

# Exploring the challenges of female police officers: a case study in Gambella town (Ethiopia)

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**Abstract:** The main objective of this research was to explore the challenges of female police officers in Gambella town. To this end, two specific objectives were designed. These are, investigate the social challenges affecting the working conditions of female police officers in Gambella town and to assess the institutional challenges affecting the working conditions of female police officers in Gambella town. The researcher used case study as a research strategy/design/ which is related to interpretive philosophical assumption. Purposive and convenience (availability) samples was employed in order to select key informants. Nineteen (19) police officer (16 females and 3 males) were taken as participants for the in-depth interview and the 16 participants to the three focus group . The researcher used in depth interview, focus group discussion and document analysis as the major sources of data collection for this study. Qualitative data analyzed thematically based on the research an objective that was guided by the study. The finding of this study showed that the most fundamental challenge to women's in policing is acceptance .They don't have acceptance by the society, the police department and by their male police officers. In addition, Institutional challenges like gender discrimination, lack of positive thinking leadership for females, lack of education and trainings are other pervasive problems or challenges for female police officers in Gambella town. Physical Violence and balancing family matters with their work are also revealed as a challenge for female police officers. The obtained results were discussed and recommendations to alleviate the problem were also forwarded.

**Keywords:** Female police officers and Gambella town.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

The development of modern professional policing in the nineteenth century was an extremely important social innovation but one that failed to include women. Female police were first appointed in a sprinkling of locations in the early decades of the twentieth century including Portland Oregon in 1908, Los Angeles in 1910 and Toronto in 1913, further expansion occurred during the First World War largely due to labor shortages (Heidenson, 1992).The first women police were appointed in 1959, four decades later than the united kingdom. Pioneer female officers were usually limited to very small numbers with in women police units working pre-dominantly as assistants to male detectives (ibid).The 1950s and 60s saw the beginning of gradual break out of the environment as women entered juvenile aid units and school traffic squads, eventually joining mixed patrol teams in the 1970's (Heidenson, 1992). Recent research indicates that in most developed democracies the percentage of sworn women police remains at or below one quarter with much lower numbers in management ranks and with women from racial or ethnic minorities suffering greater marginalization. The women police movement of the early twentieth century was only successful in creating very small space for female officers by making their role an extension of social welfare work. Women police were often unsworn, appointed on lower pay rates, without any rank structure and without a pension scheme, and they were subject to dismissal if they married (Leger, 1997).

According to Sahgal (2007), stated that policing is a demanding job which involves long and uncertain hours of duty. However, over the past few decades the police workforce has grown much more diverse with regard to gender and race. If we take India as an example, while all the postings and ranks in the police are common to both men and women, women are still under-represented in the police force and are not assigned to field missions to the same extent as men (Sklansky, 2006).

The modern version of the Ethiopian police force was established by Emperor HaileSelassie by section 18 of proclamation No.6 of 1942. The first five women police officers were recruited and trained as police officers. They were all Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) and the duration of the course was from 22 December 1953 to 22 March 1954. These police officers were Constables Aselefech Teklemichael, FikrteMokennen, AlmazTadesse, Menbere Gedion and Yeshiemebet Zewde. After graduation they were promoted to the rank of second lieutenant (Beyene, 1964). In Gambella regional state, due to many constraint factors, females are not interested to join in community police officer job, even some who are involved in the sectors were not encouraged, therefore the researcher decided to explore the challenge of female community police officers particularly in Gambella town.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The women police officers face different challenges on their work condition, the researchers have examined the role of women in policing since the 1970s. Much of this research has focused on the abilities of police women (Sherman, 1975), while other studies have focused on the unique problems that women face in this traditionally male dominated field. In particular, women as a group have historically faced opposition to their entry into the profession. Research in both the United States and Europe indicates that police forces experienced a great deal of conflict when first allowing women entry into the field (Brown, 1997). In addition this research suggests that opposition continues to the present day where female officers experience resistance from both male officers and some sections of the public (Brown, 1997). The resistance manifests itself in sexual harassment, gender discrimination in assignments and promotion, and a general lack of concern for integrating women into police departments. The official website of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD, 2008) reported that, some of the earliest females in the field served as matrons or workers who were employed in prisons and penal institutions to care for female prisoners. The matrons first appeared in policing positions as early as 1845 in local jails and were a long way from being considered viable employees for real police work (Thistlethwaite and Wooldredge, 2010). Numerous research studies have been conducted relating to different aspects of women in the police. For instance, growth and development of women in the police (Surender, 2010) their career aspirations, motivations and gender discrimination. (Sahgal, 2007) their job expectations and adjustments. (Pattanaik and Worley, 2011) their role in police and administration, These studies are gives much infuses on the opportunities of female police officers but not much on the challenges faced by them in the community police. Thus, this study is aimed to fill this critical gap.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

#### 1.3.1 General Objectives

- To investigate the challenges affecting the working conditions of female community police officers in Gambella town.

#### 1.3.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study were:

- To investigate the social challenges affecting the working conditions of female community police officers in Gambella town.
- To investigate the institutional challenges affecting the working conditions of female community police officers in Gambella town.

### 1.4 Central Research Questions

- What is the overall working condition of female community police officers in Gambella town?
- What are the social and institutional challenges affecting the working conditions of female community police officers in Gambella town?

### 1.4.1 Significance of the Study

The study was generated awareness and interest to the police department on the working conditions of female community police officers in Gambella town, local government, NGO's .Since there has been no or little information on this area, this study will serve as a secondary source for further studies of related topics.

## 2. REVIEW RELATED LITRATURE

### 2.1 History of women's in police work

Women have been in some form of policing for more than 150 years; however, they were initially restricted to social service roles out of which they were not allowed to be promoted. The official website of the LAPD. (LAPD, 2008) reported that some of the earliest females in the field served as "matrons" or "workers," who were employed in prisons and penal institutions to care for female prisoners (Women in the LAPD, 2008). These matrons first appeared in policing positions as early as 1845 in local jails and were a long way from being considered viable employees for real police work (Thistlethwaite and Wooldredge, 2010). Other early positions for female police included "clerical, juvenile, guard duty and vice work" duties, where they were forbidden from performing "basic patrol duties" (Price, 1996). Not only that, but these early female police officers received lower wages and at the same time, were also required "to meet higher standards for police employment" (Price, 1996). Perhaps these higher standards would ensure the low numbers of women in the field, keeping it predominantly male and using females only where it seemed to be advantageous. Additionally, Anderson (2003) reported that female police officers did not have any procedures in place to be promoted, limiting their roles even further. These types of practices set the tone for inequality in the field, not only in hiring females for limited positions but also setting different standards and wages for males and females (Price, 1996). In 1905, the first female *officer*, Lola Baldwin, was hired by the police department of Portland, Oregon (Thistlethwaite and Wooldredge, 2010). Thistlethwaite and Wooldredge indicated that Baldwin was given the responsibility of protecting Portland's young women, perpetuating the social worker role, rather than a police officer role. It was not until 1910 that the first woman *police officer* with arrest powers, Alice Stebbins Wells, was appointed (LAPD, 2008). This feat, however, was not the end of gender inequality in policing. Wells, when presenting her badge to obtain a free ride to work on the trolley as all police officers were afforded, was informally accused by the conductor of misusing her husband's identity because he did not believe the badge was hers (LAPD, 2008). This incident demonstrated that women were not recognized as bona fide agents in the field of policing. Even after Wells' and other female police officers' achievements in policing, females were still excluded from patrol work 55 years later; females were still assigned (or restricted) to social work, clerical, and dispatch positions (Thistlethwaite&Wooldredge, 2010). Anderson (2003) reported that although women were present in law enforcement they were placed in "women's bureaus" that "operated separately from the rest of the police department," denying them full equality with their male counterparts. Even worse, women were given full police powers, *but* were limited in using them (Anderson, 2003).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Approach

The study was mainly employed descriptive qualitative approach. The need to utilize qualitative approach to this study basically arises from the exploratory and descriptive nature of the research. As a feminist researcher Shulamit and Reinhartz (1992) asserted that qualitative approach produces non standardized information that allows the researcher to make full use of differences among people and it shows a valuable reflection of reality.

### 3.2 Design of the Study

The researcher used case study as a research strategy which is related to interpretive philosophical assumption. The case study is one of several ways of doing social science research. As Kitchin and Tate (2000) claimed that since the case study research seeks to extract meaning from the data it focuses on detail and natural order of events.

### 3.3 Target Populations

According to the information that the researcher obtained from the sampling frame of gambella police commission, there are 6 police stations in Gambella town administration and in all the police stations there are 322 police officers are found. Of them, 64 female police officers are found. Out of these 16 female police officers were targeted as populations of this study and only female police officers working as a police officer was participated.

### 3.4. Data Source

To gather relevant data, the researcher used both primary and secondary data. The researcher was mainly used primary data sources because it gives firsthand information about the working condition of female police officers and the sources of the data will be collected from the participants of interviewees and focus group discussants.

### 3.5. Data Collection Instruments

For the purpose of collecting data, qualitative tools were employed in-depth interview, focus group discussion, and document review. The detailed justification and use of these tools presented as follows.

### 3.6. Data Analysis Techniques

Coding of data was done manually. The qualitative data was analyzed thematically based on the research objectives that guided the study and the conclusion was made with reference to the main objective.

### 3.7. Ethical Consideration

The researcher was followed logical procedures in every stage of data collection processes. The researcher was getting the willingness to participate on the study from all concerned Gambella administration police office.

### 3.8. Trust Worthiness

To ensure the trust worthiness of this study, the researcher was employed using easy and simple language and description to convey the findings and triangulating of different data sources of information by examining evidence from the source and used it to build a coherent justification for themes

## 4. RESEARCH FINDING

### 4.1 THE CHALLENGES OF FEMALE POLICE OFFICERS

#### 4.1.1 Social Challenges

##### 4.1.1.1 *Lacking in recognition of women police work*

This is one of the biggest challenges that female police officers are facing now. Giving credit and recognition is much important on professions that need to mobilize the people in different circumstances like policing. There are professions that needs critical acceptance on different individuals (bodies) in order to effectively implement their jobs. Indeed, without getting acceptance it will be very hard to be effective for many institutions. One of the professions that needs critical acceptance of the society and different bodies is policing. It's a profession that things are done on cooperation with the society. One might consider the effectiveness of such institutions without getting acceptance on different bodies. However, this time female police officers lack acceptance by the society, male patriarchic perceptions, police institutions and colleagues. The research easily revealed that the societies are considered women police officers are not fit any kind of police mission. Moreover, one of the female participants informs during interview that "Many men don't do what female police ask to do. They would rather do things that annoy females." This clearly shows the female police officers difficulty of getting acceptance by the. In addition during the FGD most of the participants believe that female police officers don't get acceptance by the society. They strengthen this idea by indicating the less cooperativeness of the society for female police officers.

In congruent to this finding, Sherman (1975) conducted his study in St. Louis County, Missouri, in a suburban police department reveals that society reported that domestic quarrels and service calls were better handled by police women than police men. This refutes male officers' belief that "the public would refuse to accept them [women]" The society thinks that the police profession is men's profession. Therefore, accepting females in this male dominated job is very much difficult. Policing has traditionally been regarded as "men's work" because it is associated with crime, danger, and coercion, yet people frequently fail to question the logical shifts in the statement that "coercion requires force which implies physique and hence policing by men" (Heidensohn, 1992). Social acceptance matters on the effectiveness of police jobs. However it is very much challenging for female police officers in Gambella town now days for performing their job.

**4.1.1.2 Corporeal violence**

Corporal violence is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by using anything that can damage the person physically. It is an aggressive behavior that is physical, sexual, and emotionally abusive. Acierno *et al.* (1999) stated that physical abuse is common form of abuse practicing against women working on different areas. Hitting and Slapping are common form of physical abuse/violence/ which female traffic polices face in their works; female polices are hit and slapped by different bodies like drivers because of many reasons. Women polices, are also see peoples movement and they control it. They observe many things in their assigned place. They see thieves stolen something and run, fighting's by different people etc. So that, they have also further assignment that they have to perform in relation to their main duties. On doing it, they experience different things like hitting. The FGD also confirms that hitting happens sometimes. This shows the difficulty of the job especially for females. In addition, it clearly shows that enforcing the law is very challenging and needs patience to stay on the job. Law enforcement has generally been regarded as a masculine job.

**4.1.1.3. Social life isolation**

According to Pinsky et al (2010) Social abuse is a violence which damages a person's social life. It is preventing a person from having contact with relatives, friends, communities, service providers and other people or restricting the person's activities, thereby increasing their sense of isolation. Women police officers have a difficulty of participating on their social life's due to the nature of their work. The police work extremely affects the social life of a person. Almost all participants of this study indicated during interview and FGD that their social life is extremely affected due to the nature of the job.

In a country, like Ethiopia having people giving high value to the social life, it's very challenging to not to participated in a different social conditions by any means. Deb et al (2005) indicated that the main causes of stress were inadequate rest, no leave, abstaining from social occasions and excessive work pressure. Therefore, these conditions of female police officers may lead them to be suffered by psychological stress. Studies revealed that Stress is one of the factors which hinder the activities of traffic police officers.

**4.1.1.4 Enhancing turmoil b/n husband and wife**

Contemporarily, police women plays a pivotal role in her society, in terms of saving culture, rituals, religious issues, funeral aspects and so on. Besides these, women hold a responsibility of caring children, counterbalancing the expense and incomes wisely, food preparation...etc. as a police officer, the working condition is not appropriate for females to do all these things effectively. This is creating a greater challenge for female police officers in their socials as well as personal life's. The above story clearly indicates that the female police officers have greater challenge in participating in their personal lives due to the working conditions of policing. Due to the unconventional nature of this job, long hours, tough duty, field postings and other risks, the society does not encourage women to join the department. Even women themselves prefer a desk job, rather than being posted in the field results turmoil in the household.

**4.1.1.5 Divorce**

In addition to this research revealed that women's are facing divorce because of their work nature. Tekabo (2010) in his research revealed that more women police officers than men police officers are divorced. Hence the policing job is affecting the personal life of the female police officers. During FGD many says that "Within our culture women are expected to take care of the household, which becomes very difficult for the ones who have adopted police profession". Women are expected to maintain a balance between their jobs and family, while the men mostly do not face such a dilemma.

Women still remain the primary caregivers within the family and this poses serious practical impediments to women being able to take on additional responsibilities at work. The way in which work is organized can support or impede women when it comes to career progression and involvement in specialist roles (Wilkinson & Froyland, 1996) and policing is slow to adapt to the changing social landscape in this regard. The attrition of women from the police force tends to occur in the child bearing age groups and is being attributed to lack of access to flexible working conditions that would support their family responsibilities (Charlesworth & Robertson, 2011).

## 4.2 Institutional Challenge

### 4.2.1 Male Co-workers subordination

It seems very surprising of seeing female police officers don't get acceptance by their employers itself. The police department itself doesn't accept the capability of female police officers in police work. It's manifested in different forms

### 4.2.2 Maladministration

#### *Overstating Female police mistake by their boss*

Overemphasis of Mistakes by the leaders also exists in the police department. The exaggerations of mistakes make women's not to perform their jobs effectively. The men colleagues and the leaders at large exaggerated the mistakes committed by women than men. In relation to this one of the interviewee said that: According to the interviewee exaggeration of mistakes makes women always to perform and to act like men. This makes them not to hear their interest and need to adhere and advocate. Women are expected to act as men. Men largely dominate the leadership arena in the police department. This makes them not to have concentration in their work and to create further mistakes. This hampers women polices ambition to higher levels. It makes them to be static in their position and sometimes makes to demotion. In connection to the interviewee the focus group discussants also affirmed that: According to the focus group discussants expectation of leaders of women police officers is high. A mistake committed by women police officers is exaggerated by leaders. This is due to the socialization and stereotype associated with women. As a result women fear to learn from mistakes. This creates difficulty for women to be effective in their jobs. This makes women to focus on not to commit mistakes rather than on other activities.

#### *Subjective view of their boss on Female police officers*

After passing so many cultural and psychological challenges and so many obstacles of becoming a police, female polices have to face another very unethical problems to perform their day to day activities. This challenge is a challenge existed in her organization (home institution). It's a challenge of lack of positive thinking leadership for females in her home institution. This challenge is sex based. It seems hast generalizations of the roles of females in the department. Both the interviewee and the FG discussants believed that their leaders (bosses) consider the work of female police officers not effective.

She further express this idea as she couldn't participate in the investigation case of the driver during car accident happened. It's really painful for female polices. The other interviewee also strength this situation as follows:- Leaders at any level have to motivate the followers to effectively implement their jobs. Acknowledgement from the good work is expected from the good leaders. But its different in female police officers case in Gambella town. They are rather doing it negatively and use their power as a mechanism of discouraging female police officers not involving in police jobs. There was a debate on The FG discussants about the lack of positive thinking leadership/management/ for female polices. However, the majority asserts that the leaders lack that kind of thinking.

### 4.2.3. Gender Discrimination

#### *Discrimination on armaments*

Discrimination on uniform and armaments are another challenge for female police officers. Getting guns and other important armaments for their work is very challenging for female police officers This shows the acceptance of females in policing job by the police department is questionable. In addition it's a clear sex discrimination may be by seeing females incapable of doing the police job.

#### *Discrimination on uniform*

Moreover, one of the police officers during interview indicated that, there are tremendous existences of discrimination on the distribution of police uniforms by explain as follows:-The situation is very challenging for females to perform their duties. The closes and shoes have to consider the physical difference exist between males and females in nature. The departments have to consider it before preparing uniform.

#### **4.2.4 Sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment are other pervasive problems in the field of policing that go along with negative attitudes that women have been forced to endure, as is demonstrated by the following research study results. A 1990 study by Martin revealed that two-thirds of the 70 women police officers in the study (from urban departments that were sampled from a mail survey of 446 municipal police departments that served populations of 50,000 or more and all state police departments) had “reported at least one instance of sex discrimination and 75% reported sexual harassment on the job” (as cited in Horne, 1994).

In relation to the above interviewees, Wetendorf (2007) stated that Survival on the police force requires a female officer to “go along to get along,” which often means having to deny, minimize, excuse and tolerate controlling and offensive behaviors from her male supervisors and peers. This behavior typically includes the denigration of female officers through sexist language, “teasing,” gender-related stereotypes, criticism, intimidation, and humiliation. One way the men seek to maintain control of the workplace is by unconcerned the females and sexualizing the environment through their language, behavior, and attitudes.

#### **4.2.5 Humiliations and verbal abuse**

The police play a significant role to keep the the community safe where the population density is very high. The female police officers physical and psychological well-being is a crucial factor for enhancing their work efficiency. The job is physically demanding as well as mentally challenging. However humiliations, devaluation and verbal abuse is a day to day psychological violence happened on female police officers by the public, less mannered peoples and different bodies in Gambella town. Undermining females and not doing what the female police officers ask to do by the person is a great challenge for the Gambella town female police officers. Humiliating is inuring the dignity and self-respect of a person. Most of the time men mock and disrespect female police officers whether they do right or wrong. In line with this many female police officers during interview indicated many people in the community are not giving them proper respect .they would rather humiliate them in public. They insult them and treat them as if they are not proper for the job and powerless. Verbal abuse like insulting is a day to day psychological violence happened on female polices officers. Some interviewee indicated that this type of violence happens even on male polices officers but the extent is much higher on females than males.to strength this idea Violanti (2004), Stress manifests itself in different ways, including fatigue, chronic headaches, irritability; swings in appetite or mood, low self-esteem and diminished sex drive.

#### **4.2.6 Lack of Education**

One of the mechanisms that makes polices officers to be effective in their job is education. In order to develop their ability and problem solving skills of the polices, education is a key. However in the police department it’s very weak of making the employees to be educated and develop their knowledge’s. Access of education is almost none especially for females. The majority of the interviewee asserts that there is the existence of discrimination against women police officers in their selection and training in different aspects of the profession. Strengthening of this idea, Tekabo (2010) indicated in his research that even if the rules and regulations of the Ethiopian Federal Police declare the equality of women police, it does not rid the Ethiopian Federal Police of discrimination against women police in their selection and training in different aspects of the profession.

#### **4.2.7 Lack of Professional training**

The majority of police in the Ethiopian Federal Police who have been selected and get in-service training are male police. This is due to the bad thinking that females can’t perform policing jobs effectively than males. This type of discrimination affects the women police officers in promotion, and on the development of their skills. Selection and training policy of Ethiopian federal police is as convenient for female police officers as for male police officers. As anybody can judge from the proclamation, the selection and training proclamation is identical for both sexes. Therefore, the reality deviates from the proclamation. The well known scholar Worrall (2002), states that women’s qualities are undervalued because of the wrong perception of women subordination. The FGD participants clearly reached in agreement that the professional development effort on the Department is low and whenever there exists, its males that mostly participated in the training. This condition critically makes difference between female and male police officers on the effective performance of their job. It also decreases the involvement of female police officers in the department.

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The objective of the research was to examine the challenges and opportunities for female police officers in Gambella town. Women constitute approximately half of the country's population in the world and therefore have the right to make up half of the decision making bodies but, are discriminated in assorted field of economic ,social and political life and are more subjected to multifaceted problems because of gendered social structure.

The interviewee and focus group discussants identify the challenges and opportunities for female traffic police officers. The participants indicated that the most fundamental challenge to women's in policing is acceptance. One of the professions that needs critical acceptance of the society and different bodies is policing. It's a profession that things done on cooperation with the society. One might consider the effectiveness of such institutions without getting acceptance on different bodies. However, this time female police officers lack acceptance by different bodies. They don't have acceptance by the society, by the head of the government, by their institution, by their family and by their male police officers. The belief that women are "mentally weaker" by the society and, therefore, unreliable in the face of danger and the view that women are unable to command public respect as officers are found the major factors for not getting acceptance by different bodies. The challenges women face in attempting to penetrate successfully and persevere in historically male-dominated work environments like policing emanate from traditional gender hierarchies and norms that prevail in the family and society. Despite gender equality and empowerment, the household unit has a traditional structure and still has that makes males the dominant gender. These traditional stereotyped role expectations spill over to institutions like police department and become entrenched in a gender-based organizational culture and makes females challenging to perform their jobs. Organizational problems like lack of positive thinking leadership for female polices lack of education chance and training, Discrimination, and communication problem were the challenges that female police officers are facing in Gambella town now a days. Discrimination on clothes and weapons, discrimination on the quota given during recruitment; selection and training are found the main challenges for female police officers. Its pervasive problems or challenges for female traffic police officers in Gambella town. Female polices are facing is Physical Violence. Humiliations, devaluation and verbal abuse are the common Psychological Violence that female police officers are facing in Gambella town. The police work extremely affects the social life of a person. Almost all participants of this study indicated during interview and FGD that their social life is extremely affected due to the nature of the job. The last but not the least challenge that is identified in this study is the balance of work load and family.

Overall, the researcher concluded that, the working condition of female police officers in Gambella town was filled with full of challenges but with limited opportunities. This situation would make their life difficult, cognizing of this fact; we can also ahead predict that the existing improvement of Ethiopia women to involve in police officer profession would be reversed soon unless we take some appropriate measures.

### Recommendations

Based on the above finding, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- Gender discrimination was one of the basic challenge and to solve it, The Gambella police commission should treat female and male security guard equally whenever benefit and materials are provided
- Promotion related problems were the other challenge affecting female police officers; therefore, Gambella police commission together with other body should give equal chance on career promotion.
- Shift leaders need fill the efficiency of female police officers objectively based on predetermined criteria.
- Police coordinators and directors in the police office should be flexible and solve female police officers problems.
- Gambella police commission Gender office should expand their service to reduce the incidence of gender based violence on female police officers
- Encourage and educate female police officers husbands to get involved in the household activities to minimize the burden of women and avoid conflicts
- Gambella police commission top management should encourage female police officers to come to position like shift leaders and participate in decision making.
- Strong capacity building on gender equality need to provide to the top regional police administrators in collaboration with Gambella University.



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