their alternative lifestyle for fear of violence against them by peers. However, the way in which officers with alternative lifestyles are treated, is influenced by religious beliefs, culture, and social upbringing. Traditionally, relationships have been limited to male and female interactions, but now, police agencies must contend with all types of alternative lifestyles in the workplace, which may lead to the gradual elimination of or decline in the masculine image of the police officer.

Police Criminality

Women police officers have not generally been found to routinely engage in criminal conduct. However, in many countries, such as Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad and Tobago, there seems to be a growing trend for police officers to carry out criminal acts, unlike in Barbados, where there has been a reduction (Gomes, 2007). One may be quick to argue that female officers should not be too concerned about this trend since very few female officers actually participate in criminal activities. However, one could argue that police agencies must be more proactive before challenges, particularly negative ones, are presented.

Police brutality has long been a sore point for law enforcement agencies throughout the Caribbean. Police officers have quite often been accused of taking matters into their own hands instead of allowing the criminal justice system to take its own course. While few women police officers have been implicated in such behaviours, the fact that they are now represented in some operational units must be considered as a potential red flag for future behaviour. Simply by association, an officer can be condemned, therefore female police officers must now be cognizant of this fact and try to discourage her male counterparts from engaging in such acts of violence which can unexpectedly lead to an early end with the termination of her career.

On the other hand, the mass media is filled with stories of police officers who have allegedly engaged in criminal conduct. This trend has been developing over many years, where officers have been engaging in surreptitious acts during and after their tours of duty. These criminal activities include, but are not limited to, robberies, burglaries, corruption, murder, and larceny offences to name a few. While very few women police have been charged for these crimes, it must serve as a reminder to all women police.

Lessons for Moving Forward

The main objectives of the CAWP are to address the unique needs of women police officers within the Caribbean with an over-arching goal of focusing on recruitment, retention, and advancement. The CAWP must now be used as a vehicle to address all the challenges faced by women police officers in the workplace. To do this, the CAWP must have at the forefront its mission and vision to launch into the next century and the leadership of the CAWP must hold these sacred. Although one could acknowledge that women police personnel in the Caribbean have not received their just dues, the address by Ms. Indirah Adderley, the first President of CAWP, never sought to highlight such a concern or even the need for the CAWP to be used as a vehicle to advance the cause of female police officers. Instead, Ms. Adderley sought to place greater emphasis on the future prospects for both men and women in policing, suggesting “we are partners with our male counterparts.” While in theory this may be so, in practice it is far from reality. Competent persons are the ones who should be promoted and it is important for the CAWP to question why females are so underrepresented at the upper management and executive levels. Therefore, one of CAWP’s mandates must certainly be to ensure that women law enforcement officials achieve the optimum levels of performance and success in their policing careers.

Police agencies throughout the Caribbean must recognize the unique skills possessed by women and use those attributes in furtherance of the objectives of their agencies. At this stage, female police officers should not revert to their perceived traditional roles, but they should be interwoven into the current policing environment. In addition, police agencies must work together with the CAWP and the local women police bureaus to assist in eliminating the challenges currently faced by female officers. The CAWP must also monitor the activities of women police professionals throughout the region and record their successes and failures if they are to really achieve their stated objective. Therefore, female officers must not depend on their male counterparts to take the lead; they must be aggressive in the pursuit of empowerment and leadership. To this end, women must equip themselves with the requisite skills and competencies to assume leadership roles. Similarly, agencies must reexamine their operating procedures, legislative framework, and their policies

to allow female officers to play a greater role in the transformation of their police agencies. Finally, it would be beneficial according to Horne (2006) to determine the present position of female law enforcement officials today in order to appreciate their achievements and to note the challenges and stumbling blocks that they still face. It is only then that women police professionals can move forward in unity; they must be “each other’s keeper.”

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