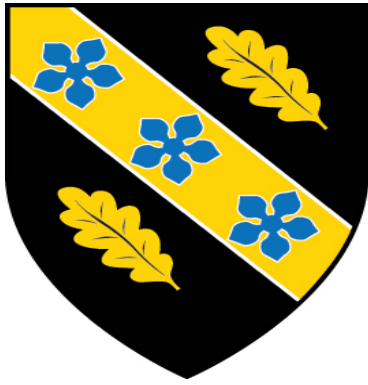




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Girls Wear Blue Too: Exploring Gender Inequality and the Challenges Faced by Female Police Officers in British Policing

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BSc Professional Policing Practice

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Acknowledgements

This research project is dedicated to the women behind the badge - for the immeasurable strength and resilience you show during every tour of duty.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: *J.S. Jones*

Date: *07.10.2024*

STATEMENT 1

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of BA.

Signed: *J.S. Jones*

Date: *07.10.2024*

STATEMENT 2

This dissertation is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated.

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to explore gender inequality, and the challenges faced by female officers in British policing. Utilising relevant sources and academic literature, the researcher completed a review of the evolution of female police officers and examined the murder of Sarah Everard to understand any institutional, cultural or structural factors that have previously or currently contribute to gender inequality in the UK.

To further assist in understanding the persistent barriers and challenges faced by female police officers, the researcher compiled a questionnaire which sought to obtain the views and experiences of serving, female officers. As the impact of gender inequality within policing extends beyond the experiences of female officers, the research project compared the experiences of these officers to the perceptions of the public and police colleagues alike. The key findings revealed that whilst some progress has been made in improving representation, female officers are regularly exposed to oppressive behaviour from male colleagues and supervisors, as well as discrimination which reinforces traditional gender roles.

The researcher has concluded the study by providing insights and recommendations which place gender equality and inclusivity at the forefront of policing.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1: Introduction

The purpose of this research project is to explore gender inequality within British policing and highlight the challenges faced by female police officers whilst fulfilling their operational duties. This chapter seeks to provide the background and context for this study and moves on to set out the overall aim and research objectives.

1.2: Background and Rationale

Gloria, a character played by America Ferrera in the 2023 *Barbie* movie said, “It is literally impossible to be a woman” (Gerwig, 2023). The powerful monologue conveys the immense pressure that gender bias and discrimination places on women around the world. This discrimination is still unwittingly embedded in many industries including the public sector and police services throughout the UK (De Camargo, 2023). Whilst gender inequality is not a new phenomenon, it continues to be a wide-ranging issue which hinders progress towards a more equitable society.

Figure 1 below shows the proportion of full time equivalent (FTE) female police officers serving across England and Wales between March 2010 to March 2024.

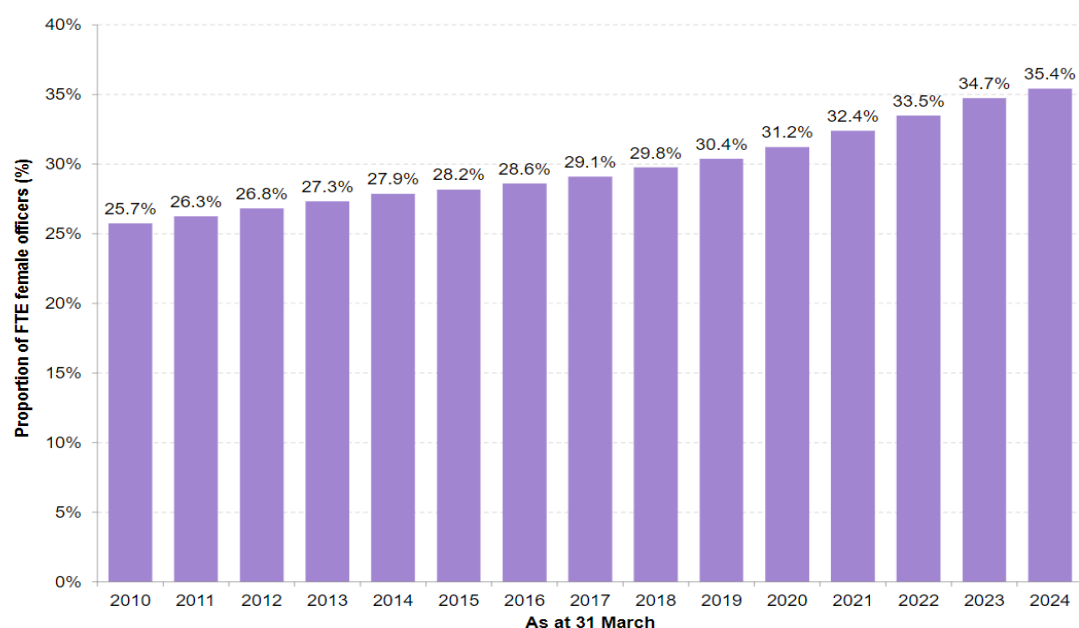


*Figure 1 – Proportion of female police officers between March 2010 - March 2024 in England and Wales
(Home Office, 2024)*

Whilst it is encouraging to see a continuous increase in the number of women joining the police service over the last decade, the progress is slow-moving. The above data reveals that policing remains a male-dominated profession as only 35% of police officers are female. This data alongside the latest Police and Crime Plan 2023-27, highlights the need for greater representation of women in policing and suggests that gender bias and discrimination still very much exist in policing today (South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, n.d; HeForShe 2023). This research project aims to explore the extent of gender inequality within policing and the implications it had on female officers.

It is important to understand that the impact of gender inequality within policing extends beyond the experiences of female officers. The shortage of female officers can also contribute to a lack of confidence in the police, particularly amongst under-represented and vulnerable communities due to a lack of understanding and empathy as demonstrated amid the Clapham Common protest (2021). The Metropolitan Police Service were heavily criticised for their handling of the event; the protest took form of a vigil following the tragic murder of Sarah Everard and brought to light the issue of women's safety as well as the police response to violence against women (Joyce and Laverick, 2021). British policing must work to restore public confidence and trust, particularly with women and girls, following the fallout from the vigil. The first step to bridging this gap is ensuring adequate representation.

Addressing gender inequality in policing requires a comprehensive and multi-lens approach (Keddie, 2023). Previous recommendations have included improving gender balances in management and leadership positions with a view to challenging the prevailing masculine culture, and developing training programs that contest gender bias and discrimination (HeForShe, 2021). Through a thorough analysis of existing literature in addition to primary research obtained from female officers, this research project aims to provide insights and recommendations for addressing gender inequality in policing.

1.3: Aims and Objectives

1.3.1: Aims

The aim of this research project is to advance an understanding of the issues contributing to gender inequality within British policing and review the implications this has on female officers and the wider community.

1.3.2: Objectives

To achieve the above aim, I have set out the following objectives:

Research Objective 1: Analyse the evolution of female police officers.

Research Objective 2: Examine how the murder of Sarah Everard impacted British policing and wider society.

Research Objective 3: Compare and contrast the perceptions of male colleagues, supervisors and the wider community towards female police officers with the perspectives of current, serving, female police officers.

Research Objective 4: Formulate recommendations to address gender inequality within policing.

Achieving these objectives will provide a deeper understanding of the complexities surrounding gender inequality within British policing and allow the researcher to put forward recommendations for a more equal, diverse and inclusive police service.

1.4: Research Structure

To confirm successful completion of the above objectives, the research project will consist of five chapters. Chapter one has provided background information on gender inequality within British policing which includes a current overview of the representation of female officers serving throughout England and Wales. Chapter one further contains the research aims and objectives and details the structure and purpose of each chapter.

Chapter two contains the literature review which will explore the impact that female police officers have on police culture and the wider community. Additionally, chapter two will provide an understanding of the previous and current impact factors that contribute to gender bias and discrimination in policing practices.

Chapter three will outline the methodology for obtaining primary research for use in this research project. The primary research will take the form of a research questionnaire aimed at the general

public and serving police officers alike, with a view to comparing perceptions of these groups as well as the secondary data found within the literature review.

Chapter four will analyse the data collected from the aforementioned methods and will seek to identify common themes in the research.

Finally, chapter five will review and summarise the findings of the research whilst considering limitations and further research opportunities. The researcher will conclude the research project by providing recommendations for addressing gender inequality within policing.

1.5: Conclusion

Chapter one has introduced the subject of gender inequality within (British) policing and combined with the aim and objectives of the research project, has highlighted the need for further research. The next chapter will present a literature review, exploring the evolution of female police officers and analysing how the murder of Sarah Everard impacted British policing and wider society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

UN Women define gender inequality as “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and boys and girls” (UN Women, n.d). Gender inequality remains a prevalent issue within British policing. In March 2023, the number of police officers in England and Wales rose to 147,430 and whilst the record number of officers boasts success of the government’s commitment to drive police recruitment, only 51,210 of these officers are female (National Statistics 2024). The 34.7% make up of female officers within the police service in England and Wales is considered one of the best-performing in gender equity, which suggests that many police forces remain as traditionally viewed; a male-dominant profession (Garcia, 2003; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Prenzler and Drew, 2023). Despite progress being made in increasing the proportion of female police officers in on the frontline, this has taken decades to achieve owing to the fact that female officers continue to face significant barriers and adversity that their male counterparts do not (Chan et al, 2010). Achieving gender equality should not be left for women to drive change but should involve and fully engage men alongside women. This literature review aims to explore the current state of gender inequality within British policing, examining the unique challenges and experiences faced by female police officers.

The review will begin with a focus on Research Objective 1 [analysing the evolution of female police officers] and will then delve into the key issues and barriers that female officers continue to face, such as under-representation, gendered workplace culture, experiences of sexual harassment and lack of career development opportunities.

The review will further focus on Research Objective 2 [examining how the murder of Sarah Everard impacted British policing and wider society] while exploring the strategies and initiatives that have been implemented to address gender inequality, and the ongoing efforts to promote greater diversity, inclusion, and equity within British policing.

Exploring the above areas of literature will not only identify gaps in existing research but also enable a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to gender inequality in policing which in turn will prepare the foundations prior to gaining the views of participants in objective 3 [compare and contrast perceptions of male colleagues, supervisors, and the wider community towards female police officers with the perspectives of current, serving, female police officers] in the form of a research questionnaire.

Finally, research objective 4 [formulate recommendations to address gender inequality within policing] will be based on the combined findings of the literature review and qualitative analysis.

2.2: The Evolution of Female Police Officers

There are 'more women than ever before' serving as police officers across England Wales (HeForShe, 2021). Whilst this is indeed encouraging and could be considered a significant milestone in British policing, there is still work to be done to improve an equal balance of both male and female police officers serving their communities (Laverick & Cunningham, 2023).

The evolution and progression of female police officers in British policing has been slow-moving and has changed substantially from the start of their integration into policing. The late 1800s saw the introduction of women into policing as police matrons which saw female officers responsible for the care and welfare of female prisoners due to the gender-specific care requirements at the time (Archbold and Schulz, 2012). The 1950's and 1960's provided a turning point when female officers then began participating in patrol duties despite resistance from male colleagues who viewed their female counterparts as being inadequate of completing the job at hand (Rabe-Hemp, 2008). The introduction of the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) then saw female police officers become integrated across all levels of policing.

Over the past decade and more so in recent years, positive movements have been made in increasing the number of female police officers serving throughout England and Wales. (Hargreaves et al, 2018; Home Office, 2021; College of Policing, 2021). Prenzler and Drew (2023) argue that recruitment campaigns such as the Police Uplift Programme (2019) played a vital role in increasing representation of female officers in recent years but noted that one of the more 'likely factors' had been the Gender Agenda, promoted by the British Association of Women Police. The Gender Agenda places the empowerment, understanding and value of women as a cornerstone to 'generate a thriving police organisation' which supports female officers in 'achieving their full potential and making their full contribution to policing' (BAWP, n.d.). In contrast, Deans (2019) argues that society still views policing as violent and dangerous, therefore it's physically challenging nature result in women being overlooked in comparison to male colleagues and may be a contributing factor which makes policing unappealing to women. Whilst both viewpoints may be correct, Fleming and Lafferty (2003) reported a distinct lack of research surrounding gender and police organisations, and this has been echoed by Prenzler and Sinclair (2013) who concluded there was insufficient data available. In any event, the issue remains that there is not an equal balance of female police officers and an uncertain number of factors that explain why this is.

As the number of female police officers continues to grow, Prenzler and Drew (2023) stressed the importance of providing support to female officers, allowing a safe work environment and zero-tolerance policy to sexual harassment and discrimination. This, alongside career progression opportunities may contribute to improved recruitment, retention, and promotion of female police officers. With this in mind, police forces that are genuinely committed to achieving gender balance also require solutions to the unique challenges and experiences female officers' encounter. This varies from operational realities such as such as ill-fitting uniform and personal protective equipment, (Malbon et al, 2020) to personal well-being including job satisfaction, management of menopause and understanding of childcare commitments (Fleming and Brown, 2021; College of Policing, 2021; Davis et al, 2023).

Even though the evolution of female police officers reflects a shift towards achieving gender equality in British policing, police forces across England and Wales are still many years away from achieving full gender equality across all levels of policing (HeForShe, 2023).

2.3: How The Murder of Sarah Everard Impacted British Policing and Wider Society

In 2006, the British Association of Women Police suggested that a 35% representation of female officers was required to allow adequate progression and cultural integration however, the latest Police and Crime Plan (2023-27) argues that gender bias and discrimination still very much exist today despite representation of female officers currently showing as 35% (Brown et al., 2006; South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, n.d). Similarly, research conducted by Dr Jackie Alexander (2019) found that parity in numbers by gender will not be achieved until 2060 which begs the question, *is 'adequate' progression enough?* Whilst numerically increasing the number of female police officers will contribute to bridging the gap, achieving meaningful equality is a more complex issue (Silverstri, 2018). Gender inequality not only affects female officers but extends to wider society and can be detrimental to public confidence and trust in the police as evidenced in the aftermath of the murder of Sarah Everard in 2021 (End Violence Against Women Coalition, 2021; Farrow, 2022).

Sarah Everard was walking home from a friend's house in London when she was kidnapped and murdered by Wayne Couzens, a serving Metropolitan Police officer. Couzens has since been sentenced to a 'whole life' order for his crime however, the incident severely damaged public trust in the police due to failings within the police service which allowed Couzens to continue is role as a warranted officer despite having a history of predatory behaviour.

Everard's murder sparked public outrage and a plea from women across the country to end violence against women and girls. A vigil was held for Everard within Clapham Common - where she was last seen walking home - amid the COVID-19 pandemic which restricted large gatherings of people within public places. The vigil started by women sharing their stories and experiences of harassment and gender-based violence which further commanded the need to address the issue of women's safety as well as the police response to violence against women (Joyce and Laverick, 2021). As the evening progressed, the Met Police began to intervene, removing women and making arrests where needed. The Met were heavily criticised for their handling of the event and the fallout caused the need to repair and re-build public confidence and trust. As within these groups which starts with representation in the workplace and policing, helping to bridge the gap.

Research conducted by Fleming and Lafferty uncovered that increasing the number of female officers reduced the level of corruption, which would in turn, eradicate 'cop culture' and therefore improve legitimacy (Fleming and Lafferty, 2003). In similar findings, a study carried out 20 years later showed that same policing culture contributed significantly to facilitating sexual harassment (Davis et al, 2023). Furthermore, the 2023 HeForShe report concluded that the key to gaining and maintaining the trust and legitimacy of the public lies in eradicating sexism and misogyny from the workplace (HeForShe, 2023).

A recent study exploring the under-representation of women in policing concluded that in order to achieve gender equality and create an inclusive environment within UK policing, systematic change is needed to tackle the root causes of gender disparities (Alexander, 2023).

There are a multitude of factors which contribute to gender inequality which range from cultural factors such as occupational culture, organisational issues such as promotion opportunities and access to higher ranks, and environmental factors which can lead to inappropriate conduct remains unchallenged (Prenzler and Sinclair, 2013; IOPC, 2022). A recommendation put forward by Baroness Casey in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard is to reinvigorate and properly resource Public Protection Teams and specialise domestic abuse teams in order to significantly enhance the service provided to women and children after Casey identified that women and children are not currently getting the protection and support, they deserve (Casey, 2023). A similar finding was also reported by Sebire in 2020 who claimed a link between officers who specialise in gender-based crimes and the successful recruitment and retention of these officers Sebire J (2020). The HeForShe movement (2022) has been implemented to address gender

inequality and focuses on the ongoing efforts of all UK police forces to promote gender diversity and inclusion.

2.4: Conclusion

In 2003, Fleming and Lafferty reported a distinct lack of research surrounding gender and police organisations evidencing a noticeable research gap. Up until 2019 there had been no controlled studies which sought to explore the experiences of female officers in an attempt to identify patterns of cultural changes and seek out the challenges female officers face (Fleming and Lafferty, 2003). Cunningham and Ramshaw (2019) commissioned research to address this gap and identified that the progression and experience of female officers has been monumental on an operation basis, as they compare a time where female officers carried a truncheon in their handbags to the female officers of today who equip themselves in full riot gear. In spite of that, Cunningham and Ramshaw's research also found that little has changed regarding perceptions of female officers based on their sex which underlines female officers are perceived to be more suited to specific areas of work such as administration tasks and dealing with female victims of sexual offences.

Further studies have found a variety of outcomes which argue the necessary actions for improving gender equality within policing. The most recent include that of Sebire (2020) who views senior management teams as the cornerstone for promoting transparency and developing accountable workplace cultures, and similarly, Luo and Schleifer (2023) who advocate policies which are aimed at improving work and family life balance for instance, providing childcare for police officers.

There remains a limited insight into how the views of female police officers compare with those of male colleagues and wider society which indicates a need to conduct this qualitative research. Addressing this gap could not only illuminate potential areas of improvement but also highlight strategies to promote female officers' overall well-being in a bid to improve retention and make policing more appealing to women.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1: Introduction

The literature review achieved objectives one and three of this study after examining evolution of female police officers and analysing how the murder of Sarah Everard impacted British policing and wider society. The key findings of the literature review were varied but highlighted a number of issues surrounding gender inequality within a policing environment. The overall theme of the research was that despite the changes in policies and increasing incentives to strive for greater diversity, gender inequality remains a persistent issue within policing and communities alike. This chapter seeks to assist in achieving objective two which is:

Compare and contrast the perceptions of male colleagues, supervisors and the wider community towards female police officers with the perspectives of current, serving, female police officers.

By analysing the viewpoints and perceptions of female officers, male colleagues and the wider community alike, this research seeks to uncover potential disparities, biases and uncover the challenges that remain for female police officers.

3.2: Research Strategy

Gratton and Jones (2010) define research as: ‘a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge’. As the overall aim of this project is to cultivate an understanding of the issues within British policing surrounding gender inequality, as well as exploring the implications this has on female police officers and the wider community, it is essential to conduct primary and secondary research to achieve this.

Primary research involves the collection of original data which is tailored to a specific research project while secondary research analyses existing data and usually provides context and background information on a topic (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The previous chapter utilised secondary research to highlight gaps in the current literature. Primary research will now be required to assist in addressing these gaps and put forward recommendations for improvement.

3.2.1: Methodology

This research project requires a qualitative approach as it seeks to explore the attitudes, behaviours and experiences from participants. Biggam (2021) describes qualitative research as the study of human behaviour and attempts to answer the why questions by obtaining in depth or quality responses. As this research project seeks to understand the complexities surrounding gender inequality as well as the challenges faced by female police officers, a qualitative study is the most appropriate method for gathering this data.

This research project further details an interpretivist approach as a variety of responses are expected which explore not only the experiences of female police officers but the opinions of the public and their perception of female police officers. Interpretative research will also allow for further exploration of the findings by other researchers.

This research seeks to build on the research conducted by Cunningham and Ramshaw (2019) where they reviewed the experiences of female officers in England and Wales using qualitative interviews. Whilst Cunningham and Ramshaw used a small sample of 23 participants, this research seeks to obtain a larger sample size through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaire will contain a variety of open and closed questions in order to keep participants engaged and aims to establish the challenges faced by female officers, public perceptions of female police officers' abilities in comparison to their male counterparts and factors preventing more females from joining the police. Due to the varying demographic of participants namely, current serving officers and the general public, consideration was given to the need of differing questionnaires however, this would require additional time in creating and disseminating to the appropriate audience and could cause problems when analysing the data due to varying content.

The overall aim of this research is to critically examine the experiences and perceptions of female police officers and compare this to the perception of the public and other colleagues.

3.2.2: Sampling

This research project seeks to obtain the views of serving, female police officers who can provide the required insight as well as their male counterparts and the general public for a comparative analysis. The sample size allows for a greater insight into the perspectives of a variety of individuals from different backgrounds and experiences which further demonstrates the need

for an interpretive research philosophical approach. The research seeks to obtain 25-75 respondents from serving police officers and an additional 25-50 respondents from the general population. This research aims to build on that by Cunningham and Ramshaw by identifying patterns in the current challenges faced by female officers and identify whether these challenges are contributing to a lack of females joining the police force and as a result, contributing to inequality within British policing. The composition of the final sample size will be detailed within the next chapter of this research project.

3.3: Data Collection & Analysis

Social media will be utilised as a means of disseminating questionnaires to members of the public which will allow for a wider reaching audience. The police force intranet and internal emails will be used to seek the responses of female police officers within the organisation.

Anonymity will be given to participants who partake in the research however some relevant information will be published such as the length of service of officers enabling a higher quality analysing of the data.

3.4: Reliability and Validity

Adhering to ethical principles helps to maintain the credibility and validity of the research findings (Milton, 2019). The data collected will be reliable and credible as it aligns with the objectives set out at the beginning of the research project and builds upon research conducted within the last five years.

3.5: Limitations and Potential Hurdles

This research contains a *delimitation* - defined as 'a systematic bias intentionally introduced into the study design or instrument by the research' (Price and Murnan, 2004). The delimitation is noted as the researcher has designed the study for serving police officers to share their views and experiences. In addition to this, data will be largely obtained from officers serving within one police force which does not provide a well-rounded view of officers experiences across the UK. Furthermore, the short timescale in which this research was conducted did not allow for a change in the methodology as the research developed.

3.6: Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations refer to the participation, consent, anonymity, and overall risk of a research project and its participants (Gregory, 2003). Prior to the commencement of this research, approval was obtained from the supporting university's ethics board. During the collection of primary data, participants were advised of the nature of the study as well as how their participation would be utilised when it came to data analysis. Full consent was obtained from the participants and participants also had the right to refuse to partake and could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also given anonymity and did not receive any reward for participating in the study.

3.7: Conclusion

This chapter has identified and demonstrated the most suitable and appropriate form of methodology for the research project. The next chapter will present and analyse the data collected as identified in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Survey Study Findings

4.1: Introduction

Chapter 3 outlined the methodology of this research project. This penultimate chapter seeks to produce a comparative analysis of primary research with a view to completing research objective 3 of this dissertation:

Compare and contrast the perceptions of male colleagues, supervisors and the wider community towards female police officers with the perspectives of current, serving, female police officers.

Data was collected on specific themes – adversity and barriers specific to female officers, gender specific deployment and roles within policing, perceptions of female officers and the police service, challenges faced by female police officers and experiences of sexual harassment and misogyny in the workplace – using questionnaires targeted at two groups: the general public and serving police officers.

Following the collection of primary research, this chapter will present and analyse the findings of the data that has been gathered.

Appendix A introduces a blank copy of the questionnaire and features the set of questions aimed at the targeted groups.

4.2: Demographics of Respondents

Appendix B introduces the demographics of respondents.

4.3: Data Analysis

The term ‘data’ has come to mean a variety of information, or the accounts gathered by researchers (McLeod, 2001; Polkinghorne, 2005). During this research project, data has been collected using Microsoft Forms’ survey tool. The data has been exported to Microsoft Excel for additional analysis to allow the researcher to review and identify themes that align with existing research. The data analysis will provide insights and further assist the researcher in formulating

recommendations for addressing gender inequality in policing, thus achieving the final objective of this research project in the next chapter.

4.4: Survey Findings

4.4.1: Adversity and Barriers Specific to Female Officers

When analysing the 136 responses, 52% of respondents believed that female police officers face barriers and adversity that their male counterparts do not. Of this, 95% were female police officers. The large number of responses received by female officers corresponds with the literature review affirming that female officers continue to face hardship as part of their daily lives. The most common issue perceived by the small percentage of public respondents were those surrounding sexual harassment and misogyny with one respondent explaining, “It is systematic with years of training and behaviour reversal needed”. This will be examined later in the chapter where officers are asked about their experiences of sexual harassment and misogyny. The response from serving officers did not mention sexual harassment and misogyny being a barrier to female officers however 65% of these respondents stated there was a distinct lack of flexibility for officers and little consideration for childcare responsibilities.

4.4.2: Gender Specific Deployment and Roles

When analysing the 136 responses, 65% of respondents believed that certain incidents/circumstances require gender-specific police deployment. This highlights the importance recruiting and retaining female police officers due to the overwhelming response that females were perceived to be more appropriate in dealing with vulnerable victims of crime, sexual assaults, whereas males were perceived to be more suited to attend large scale disorder, sporting events or dealing with non-compliant prisoners and method of entry tactics due to being a stronger sex. Overall, there was a collective response whereby gender considerations should be made to maximise support to a victim and the investigation as a whole.

Over a quarter of male respondents referred to the physical difference between men and women.

4.4.3: Public Perception of Female Officers Compared to Their Male Counterparts

This question allowed participants to share their views of the difference in skills between male and female officers. 65% of respondents believe that male and female officers possess different skill sets. The data showed that the public perceive empathy and strength as the main difference in skills between male and female officers. Participants viewed female officers as more empathic and offer better communication skills which allow for disputes to be resolved calmly. Male officers are perceived to be more effective at showing force and exerting authority. The views put forward by participants support the existing findings throughout the literature review regarding the capabilities and the way female officers are viewed by society.

4.4.4: Public Perceptions of The Police Service

To gain an understanding of the public perception of the police service, respondents were asked if they would consider joining the police service. The data found an equal number of respondents who would consider joining the police service against those who would not. When asked what would prevent individuals from joining the police service, 35% of respondents felt that their age was a barrier to this. Pay and a discontent or lack of respect toward the police was another theme identified which is stopping individuals from joining the police service. This data does not match findings published in the literature review by Deans (2019) as only one respondent referred to the exposure to conflict as a barrier to joining the police service.

4.4.5: Challenges Faced by Female Police Officers

Figure 2 below shows the most frequently used words utilised by female police officers in response to Question 25 of the survey: 'What challenges do you face as a female police officer?'.



Figure 2 – Key Words Used by Female Police Officers when Describing their Challenges

Highlighted in *Figure 2* and consistent with the findings within the literature review, 49% of 88 female officers stated that the attitudes and actions, or inactions, of male colleagues and/or supervisors remained their most prominent issue within their policing careers. Additionally, 33% of respondents stated they were often undermined or left feeling inadequate by their male counterparts. This varied from being deployed to rape allegations or child concern calls in place of incidents that may involve a physical altercation to being physically moved out of the way by male colleagues when subjects of crime became volatile. Furthermore, 11% reported ill-fitting uniform as a significant challenge to operational duties and 7% stated that a lack of understanding surrounding female health issues had a detrimental effect on welfare whilst on duty.

4.4.6: Sexual Harassment and Misogyny in The Police Service

In contrast to the public perception of sexual harassment and misogyny in the workplace, 76% of police officers denied having experienced any form of sexual harassment whilst working within the police service. However, the data further showed a distinct lack of reporting within the 24% of respondents who were said to have been subject to such behaviour. Participants were asked to provide their reasons for not reporting the matter and following a compilation of the answers provided, two themes were identified within the data. Firstly, 37% of respondents stated that they did not report the behaviour as they were in the early stages of their careers and were fearful of reputational damage or were simply naive to the behaviours and considered it 'normal'. The second theme uncovered a lack of confidence in the investigation process with respondents stating that they were fearful of not being believed or not having adequate support. This aligns with the findings of the literature review which place providing support and zero tolerance policies towards sexual harassment at the forefront of eradicating sexual harassment from the workplace.

4.5: Conclusion

This chapter has utilised primary data to achieve the third objective of this research project:

Compare and contrast the perceptions of male colleagues, supervisors and the wider community towards female police officers with the perspectives of current, serving, female police officers.

In conclusion, the study identified that female police officers face ongoing discrimination due to gender stereotypes. Despite possessing the same training and qualifications as their male

counterparts they are often isolated due to a perceived increased level of emotional awareness. A collective agreement between the general public and police officers identified that solely increasing the number of female officers would not reduce sexism and misogyny in the police service. Instead, the focus should be on challenging the behaviour which leads to or encourages sexism and misogyny.

The final chapter will conclude the research project by completing the fourth and final research objective:

Formulate recommendations to address gender inequality within policing.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1: Introduction

This research has investigated the current state of gender inequality within British policing, with a particular focus on the unique challenges and experiences faced by female police officers. As evidenced in the literature review and several high-profile reports, the impact of gender inequality extends beyond the experience of female officers. The shortage of female police officers can contribute to a lack of confidence in the police, particularly amongst under-represented and vulnerable communities due to a lack of understanding and empathy (Joyce and Laverick, 2021). Therefore, achieving gender equality across policing is important as Gender diversity goes right to the heart of policing by consent, bringing different perspectives, skills and approaches to decision-making and problem solving (Laverick et al, 2023). This chapter seeks to achieve the final objective of this research project which is to formulate recommendations, placing gender equality and inclusivity at the forefront of policing.

5.2: Research Objectives: Summary of Findings and Conclusions:

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1: ANALYSE THE EVOLUTION OF FEMALE POLICE OFFICERS.

Changing societal attitudes and recruitment campaigns such as the Police Uplift Programme have contributed to a significant increase in the number of female police officers serving in England and Wales. However, despite ‘major changes and monumental transformations’ over the last decade, female police officers continue to face a variety of structural and cultural challenges which continue to hinder progress towards achieving gender inequality across all levels of policing (Cunningham Ramshaw, 2020; Prenzler, 2020). This ranges from the fitting of police uniforms, which have been designed with men’s physique in mind and as such, have a direct impact on a female officers’ comfort and performance, to a lack of flexibility and challenges in balancing the demands of frontline policing with childcare and family responsibilities. Although clear progress has been made across the UK in the representation of female officers, increasing the number of serving female officers alone is not enough to achieve gender equality within policing.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2: EXAMINE HOW THE MURDER OF SARAH EVERARD IMPACTED BRITISH POLICING AND WIDER SOCIETY.

The rape and murder of Sarah Everard has had a profound impact on British policing and wider society. The police depend on the consent and support of the public to operate effectively, and the murder of Sarah Everard brought to light a series of “significant failings” and “wider institutional problems” within policing which has severely damaged public trust in the police, particularly amongst women (Angiolini, 2024). Nationwide upset and fury in the weeks that followed Sarah’s murder, combined with an unprecedented demand for action saw the government reopen its consultation on its strategy to tackle violence against women and girls (HM Government, 2021). Research found that 75% of women and 71% of all adults think the culture of policing must change to enable the police to better respond to gender-based crimes (End Violence Against Women, 2021; HeForShe, 2024). Therefore, UK policing must now focus on addressing sexism, misogyny and inappropriate behaviour from police culture with a view to reinforcing legitimacy and restoring faith and trust within communities. On the whole, the murder of Sarah Everard has proved a ‘watershed moment’, commanding the need for genuine reform within policing in addition to gender-centred cultural change (Zempi and Smith, 2022; Prenzler, 2020).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 3: COMPARE AND CONTRAST THE PERCEPTIONS OF MALE COLLEAGUES, SUPERVISORS AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY TOWARD FEMALE POLICE OFFICERS WITH THE PERSPECTIVES OF CURRENT, SERVING, FEMALE POLICE OFFICERS.

Through analysis of the primary research obtained within this research project it is evident that the perceptions of the capabilities of female police officers have not changed despite the increase in representation. Female officers are often stereotyped as being the most appropriate officer to deploy to certain incidents such as sexual offences or child protection issues because of their gender. However, the research found that victims of crime did not find it necessary to request a particular gender of officer to deal with their report. Exposure to conflict is also considered more appropriate for male officers to deploy to and was perceived as a barrier to further females joining the police service. Conversely, this research has found that participants’ age and society’s lack of respect toward the police were the main factors in preventing them from joining the police service.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 4: FORMULATE RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS GENDER INEQUALITY WITHIN POLICING.

This final objective will be accomplished by the end of this chapter.

5.3: Recommendations

These recommendations are made based on the responses provided by the participants of the research questionnaire and the overall findings of this research project.

Firstly, the most common challenge faced by female police officers were those concerning the conduct or behaviours of male colleagues. This was further complicated by the lack of support provided by supervisors when reporting these issues. As policing remains a male-dominated profession - with only 27% representation of female sergeants and inspectors - there is a lack of female leaders available to challenge inappropriate behaviour and provide support to female officers (HeForShe, 2024). The researcher is recommending nominated 'empowerment champions' who can provide support to officers and a safe environment to discuss specific issues. In addition to this, more accountability should be placed on police federations and professional standards departments to ensure that reports concerning officers' conduct are taken seriously and thoroughly investigated.

Secondly, police forces should invest in the design and procurement of gender-appropriate uniform and equipment. Many female officers have commented on the poor fitment and quality of their force-issued trousers. As originally tailored for men, standard issue police trousers do not cater for the varied shapes of female bodies. The continued use of traditional non-stretch/polyester material provides poor fabric performance for operational duties and the lack of flexible, breathable material not only limits movement and causes discomfort, but is said to have caused medical implications such as yeast infections in some females (De Camargo, 2023). In addition to this, the standard-issue body armour does not provide enough support for large breasted women and generally lacks compatibility with the female body. This not only reduces the level of protection offered but further limits upper body mobility and causes musculoskeletal issues including chronic pain. Although alternate body armour can be provided in some police forces, officers are required to obtain medical exemption paperwork to obtain these. When there are now more than 50,000 female police officers serving across England and Wales, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) priorities should extend to the developing needs of female officers. At the very least, female officers should expect a uniform that serves and protects them, as they do their communities.

5.4: Limitations/Further Research

In addition to the delimitation discussed in chapter 3, there was a notable lack of response to the research questionnaire from the members of the public. The timescale for the research project did not allow for further public opinions to be obtained. As the research project intended to analyse public perception of the police service and female police officers, further research from a wider audience is required to fully grasp public perceptions across the UK. There is also a lack of data specifically from members of the public who are under 24 years old. Further focussed research from this group would be of benefit to fully establish the concerns or issues that are preventing females from entering the policing profession. Additional data can be used to develop strategies to make policing more appealing to women and could further confirm or negate perceptions regarding the police service being viewed as violent or dangerous as found within the literature review.

It is hoped that the findings within this research project will increase the awareness of issues within the police service and facilitate in providing officers a work environment that supports their well-being. When adequately supported, and encouraged to achieve their full potential, these officers can in turn, improve the service provided to victims of crime.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Blank Questionnaire

Gender Inequality within British Policing & the Challenges Faced by Female Officers

As part of my dissertation, I am conducting research on gender inequality within British policing and the implications it has on female officers and the wider community.

Your participation in this survey will allow me to advance an understanding of the factors contributing to gender inequality, identify areas for improvement, and put forward recommendations for a more inclusive and representative police force.

By completing this survey, you agree you and/or understanding the following:

- You are aware of the nature of the study and your role within it.
- You consent to take part in the study.
- You have the right to refuse to take part and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- Your responses will be anonymous and confidential, used solely for academic purposes.

As this research seeks to examine the views of female police officers and compare their views to those of the general public and other police colleagues, there are sections within this survey specifically aimed at these groups. Please see the section headings to ensure you are responding to the relevant questions.

1. Please select one of the following:

- ☐ *I am a serving police officer*
- ☐ *I am a member of the public*

2. Please select your age range:

- ☐ *Under 18*
- ☐ *18-24*
- ☐ *25-34*
- ☐ *35-44*
- ☐ *45-54*
- ☐ *55-64*
- ☐ *65 and older*

3. What is your gender?

- ☐ *Male*
- ☐ *Female*
- ☐ *Non-binary*

4. What is your role within the police service?

- ☐ *N/A*
- ☐ *Constable*
- ☐ *Sergeant*
- ☐ *Inspector*
- ☐ *Chief Inspector*
- ☐ *Superintendent or higher*

5. Please indicate your level of service:

- ☐ *N/A*
- ☐ *Less than 1 year*
- ☐ *1-2 years*
- ☐ *2-3 years*
- ☐ *3-5 years*
- ☐ *5-8 years*
- ☐ *8-15 years*
- ☐ *More than 15 years*

6. Do you believe female police officers face barriers and adversity that their male counterparts do not?

Yes

No

7. If selected 'yes', what actions or policies do you think could be implemented to reduce these barriers?

8. Do you believe certain incidents/circumstances require gender-specific police deployment?

Yes

No

9. If selected 'yes', what incidents or circumstances would these be and why?

10. Do you believe male and female officers possess different skill sets?

Yes

No

11. Could you elaborate further on this?

12. Do you believe there are roles in the police service more suited to female officers?

Yes

No

13. If selected 'yes', what roles are these and why do you believe them to be more suited to female officers?

14. If a family member or friend expressed their interest in joining the police service, would you be supportive of this?

Yes

No

15. If selected 'no', why is that?

16. In your opinion, what actions should be taken to address gender inequality within British policing?

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ONLY APPLY TO MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

PLEASE SKIP TO THE NEXT SECTION IF YOU ARE A SERVING POLICE OFFICER

17. When engaging with the police, do you prefer dealing with male or female officers?

Male officers
Female officers
No preference

18. If 'male officers' or 'female officers' selected, why is this?

- ☐ *I prefer to deal with officers of the same gender as me*
- ☐ *Other*

19. When requesting police assistance, have you requested to deal with a specific gender of officer?

- ☐ *Yes*
- ☐ *No*
- ☐ *I have not had to contact police for assistance*

20. Was the attending officer of the same gender as requested?

- ☐ *Yes*
- ☐ *No*
- ☐ *N/A*

21. Why did you request a specific gender of officer?

22. Would you consider joining the police service?

- ☐ *Yes*
- ☐ *No*
- ☐ *Maybe*

23. What would prevent you from joining the police service?

24. What can British police forces do to make policing more appealing to women?

THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ONLY APPLY TO SERVING POLICE OFFICERS

PLEASE SKIP TO THE NEXT SECTION IF YOU ARE NOT A SERVING POLICE OFFICER

25. What challenges do you face as a female police officer?

26. What can British police forces do to make policing more appealing to women?

27. During your service, have you seen a change in the challenges you face as a police officer?

28. If 'yes' selected, have these changes been positive or negative?

29. Please explain what these changes have been

30. During your service, have you seen a cultural change within your police force?

31. If 'yes', has this change been positive or negative?

Positive

Negative

32. Please explain what cultural changes you have seen, if any

33. Have you experienced sexual harassment whilst working within police service?

Yes

No

34. Was this reported?

Yes

No

N/A

35. If selected 'no', why didn't you report it?

36. If selected 'yes', did you feel appropriately supported when reporting?

Yes

No

N/A

37. How satisfied were you with the handling of the investigation?



38. Please explain your reason for this answer

39. To what extent do you believe that increasing the number of serving female officers would reduce sexism and misogyny in the police service?

Increasing the number of female officers would completely eradicate sexism and misogyny in the police service

Increasing the number of female officers would significantly reduce sexism and misogyny in the police service

Increasing the number of female officers would somewhat reduce sexism and misogyny in the police service

Increasing the number of female officers would have little to no effect on sexism and misogyny in the police service

40. Please explain why you feel this is the case

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH.

1. Is there anything further you wish to add or contribute?

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.



Microsoft Forms

Appendix B – Demographics of the respondents

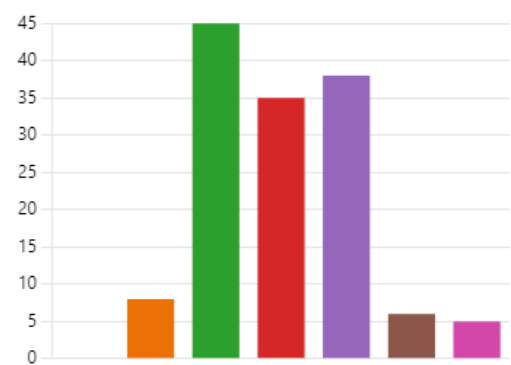
1. Please select one of the following:

☒ I am a serving police officer	103
☐ I am a member of the public	33



2. Please select your age range:

☐ Under 18	0
☐ 18-24	8
☒ 25-34	45
☐ 35-44	35
☐ 45-54	38
☐ 55-64	6
☐ 65 and older	5



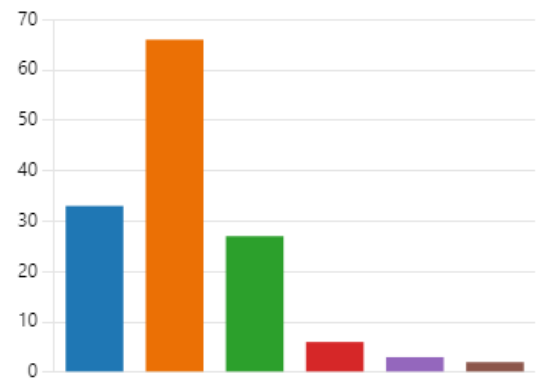
3. What is your gender?

☐ Male	33
☒ Female	103
☐ Non-binary	1



4. What is your role within the police service?

N/A	33
Constable	66
Sergeant	27
Inspector	6
Chief Inspector	3
Superintendent or higher	2



5. Please indicate your level of service:

N/A	31
Less than 1 year	6
1-2 years	6
2-3 years	8
3-5 years	15
5-8 years	8
8-15 years	19
More than 15 years	44

