Attracting Women to Police Work in Pakistan

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Abstract

In Pakistan, there is a significant shortage of females working in law enforcement. This is hampered by traditional and cultural gender-oriented barriers that restrict open community interaction. Sexual harassment, corruption, and the lack of equal opportunity have further restricted progress in enhancing career advancement for women police officers. There is a clear need to increase the number of females working in law enforcement in Pakistan to address the needs and concerns of female community members. This article will attempt to identify and explore the nature of these obstacles and offer some practical short- and long-term solutions to these problems.

Keywords: Law Enforcement; Women in Policing; Pakistan; Police Corruption; Sexual Harassment

Introduction

Pakistan is facing a difficult situation in that it has a tremendous need for women to enter into law enforcement careers, but must overcome the host of barriers that potential female officers will face entering this field. These challenges include structural and cultural barriers related to police corruption, cultural understandings of law enforcement as being a masculine profession, a male dominated police subculture, and the vulnerability to exploitation brought on by extreme economic depravity. Female law enforcement officers are especially needed in order to search and otherwise physically interact with women who may be suspected of crimes, since social norms in Pakistan prohibit male police officers from physically searching a female in the strongest terms.

One major structural obstacle involves the widespread corruption in the criminal justice practices within Pakistan. For instance, TI (Transparency International) Pakistan conducted a national *Corruption Perception Survey* in 2010 and found that the "police force is seen by respondents to be the most corrupt sector" (Transparency International Pakistan, 2011). With this finding, TI did not discover something new but shined a light on a widely held public view. The main impact of this corruption is not so much monetary, but rather stems from corrupt daily interaction with the public. Culturally, the police are despised for their questionable tactics, but also revered for their heroic use of brute force to meet their objectives. The public view of a strong and determined police force is highly gendered, resulting in the occupation being understood primarily as masculine. Male police officers engaging in brutalities and corrupt practices have been normalized culturally but "good and educated women" engaging in the same practices have been viewed anathematically.

Therefore, there is a double standard, where men would be viewed heroically and women would be vilified for the same police actions.

In addition to this cultural double standard is the male dominated subculture of police officers. This can translate into various forms of sexism on the job from subtle acts of discrimination to extreme forms of sexual harassment. Women and their families are often highly dependent on the income provided by their work, and so they become vulnerable to *quid pro quo* sexual harassment. This issue stems from the grinding poverty experienced by many in Pakistan—leaving aside a rather affluent elite class—where one paycheck is not sufficient for even the barest level of subsistence. This fact has prompted droves of women to enter the workforce and has also led more women to enter into a life of crime of the type Merton defined as "innovation." Moreover, consumerism has compounded the issue of poverty as expectations of a western lifestyle grow.

Generally speaking, current trends suggest that women are being forced into a more public and visible place within Pakistani society than has traditionally been the case. A brief review of the literature, a consideration of comparative settings, and interviews with women law enforcement officers will provide the basis for an analysis on how to best integrate women into law enforcement roles in Pakistan.

Research on Women in Law Enforcement

The job satisfaction of women in either heavily male- or female-dominated jobs tends to be low (Ethington, Smart, and Pascarella 1988). In other words, sexual segregation is often at the root of job dissatisfaction. Hence, recruitment of women into male-dominated jobs can be slow as they encounter resistance among colleagues and their important referents. Studies of female police officers in Bahrain and South Korea, where women make up four and ten per cent of the police force respectively, demonstrate how culturally-specific factors affect women's entrance into the force (Kim and Merlo 2009; Strobl and Sung 2009; Strobl 2010). Strobl (2010) claims that segregation and integration of women can co-occur, suggesting that integration cannot occur in Bahrain in the same direct and unilinear way that it allegedly does in Western countries, due to the cultural conflict between the local and the global. In South Korea, however, impressions of law enforcement as exciting and positive images of the job were strong factors in women's reported decisions to join the force (Kim and Merlo 2009). This suggests that Western notions of police work as glamorous may be involved, but also points to the importance of occupational prestige and positive impressions of the police in general. The implication here is that irrespective of gender, the relationship between the police and the community can be an important factor in recruitment.

The reputation of law enforcement agencies was also found to be relevant in the U.S. (Burlingame and Baro 2005). The similar policing functions of law enforcement and social work historically promoted the use of women as police officers (Simpson 1978), and the motivations—altruistic and practical factors—for joining the force seem similar regardless of race or gender (Raganella and White 2004). However, currently, the factor that seems most important for any woman who is considering law enforcement is the perceived attitudes of male officers (Johnson 1998). Thus, Johnson (1998) concludes that the most effective recruitment campaign will involve creating a desirable work environment in addition to marketing and training initiatives.

Women can "do gender" in very different ways, and this is reflected among female police officers and other women in similar fields. Police work is traditionally typed as masculine across cultures. Research involving interviews with female police officers suggests that they take two main approaches to femininity in their role as a police officer, defeminization or deprofessionalization, or what Rabe-Hemp (2009) terms performing as a POLICEwoman or a PoliceWOMAN. The effectiveness of either strategy seems very limited for overall gender integration, at least in ideal type cases. Sasson-Levy (2003) argues that as many women in the Israeli military attempt defeminization, ironically, their actions only reinforce the masculinity of the institution, contributing to limited inclusion.

Hence, current women police officers may not be the best targets for change, since it is not their behavior so much as that of their male counterparts that contributes to further integration. Watts (2007) finds in her study of female construction workers in the UK that their success as civil engineers depends in part on their ability to fit into the dominant masculine culture which entails working long hours and having time and freedom to go to the pub when off work, something that many women in charge of families may not be able to incorporate. Denissen (2010), however, argues that the binds women face in male-dominated professions could help produce change, as her tradeswomen subjects altered their gender performance according to the situation in reflexive and creative   ways.

Altogether, such studies support greater control over and formalization of the interactions of law enforcement officials with women recruits and the general public. Formalization of work policies has been linked to greater equality for underrepresented or stigmatized groups (Kulis and Shaw 1996; Mueller, De Coster, and Estes 2001). Because informality may mean heavier reliance on cultural understandings, official rules and policies that are regularly enforced can force short-term change.

Interviews with Women in Law Enforcement: Identified Barriers

In hopes of gaining additional insight into recruiting obstacles encountered by women going into policing, confidential interviews were conducted in law enforcement agencies that had recruited female officers. Though these interviews were conducted in the United States, and acknowledging that the conditions between the U.S and Pakistan are quite different, there are some dynamics that may be generalized or compared to Pakistan and other contexts as well. The women who were interviewed were asked the following questions.

1) "Why did you get into law enforcement as a career"?

2) "What do you feel are some of the obstacles faced by females entering law enforcement"?

3) "How do you feel recruiting efforts effect female applicants"?

Most of the responses contained similar general themes related to the perceived benefits of working. For instance, they all said that they wanted an "important" job with good benefits. Comments were made such as, "I wanted to make a difference" or "I wanted to feel that I was needed in society." One stated that she wanted a "powerful" job. She additionally added "a job that also made me feel equal to my co-workers," "outside of rank, all the officers I work with are equal in each others' eyes." They additionally stated things about police work that were not gender related, such as "(e)very day is different, the various types of calls you go on." These comments do not contain any immediate components that mark them as unique to women.

However, when discussing obstacles that female law enforcement officers may face, the main area of concern was the possibility of physical injury. They all felt that while police work is demanding mentally there is an ever present danger of being injured in fights and motor vehicle accidents. As a result, most of the interviewed females said they did not want to work in an environment where they would have to use physical force, largely because they had not been socialized to be physical. While they knew that they would receive the training necessary to help them overcome this obstacle, they had no idea "what is it like to be punched" or "knew how hard, someone can hit or kick." Violence had not been part of their upbringing and it therefore was not socialized into who they were as women.

Surprisingly, little was said about a "male environment" or subculture in policing. They did say that women really do "have to prove themselves." This was a repeated statement that emerged during the explanation of physical altercations. This need for women to prove themselves may be the result of the socialization processes of the male officers who were not accustomed to seeing

women in these occupational roles. Men were therefore skeptical of the ability of women to perform the expected duties well, regardless of the individual. Women in turn felt as though they had to "prove" that they were capable of performing these duties, especially the physical ones, should the need arise. They recognized that they may be anatomically weaker than their male counterparts, but through proper training (learning how to fight) they would be able to overcome physical obstacles.

Another theme that arose through the interviews was that most of the interviewed women stated that they would like to see more females portrayed on recruiting posters. This small symbolic act was understood by these women to be a way to promote new ideas about women in law enforcement. All of them felt role models were important for females entering police work. Women who have worked up the chain of command and have held important police positions were important to them. Female role models serve as examples of what women can accomplish, and this is important for both men and women to see. The interviewed women also mentioned that they saw "themselves" as role models for young women and children. In turn, they felt it important to let young women know there are police jobs for females, and that you can simultaneously be a mother and a police officer. These symbolic and role modeling dynamics can help to change the processes of gender socialization as they relate to law enforcement and women.

Whereas with many jobs women can maintain the role of femininity, this is more difficult for jobs more closely associated with masculinity and power. Moreover, the idea of women in a position of authority and power, not to mention corruption, is likely to cause misgivings among members of the family and community. What support for women police officers will exist? The confluence of these factors—a reputation for corruption, daily harassment, lack of support among family and community for entrance into the field, and cultural restrictions—clearly make the recruitment of women into law enforcement especially challenging in Pakistan.

Social Imperatives for the Inclusion of Women

Despite the financial opportunity presented by careers in law enforcement, the cultural restrictions and implications for daily life make jobs in law enforcement very undesirable and/or unrealistic for Pakistani women. In terms of the latter, harassment on the job would likely be a daily reality. Women in the US and in other countries (e.g., Bahrain) have dealt with similar issues, and have addressed sexism in the force partly by embracing a more masculine role. However, this may not be as feasible for women in Pakistan

given the cultural differences that exist. In spite of these challenges, one can draw from the experiences of women in the United States employed in law enforcement careers and findings from other studies to provide some practical solutions for Pakistan.

Long Term Solutions

In the long term it would be ideal if Pakistani society moved towards a new paradigm as it relates to how issues of masculinity and femininity are understood and applied to various roles and occupations in society. The continued pattern of women's social integration implies that issues of discrimination will only be exacerbated without an attendant transition in cultural norms and values about gender. To facilitate a new gender paradigm, social institutions must play a critical role. For instance, the media has a responsibility to portray women in a wide spectrum of the roles that they are increasingly playing in society. This will challenge gender stereotypes that the media has traditionally reinforced. News programs, for instance, can highlight the contributions and importance of females in the workforce by showing the public how women are making a positive impact. This could mean covering stories about women in law enforcement who had successfully captured criminals or prevented acts of terrorism as a result of their enforcement activities.

The related social institutions of school and work can learn from the insights discussed earlier regarding the need for stronger role models. Systems of mentoring at all levels could assist women in their professional development as students and workers. Mentors serve as examples that reinforce the possibility of occupying a range of roles and they provide crucial social contacts that may lead to employment. Employers and school administrators can promote educational programs that challenge gender stereotypes and offer positive ideas for including women socially and professionally.

Short Term Solutions

Though long term and fundamental changes in the way gender is considered in Pakistani society should be advocated, there are some practical steps that can be taken in the interim. The police subculture that routinely excludes or exploits women can be altered directly through a combination of intense educational training, enhanced checks and balances, and increased surveillance and oversight. For example, the use of chaperones can provide a level of surveillance that may protect women from harassment in otherwise private interactions.

Since both the research literature and the discussed personal interviews reveal that it is largely dependent on men in masculine subcultures to create a friendly and productive work environment, the implementation of training programs can aid in highlighting the important roles women can play in law enforcement. Recruitment materials should explicitly include women as representative and desired recruits, which may not only attract women, but could better prepare male recruits for their presence. To ensure fairness, strict anti-discrimination policies should be enacted. Cases of harassment and discrimination should be filed with and investigated by an external and independent commission. In addition, anti-retaliation policies should be enacted to ensure that women who file complaints will not become targets of greater harassment or abuses.

The real challenge in overcoming the male oriented subculture in law enforcement is breaking down the informal interaction barriers, where women may be excluded in subtle ways from the group. Increased informal interaction opportunities may aid in making women feel more included provided these endeavors are not exploited. This implies the need for oversight and as mentioned above, the possible use of chaperones.

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