

## Women Police Officers and Gender Issues in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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### Abstract

Women have not been provided adequate opportunities when working in law enforcement positions across Pakistan. In order to better understand the underlying causes, a survey involving the female police officers working in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police was conducted. Analysis of the results has revealed that the majority of the female officers joined the agency for subsistence, had freely chosen to join the police, and were overwhelmingly satisfied with their positions and salary, while some reported being the victim of sexual harassment. The survey, findings, and recommendations will be comprehensively outlined and evaluated.

**Keywords:** Law Enforcement; Pakistan; Women in Policing; Sexual Harassment

### Gender Issues in Pakistan

The social and cultural context of Pakistani society is predominantly patriarchal. Men and women are conceptually divided into two separate worlds. Home is defined as a woman's legitimate ideological and physical space, while a man dominates the world outside the home. In the given social context, Pakistani women lack social value and status because of negation of their roles as producers and providers in all social roles. Male members of the family are given better education and are equipped with the skills to compete for resources in the public arena, while female members are imparted domestic skills to be good mothers and wives.

Since the independence of Pakistan, the pace of change in the role and status of women in Pakistan has been greatly accelerated. According to the constitution, women and men are equal, but this equality has been limited to political slogans and very little has been done in practice to evaluate and improve gender equality.

By virtue of various legislative acts and statutes, the role and status of women has been enhanced and elevated. However, the basic attitude of society and particularly of men towards the new role and status of women has not kept pace with this change leaving a wide gap and time lag. There is still a large gap between legal rights and the social attitudes and beliefs. This gap is continuing to hamper the actual emancipation of women, particularly in smaller cities and villages. The social attitude towards working women who mostly belong to middle class educated families has changed considerably. It is no longer demeaning for women to hold a job. Our constitution accordingly delineates that women shall have equal opportunities to men in the field of education, employment and social, economic and political opportunities. They shall be entitled to equal wages with men for equal work. They have also been given the

right to run businesses, to take a progressive occupations and professions, and to enjoy the right to vote in the political field. While the position may still not have improved in village communities, in urban areas, women are today enjoying higher positions in every walk of life. They are pursuing all careers which were previously the domain and prerogative of men like the police and administrative service.

### **Women Policing in Pakistan**

The earliest history of women police personnel in areas which now constitute Pakistan is found during the British Rule in 1939. At the time there was a farmer's movement in Punjab, which also included female demonstrators. In order to deal with the movement and maintain law and order, seven female constables and a female head constable were recruited by the authorities. The next significant recruitment was undertaken post-independence in 1952, when twenty five constables, two head constables and one ASI were hired<sup>1</sup>. After a gap of 42 years, the next significant initiative was taken in 1994, when women police stations were established in various parts of the country. Currently there are 17 women police stations throughout the country and one reporting center in Quetta, while the strength of women police personnel is slightly above 3,700 out of the total of more than 400,000. This only constitutes for 0.86% of the strength of police department<sup>2</sup>.

In this male dominated society, the women here are reluctant to join the police service. Over the years, policing was considered to be a men's job and women were not fit to work as police officers. However, recently there is an encouraging trend and women have joined the ranks of the law enforcement organizations. But in spite of this, the ratio of women in the police in Pakistan is still less than one percent of the total strength. There are many reasons why women are not joining the police departments, namely:

1. There is a social taboo against women working in a government agency;
2. Image and working of police has also barred/discouraged women to join police departments;
3. There are few opportunities for women officers in police departments;
4. Pakistani society in general considers teaching and medical professions more suitable and respectable for females.

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<sup>1</sup> Jamal, Asad and Patil, Sanjay (Ed). 2010. Police Organizations in Pakistan. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI).

<sup>2</sup> Imran, Myra. 2011. Strategy for controlling violence against women demanded. The News International. July 06, 2011.  
<http://www.thenews.com.pk/TodaysPrintDetail.aspx?ID=56268&Cat=6&dt=7/6/2011>.

5. According to Islamic injunctions, men & women are separate genders and they should not mingle. By segregating these two sexes, Islam's main objective is to preserve the woman's chastity.

### **Survey conducted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police**

A survey has been conducted in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa police wherein female police officials were given a written survey containing 10 questions to better understand their issues and problems. The following have been translated from Urdu into the English language:

1. Why did you join the police service? Mention one and the most important cause/reason which compelled you to join the police.
  1. For subsistence
  2. For respect in society
  3. For becoming influential
  4. Due to extreme domestic necessities
  5. Any other reasons
2. Did you join the police department with free will?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
3. Are you satisfied working in the police service?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
4. Did you wish that your female friends & relations also join the police service?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
5. Are you satisfied with your monthly salary?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
6. Are you getting your monthly salary on time?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
7. In case of need, do you get leave when your request?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
8. During illness, do you get any kind of assistance from the police agency?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
9. Did you get proper training and education for your police position?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Not Known
  4. To some extent
10. Are you provoked or sexually harassed by your male colleagues during duty hours?
  1. Yes
  2. No
  3. Occasionally
  4. Usually
  5. Not Known

### **Survey Results**

According to the survey results, when asked why they joined the police, the majority (50%) of the female police officials conveyed that they joined for subsistence, 32% replied to have respect in society, 6% to become influential, 4% joined due to extreme necessities, and 18% mentioned other miscellaneous reasons.

When asked whether they joined the police department with free conscience and will, the majority (84%) replied that they came to police with their own free conscience and will, 2% replied negatively, 2% replied that they do not know, and the remaining 12% joined with partially free will.

When asked about the extent of satisfaction with the police service, the majority (78%) were satisfied while 18% reported partial satisfied.

When asked either they were in favour that their female friends and relatives join the police, the majority (44%) replied affirmatively, 34% replied negatively, while 18% favoured it to some extent.

When asked about satisfaction with their monthly salary, the vast majority (60%) were satisfied and 32% were to some extent satisfied.

When asked about receiving their salary on time, 94% replied affirmatively.

When asked about being granted leave on time, 36% replied negatively, 32% affirmatively, while 32% replied in affirmative to some extent.

When asked during times of illness if they were getting any kind of assistance from the police department, the majority (42%) replied negatively, 30% replied to some extent, while 26% replied positively.

When asked about getting proper training and education, 44% replied positively, 28% negatively, while 22% replied to some extent.

When asked about whether they had been provoked or sexually harassed, almost half (48%) replied negatively, 20% replied that it had happened occasionally, 20% replied that it occurs regularly, while 4% replied affirmatively.

## **Findings**

The results of this survey revealed that although 50% of the female police officers had opted to join the police department for substance, 84% of them joined with free will. Some common problems identified by women in policing can be said to be also faced by their male counterparts. The identified issues related to medical facilities and permission for leave during illness are the same for all government departments.

The last and the most significance factor raised by the female police officials was the reported behaviour/attitude of their male colleagues. Many admitted that they do not feel secure and had been sexually harassed and provoked by their co-workers. The police department must take solid steps to introduce a zero tolerance policy in this regard so that immediate and strict action can be taken against the violators.

## **International Research Findings: Women in Policing**

A number of research studies have revealed some significant points about the role of women in law enforcement:

- i. According to one recent American study, it is believed that women are especially adoptable and can even perform better than men in many areas of policing. According to this view, police women are especially suitable for working for special prostitution groups, dealing with migrants in prostitution, and trafficking in women within the larger cities. They are also beneficial in dealing with domestic violence and juvenile affairs. Female police officers are generally more acceptable to women and children who have been the victims of the misdeeds of men. Girls and young children have more confidence in women. The employment of police women offers the best method of finding out the real problem, ascertaining what the runaway girl experienced while away from home, and then determining the best course of action to pursue.
- ii. Research conducted internationally clearly demonstrates that women officers rely on a style of policing that utilizes less physical force, are better at defusing and deescalating potentially violent confrontations with citizens, and are less likely to become involved in problems involving the use of excessive force. Additionally women officers often possess better communication skills than their male counterparts and are better able to facilitate the cooperation and trust required to implement a community policing model. Female police officers often respond more effectively to incidents of violence against women and will ultimately improve agency response to domestic violence. The service-oriented style of policing has revealed that women officers are less likely to engage in misconduct or become cynical towards citizens. They are considered at least equal to male officers in most areas of police work. All research demonstrates that female officers are as equally capable as their male counterparts when it comes to job performance and have demonstrated no consistent differences in the quality of their performance in street policing. The argument premised on women's lack of physical strength can be rejected by earlier research. No research has proven that physical strength is related to the ability to successfully manage dangerous situations in a law enforcement environment.

These findings would appear to provide optimism to female police officers in Pakistan and in other Middle Eastern countries.

## **Survey Results**

TABLE I Total Number of Female Employees Surveyed 50

| Questions | Option 1 | Option 2 | Option 3 | Option 4 | Option 5 |
|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1.        | 50%      | 22%      | 6%       | 4%       | 18%      |
| 2.        | 84%      | 2%       | 2%       | 12%      | 0%       |
| 3.        | 78%      | 4%       | 0%       | 18%      | 0%       |
| 4.        | 44%      | 34%      | 4%       | 18%      | 0%       |
| 5.        | 60%      | 8%       | 0%       | 32%      | 0%       |
| 6.        | 94%      | 0%       | 2%       | 4%       | 0%       |
| 7.        | 32%      | 36%      | 0%       | 32%      | 0%       |
| 8.        | 26%      | 42%      | 2%       | 30%      | 0%       |
| 9.        | 44%      | 28%      | 6%       | 22%      | 0%       |
| 10.       | 4%       | 48%      | 20%      | 20%      | 8%       |

#### About the Author

The author Syed Akhtar Ali Shah (PSP) is a senior police officer in KPK province. He has committed to the cause of criminology, academic excellence and research orientation. He has served in many important positions in the police service. Currently, he is serving as Additional Inspector General (Special Branch) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Police.