

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Introduction

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. While 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). 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 3 [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 2 [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] through qualitative interviews.

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). 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 his 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.

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