



Perceptions and Social Identity of Women in Policing: A Qualitative Exploration

Shabana Parveen ¹, Bushra Hassan²

¹ International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: saifmultan123@gmail.com

² Assistant Professor, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: bushimalik@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: March 22, 2025

Revised: June 16, 2025

Accepted: June 17, 2025

Available Online: June 18, 2025

Keywords:

Women in Policing
Gender Stereotypes
Social Identity
Social Representation
Pakistan
Qualitative Research
Law Enforcement
Gender Roles

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

Policing in Pakistan remains a predominantly male-dominated profession, making the presence of women in this field a challenge to traditional gender roles. Despite increased representation, female officers continue to face entrenched stereotypes and institutional barriers that shape both their professional identity and public perception. This study explores how women in policing are socially constructed and how they perceive their own roles, drawing insights from focus group discussions with policewomen, adolescent girls, parents, and members of the general public. Using a qualitative exploratory design, the study conducted 40 semi-structured focus group discussions. Thematic analysis was guided by Social Representation Theory and Social Identity Theory. Key themes that emerged included persistent gender stereotypes, identity negotiation in leadership roles, and structural barriers rooted in cultural myths. While participants expressed admiration for female officers, the societal and institutional inequalities were evident. Findings highlight the need to redefine policing competence to include emotional intelligence and inclusive leadership qualities. The study advocates for the implementation of gender-sensitive policies, public awareness campaigns, and systemic reforms to support meaningful participation of women in law enforcement.

© 2025 The Authors, Published by iRASD. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License

Corresponding Author's Email: saifmultan123@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Women in policing often face unique perceptions and challenges related to their social identity, stemming from the historical dominance of men in the profession. These perceptions can impact their experiences, career progression, and overall well-being within the police force. Police women's gendered experiences of stress and their impact on mental health have previously been overlooked in consideration of the broader aspects of overall police mental health (Bishopp et al., 2019). Women are still a separate minority in policing, an area in which masculine norms have long been the dominant ones. Studies observe that policing has always been regarded as a masculine profession that is oriented towards characteristics that are considered stereotypically male (Lord & Friday, 2003). Women officers tend to talk about the necessity to be even better in order to be respected as much as men. They do not think that she is valued so much in her team because of her gender and feels the necessity to prove herself even more than her male colleagues to be valued as much. In other words she feels that her subordinates think that her gender is in conflict with her work (Inzlicht & Good, 2006). In Stressors and related health impact among women police officers by Hartley et al., 2014, sexual harassment and sexual discrimination were described as the possible causes of stress among women police officers. However, they did not provide clear definitions for these terms. Similar findings were reported by (Deschamps et al., 2003; Somvadee & Morash, 2008; Taylor Greene & Del Carmen, 2002) Liberman et al. (2002) conducted a qualitative exploration of the experiences of policemen. The women highlighted gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment as being salient within their respective police organizations. The authors suggested that the responsibility for addressing sexism seems to rest solely on policewomen, rather than on men to prevent sexism. The women

detailed encountering different types of sexual harassment, such as sexual jokes, receiving pornographic material, and inappropriate messages. (Guajardo, 2016; Shjarback & Todak, 2019; Swan, 2016) have highlighted a concerning trend: the lack of significant increase in the presence of policewomen in leadership roles over time. In their comprehensive quantitative study, (Shjarback & Todak, 2019) found that promotion in policing is rare for both genders, but even rarer for policewomen. Surprisingly, they also discovered that policing organizations with higher levels of professionalism (e.g., accreditation, community policing initiatives) were more likely to have to have women in leadership positions. Despite this factor, overall, studies have found that policewomen have fewer advancement opportunities and are often hesitant to pursue such opportunities when presented (Guajardo, 2016; Swan, 2016).

1.1. Objectives

1. To explore the social and psychological factors contributing to the development of the imagery and social representation of women in policing.
2. To understand the social representation of women through qualitative triangulation by incorporating viewpoints from the general public, male and female police personnel, and young girls regarding their aspirations to pursue a career in the police force.

2. Literature Review

Presentation of women in policing has also been showcasing but not equal. In high-income countries the proportion of female officers is frequently having between 25% and 30%, but the positions at the top and as specialists remain mostly male (Prenzler, 2020). Nevertheless, this has advanced relatively slowly, because in the majority of the cases, women have only been selected as patrol level officers, a much lesser percentage being selected on special units (e.g., Guns and Gangs, Homicide), management, and senior management positions (Prenzler, 2020). In Canada, women constitute 22.2 percent of the entire police force of which only a percentage of officers who occupy senior ranks are women of less than 19 percent (Conor, Robson, & Marcellus, 2019). Although the figures are on the upsurge we warn the slow growth of women in policing should not be associated with gender equity. Quite on the contrary, we argue that the mere influx of women into policing is unlikely, in itself, to make significant organizational change.

In research consistently refer police culture as gendered and tend to become hostile to women. Policing values such aspects as physical strength, toughness, or authority, which are traditionally masculine coded traits. The initial women officers in certain departments were unsworn and paid lesser salaries compared to their fellow officers who were male (Walker, 1993). Police work has traditionally been viewed as a masculine occupation, and the overall conception of policing has been on the elements that are the so called stereotypically male. Nevertheless, the advantage of having female police officers as part of the force has been reported through research findings, such as: safeguarding the interests of the people, the aspect of equal opportunity being manifested, improving the police image towards the populace, the formation of closer relations between the police and the communities, and increasing the ethic of care (Lord & Friday, 2003).

The study revealed that traditional gender stereotypes did not dictate their behavior, because their gender performance was context-dependent. This study confirmed (Moore, 1999) findings that occupational identity holds more significance than gender identity for women policing in Israel. Differing from (Moore, 1999), Morash and Haarr's found that women tended to devalue certain masculine attributes (e.g., aggression, physical strength) while emphasizing traits commonly associated with women (e.g., communication and interpersonal skills). This finding was supported by (Angehrn et al., 2022). Contextual factors, such as geographic and physical location, organizational differences (e.g., structural and cultural), and individual differences between participants within each study sample may account for this difference. Regardless of contextual differences, the discord between role and gender identity can negatively impact women officers' stress levels and mental health (Hartley et al., 2014).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory (SIT) is a psychological theory formulated by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1970s and formalated in 1986 which studies how people can obtain a sense of identity and self-concept based on the groups where they belong to. According to social identity approach

(Tajfel & Turner, 2000; Turner & Reynolds, 2012), individuals group themselves and others into in- (similar to them) and out-groups (different to them) using observable similarities and differences (such as gender). Incongruence with others makes this group more visible (Wilder, 1984) and elevates individuals propensity to anticipate others will declare the person on the basis of his group membership (Frey & Tropp, 2006). Gender is a very noticeable social category in policing. When the force is male dominated, female officers adopt a different identity, which makes their gender identity stand out particularly. The gender-dissimilar nature makes one become aware that the people around recognize them as a result of their gender (Inzlicht & Good, 2006). Empirically this implies that women tend to feel that teammates consider their femininity as incompatible with their police roles thus creating identity conflict and diminishing the attachment to the team.

4. Method

4.1. Study Design

This phase employed a qualitative exploratory design to understand the social representation of women in the police force through multiple stakeholder perspectives. The design aimed to uncover deep-seated beliefs, attitudes, and experiences using semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). A qualitative triangulation approach was used, incorporating viewpoints from female police personnel, the general public, young girls, and parents to ensure a holistic understanding of the research question.

4.2. Sample

The sample in the study was of four focus groups which were selected carefully to give a detailed meaning to the social image of women in the police force. The number of respondents was 40 with 10 in each group selected through purposive and convenience sampling, so that we have different views in the society as per the research aims. The sample of the first focus group involved 10 young girls aged 15-20 years, students of high school and of college. These respondents were selected so as to examine their career aspirations especially their opinion towards women whose career choices aim at entering the law enforcement field. The second group was composed of 10 parents of girls of the same age, which was meant to reflect the attitudes, beliefs and their potential influence of parents on the choice of career of their daughters particularly that of police profession. The third focus group was composed of 10 women police officers, but these participants represented different ranks and experiences in the police force. The tenure of their service was between 6.5 and 33 years. These interviewees gave their reflections of their experience of working in a male-dominated area, how they had come to understand themselves as women in a traditionally male profession, and the attitudes of the institution and the wider society toward women in policing as they saw them. The 10 members of general population including men and women of different age group and socioeconomic levels, were in the fourth group. This cohort allowed the evaluation of the bigger picture regarding perceptions, stereotypes, and attitudes of society towards female police officers.

Participants were totally Pakistani and this brings about cultural and contextual validity. All focus groups were undertaken in an environment that enhanced friendly and open discussions. The sample allowed us to explore how the police women are viewed in a multidimensional way begin with individual dreams and family influence up to the institutional aspect and the outside perception.

4.2.1. Justification of Sample Size

The overall number of 40 samples was found to be adequate to develop data saturation that is where additional gathering did not lead to the development of new themes or information. The repetition of patterns, consistency of theme on different groups, and the density of narrations were used to determine saturation. The triangulation of views: as it has been formulated based on viewpoints of officers, youth, parents, and general people, increased the depth and credibility of results as identified by (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) in their saturation measures. Hence there was no need expanding the sample further to meet the qualitative goals of the study.

Table 1: Participant Demographics Table

Group	N	Age Range	Gender	Education Level	Notes
Young Girls	10	15–20	Female	Matric to Intermediate	Students considering future careers
Parents of Girls	10	35–55	Male & Female (mixed)	Mostly secondary or above	Guardians of adolescent girls
Women Police Officers	10	28–55	Female	Varying from BA to Masters	6.5 to 33 years of policing experience
General Public	10	25–60	Male & Female (mixed)	Mixed education backgrounds	Community members of various socioeconomic strata

4.3. Conceptual Model Phase-I

4.3.1. Recruitment Process

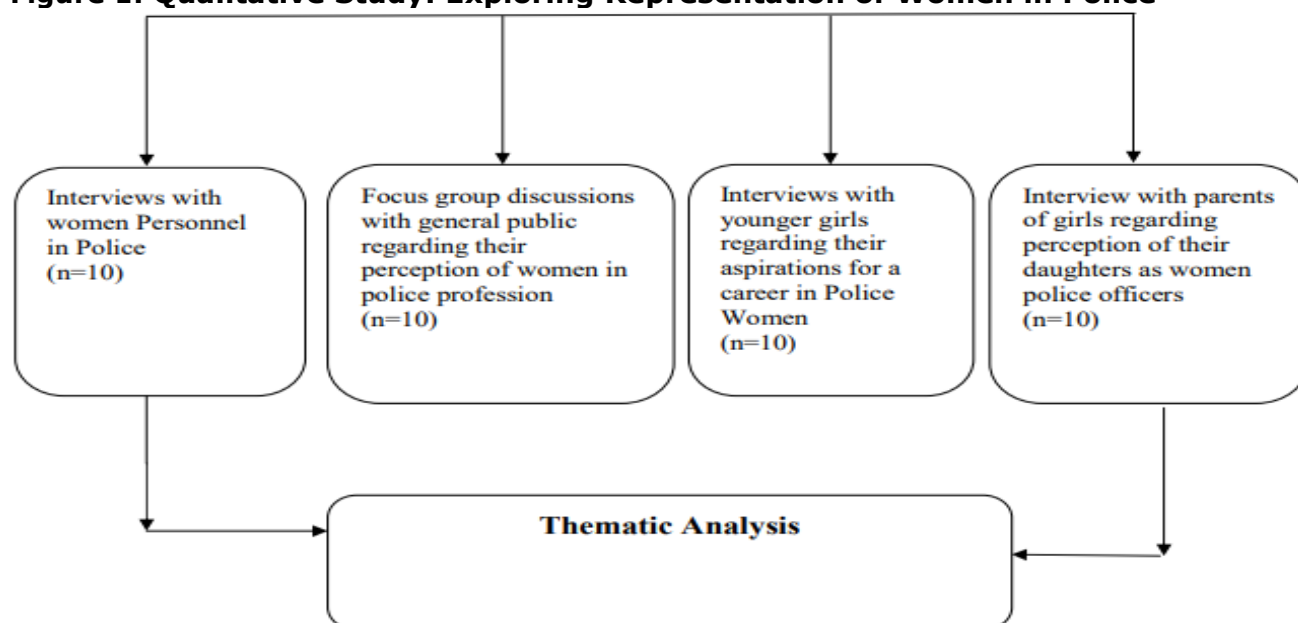
Participants were recruited through purposive and convenience methods. The researcher approached schools, police departments, and community organizations to access individuals who met the criteria for each focus group. Institutional permissions were obtained where necessary, and participants were selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives and their willingness to participate.

4.3.2. Exclusion Criteria

Individuals were excluded from the study if they were under the age of 15 or above 65, lacked basic understanding of policing roles, or had difficulty communicating effectively in either Urdu or English. This ensured meaningful participation and reliable data collection across all groups.

4.3.3. Measures to Reduce Bias

To minimize bias, the study ensured demographic diversity in age, gender, geographic background, and professional roles. The researcher maintained a neutral tone during discussions and used open-ended questions to avoid leading responses. Reflexive notes were maintained, and another researcher reviewed the themes to enhance objectivity and analytical credibility.

Figure 1: Qualitative Study: Exploring Representation of Women in Police

4.4. Interview Schedule and Procedure

A structured topic guide was developed for each focus group to ensure relevance to the participants' background and perspectives. The guides included open-ended questions and prompts to encourage detailed responses. All interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis. For the young girls' group, topics included career decision-making (e.g., "If given a choice, would you join the police? At what rank?"), perceptions of female police officers, anticipated challenges, and views on the societal impact of women in law enforcement.

The parents' group explored their preferences for their daughters' careers, reasons for educating daughters, views on male–female cooperation in society, perceptions of women in uniform, and concerns about the marital life of women in policing. The female police officers' group, comprising those with more than five years of service, was asked about job satisfaction, societal and institutional perceptions, family and peer support, gender stereotypes, discrimination in assignments or promotions, work-life balance, and the evolution of male colleagues' attitudes over time. The general public group was engaged in discussions about the role of the police in society, the impact of female staff at police stations, trust in female officers during sensitive investigations, gender-based duty assignments, and the proportion and inclusion of women in the police force. Focus groups lasted 2 to 3 hours and were conducted in private, comfortable settings within participants' communities. Participation was voluntary, with no compensation offered. All participants were informed of the study's objectives, assured of confidentiality, and given the option to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants. Ethical approval was granted by the Ethical Review Board of IIUI.

4.5. Triangulation and Data Integration

Triangulation was made by gathering information on four different groups of stakeholders including the police officers who are female, young girls, parents, and people in the general population. This method allowed contrasting the different perspectives in order to find similar and differing themes. During the analyses, thematic similarities and differences were incorporated in order to capture the entire socio-representation of women in policing across various standpoints of the social spectrum.

4.6. Data Saturation

It was found that the data were saturated because no new themes or meaningful discoveries occurred in the last focus group discussions. Trends started to repeat within groups of participants, which signified that the depth and scope of data is adequate. This was informed by the principles of the qualitative research standards because according to them often saturation begins to appear after the 30-40 interviews on the study area (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

4.7. Analytic Approach

Thematic analysis based on phenomenological thinking (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the transcripts of interviews in order to discuss the views of the participants regarding the place of women in policing in the Pakistani sociocultural context. This manner could reveal some commonalities and deeply ingrained beliefs among the various groups of stakeholders. The analysis was informed by the following principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 2011): the subjective meanings are characterized by the sense that each person makes individually in line of duty; co-construction of knowledge between the participants and the researchers. The research knew that identity is influenced by context and experience (Smith, 2011; Widdicombe, 2008), as well, it was informed by the social-cognitive aspect of identity development used by Berzonsky to aid in a context in which the participants were in the moment of internal processing styles and experiences influenced by external factors. Given the gendered and hierarchical nature of law enforcement—historically rooted in militarized and masculine traditions (Crank, 2014; Garcia, 2003; Walker, 1993)—special attention was paid to how female officers navigate professional identity and societal expectations.

Researcher reflexivity was central to the analytic process. The first author, a Pakistani female researcher, conducted and transcribed the interviews, allowing for cultural empathy and insider insight. Potential bias was mitigated through collaboration with the second author, who provided an outsider perspective due to her distinct academic background. This dual-positioned reflexivity strengthened interpretative validity (Stiles, 1993; Sultana, 2007). To support transparency, direct participant quotes were integrated throughout, allowing readers to assess interpretations and hear participants' voices authentically (Fine, 1992). While familiar with existing theoretical frameworks, the authors allowed themes to emerge inductively, ensuring that analysis remained grounded in participant narratives. The process emphasized reflexive validity (altering researcher understanding) and generativity (offering novel insights), with themes labeled based on data characteristics rather than predefined constructs.

5. Results

5.1. Analysis

The primary themes and sub-themes, which emerged from our analysis, are outlined in the following sections. Each theme is supported by relevant quotations, with a particular focus on highlighting the distinctive processes of imagery of women police officers observed within the sample. The data related to the imagery of women in police were carefully identified, compared, and organized into an analytical framework encompassing various themes and sub-themes. Utilizing a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the data underwent a structured six-step process which involves familiarization with the data, development of a coding framework; identification of underlying themes, reviewed and refined themes, defined and assigned names to the identified themes; finally, generated a comprehensive report. The table comprises of the overview of the themes and subthemes are identified during the data analysis.

Table 1: Table of themes and subthemes

	Main Theme	Sub-Themes	Brief Description
1	Gender Stereotypes	- Traditional gender role perceptions- Challenging gender-based assumptions- Gendered work environments- Balancing femininity with authority	Societal and institutional assumptions about women's roles and capabilities in policing.
2	Leadership and Identity Negotiation	- Influence on organizational culture- Navigating hierarchies and respect- Balancing assertiveness with societal expectations	How women navigate leadership, professional identity, and gain respect in a male-dominated field.
3	Barriers and Facilitators to Women in Policing	- Recruitment and retention challenges- Harassment and discrimination- Lack of gender-sensitive policies- Work-life balance and family roles	Institutional and cultural barriers, and potential enablers for women's success in policing.
4	Stigma and Cultural Myths	- Public perceptions of women in authority- Concerns about marriageability/respect- Stereotyping by media and community	Societal stigma and myths that portray women as unsuitable for authoritative roles.
5	Redefining Competence and Masculinity	- Emotional burden on male officers- Recognition of soft skills (e.g., empathy, patience)- Disruption of rigid masculine norms	Broadening the definition of police competence to include non-physical attributes, challenging gender binaries.

Theme 1: Gender stereotypes

The gender stereotypes theme toward females in the Pakistani police serves as the multidimensional area of qualitative studies that is critical. This theme discusses the predominant societal attitudes and beliefs and predispositions concerning gender roles and abilities that shape the life, perception, and behavior of women in the law enforcement sector in Pakistan. Gender stereotypes are very strong in Pakistan as in most societies. All these stereotypes tend to portray women as more domestic and inability to cope with roles involving physical strength as well as command and authority in decision making. These stereotypes that affect the legitimacy and effectiveness of female police officers to a greater extent become part of the system and are extremely difficult to change or eliminate. Gender differences should not impact the responsibilities of officers who share identical ranks in the view of Participant 1. According to this stance we should base our treatment of people equally and hold them accountable while focusing on their qualifications rather than their gender.

**: Jab aapko responsibilities mil gayi hain to time ko or is chez ko beej me nahi lana chahye. Agar apka rank blkul same hai to I think so k apki responsibilities or duties same honi chahye os k liye mery khyal se gender difference ka hona thek nahi hai*

The responses reflect a clear stance on gender equality within policing roles. Participants argue that gender should not dictate the responsibilities or duties assigned to officers. **:Jis tarah ajkal myth bani hui hai society ki agar koi sipahi or is tarah ka hai to wo to blkul bhi nahi agar koi achi yani abhi hum jesy bat kr rahy thy rank ki 16 ka ho, 17 ka ho 18 ka ho to why not, q nahi*

This response emphasizes that societal myths should not dictate job responsibilities based on gender. If ranks are the same, responsibilities should be equal irrespective of whether the officer is male or female.

**: Mery khyal me to us level tak jaye gi, designation aik milna us k equal assignments ka pata to hota hai na her bandy ko, to phir usi hisaab se wo competency bhi show kry gi"*

This highlights that a female officer who reaches a high designation must be competent and should be assigned duties equal to her rank.

Participant 2 adds nuance to this view by acknowledging that both male and female officers face similar challenges regarding work hours and capacity. This recognition suggests that while gender equality is crucial, practical considerations regarding workload and working hours should be addressed regardless of gender. The focus is on the ability to handle responsibilities effectively rather than the gender of the officer.

**: Lekin mery khyal me agar male bhi ho, sometimes male bhi 24 hours nahi job kr skta, situation ko dekh k dono k pas dekh k*

The provision recognizes realistic operational factors which affect both male and female officers by considering their potential capacity and operational hours. The acknowledgment demonstrates that gender equality receives priority but regulating agencies understand how work requirements shape operational fields. The analysis reveals that gender equality affects both men and women equally throughout their professional duties.

Participants further elaborate work-life balance challenges. This sub-theme supports the idea that gender equality in policing is not just about equal opportunity but also about providing a fair and practical approach to managing the diverse needs and challenges faced by all officers. Participant 11 response points out that females traditionally bear more domestic responsibilities, such as raising children and managing household duties, which impacts their work-life balance.

**: Jo agar ap gharelo role dekhein, domestic role dekhein to Khandan ko ya ghar ko banany me female ka role ziada hai, bachon ko palna, ghar me khana dena, thek hai? Family ko bound kr k rkhna bonding me uska role hota hai uska ghar me rhna zaruri hota hai.*

It was acknowledged that female officers often face greater work-life balance issues due to extended duty hours and their additional domestic responsibilities compared to their male counterparts.

**: work-life balance ka bohat ziada females ko issue hai qk Duty timing jo hai na wo extra ho jati hai mery khyal se, unki social life bohat ziada busy as compared to males.*

Participant 12, a senior female officer, stressed the importance of competence-based evaluation over gendered perceptions. She shared that even though she performs the same duties as her male colleagues, her actions are often scrutinized more.

: "Main bhi wahi duty karti hoon jo mere male colleague karte hain, lekin log har waqt compare karte hain—jaise mujhe prove karna ho ke main bhi kar sakti hoon. Equality tabhi hogi jab log gender ka zikr karna chor dein."

This quote underscores the ongoing pressure on women to repeatedly validate their competency, despite performing similar tasks. It emphasizes that true gender equality will be achieved only when gender is no longer highlighted as a differentiating factor in duty performance. She also spoke about leadership roles and shared frustration about not being assigned operational responsibilities despite her seniority.

: "Kabhi kabhi lagta hai sirf is liye mujhe operational kaam nahi diya jata kyunki main aurat hoon. Har baar supportive role hi milta hai."

This statement reveals subtle forms of occupational gender segregation, where women are pushed into non-operational or supportive roles, despite equivalent qualifications and rank.

Theme 2 Stigma Related to Women Police Officers

This theme revolves around the societal stigma and stereotypes faced by women police officers. It focuses on the perception that women may not be suited for the profession due to cultural expectations and traditional gender roles. The stigma also involves concerns about how women are viewed in positions of authority and whether they are perceived as being as effective as their male counterparts.

Participant 1 addresses the societal myths about women in the police profession.

**:Mery khyal me agar job flexibility ho to wo kar sakti hain, magar aaj bhi jab tak society ka mindset change nahi hota, wo tasavurat hain k ladkiyan police mein nahi aa sakti. (If job flexibility is available, women can succeed in the role, but until society's mindset changes, there are still perceptions that women cannot be in the police.)*

Participant 2 acknowledges the societal resistance towards women in law enforcement.

**:Agar wo sipahi ki position tak aati hain toh usko ikdham se nahi samajhte, lekin agar rank badh gayi, 16 ya 17 ki ho gayi toh phir unko bhi respect milti hai. (If a woman reaches a constable position, she may not be immediately respected, but if her rank increases to 16 or 17, she gains more respect.)*

Participant 5, a female sub-inspector, emphasized that social perceptions still undermine women's legitimacy in uniform, regardless of their achievements:

"Uniform mein jab bhi koi aurat nazar aati hai, log pehle hairaan hote hain, phir unka andaz hota hai ke 'ye kya kar legi?' Wo sirf dekhte hain ke aurat hai, officer nahi." (Whenever a woman is seen in uniform, people first get surprised and then act like 'what can she even do?' They only see a woman, not an officer.)

This quote reveals a persistent public tendency to reduce female officers to their gender rather than acknowledge their professional role or competence, indicating a deep-rooted societal stigma.

Participant 7, a male senior officer, shared that community members often question the authority of female officers, especially during field operations:

"Jab kisi case mein lady officer ko lead diya jata hai, to public reaction hota hai—'kya wo manage kar payegi?' Yeh sawal kabhi male officers ke liye nahi uthta." (When a female officer is assigned to lead a case, the public often reacts—'can she handle it?' Such questions are never raised for male officers.)

This insight highlights a gendered double standard where women must constantly prove their competence, while men are assumed to be naturally capable.

Participant 10, a parent of a young girl, expressed concern about how society would view his daughter if she joined the police:

"Main chahta hoon meri beti kuch kare, lekin log police walo ko bura kehte hain, aur aurat agar police mein ho to log aur zyada baatein banate hain. Kya izzat milegi usey?" (I want my daughter to do something, but people speak badly about police officers, and if a woman joins, they talk even more. What respect will she get?)

This response reflects the stigma not only directed at women officers but also experienced by their families, showing how community pressures discourage women's participation in law enforcement.

Theme 3 Myths related to Men in the Police

The theme analyzes multiple obstacles experienced by female police officers by evaluating institutional work-related obstacles and social pressure expectations. Female police officers encounter most of their professional challenges because they strive to fulfill job responsibilities while clients of domestic obligations. Society requires women to demonstrate professional

competence precisely when they need to execute their domestic tasks as well as operate as caregivers for children and household relationships. Policing work requires female personnel to adapt to unscheduled shifts in long hours combined with demanding field responsibilities. Police forces secretly discriminate against women regarding their professional abilities and bodily strengths and their readiness to act as leaders. Women police officers face sexism in their career progression as well as in their workplace responsibilities alongside diminished respect from both fellow officers and external members of the community. Organizations require gender-specific policies to overcome gender barriers because participants show that flexible shift schedules and on-site child care and performance-based workplace cultures benefit women officers. The first participant observes how societal standards force women to manage family commitments inside their homes along with external workplace responsibilities which produces extreme mental pressure.

**:Log yeh samajhte hain k mard zyada tough hain aur unka kaam zyada muskil hai, lekin har banday ko apni capabilities ke hisaab se kaam karna chahiye. (People believe that men are tougher and their work is harder, but everyone should work according to their capabilities.)*

Toughness no longer needs to be considered as something that only men naturally possess according to this explanation. The responder believes that competency assessment should determine job placement despite gender considerations. Safety capacities and the ability to handle situations with skill do not belong to one gender according to this viewpoint because toughness and skill represent individual traits instead of gender-specific characteristics. This perception supports contemporary changes toward acknowledging diverse capabilities between the genders.

Participant 2 emphasizes that men's roles are often seen as more critical within the force but argues that effectiveness depends on skills and training:

**:Mard ki role ko zyada critical samjha jata hai, lekin jab tak apki skills aur training achi ho, aap kisi bhi rank ya position mein achi performance de sakte hain.*

The perception that men hold higher importance exists although your expertise and training capabilities determine how well you succeed regardless of your rank or position assignment.

Participant 2 describes the developed understanding of the fact that men have to cope with the demanding and critical police work which creates the gendered requirements among the police force. This reaction manifests itself in the training criteria, according to which policing skills must be measured by learnt abilities regardless of the gender. Participant 2 sees the standard performance as the act that is directed to the idea of competency instead of positioning it on gender preference due to their efforts involving the provision of equal evaluation to all of the officers based on the experience. By further examination Participant 4 shows how ideas of the physical strength attached to men help to mask the necessary skills such as emotional perception and tolerance in police work:

"Aksar log kehte hain ke mard hi moqaam sambhal sakte hain kyun ke unmein strength hoti hai, lekin har case strength ka nahi hota. Kabhi kabhi samajh aur patience bhi zaruri hoti hai jo har shakhs mein ho sakti hai, chahe mard ho ya aurat." (People often say only men can handle certain situations because they have strength, but not every case requires strength. Sometimes understanding and patience are also needed, and anyone—man or woman—can have that.)

Furthering the discussion from within the institution, Participant 6 talks about internal departmental biases and offers a counterexample based on real-life field experience:

"Hamare department mein bhi kuch log samajhte hain ke agar physical kaam hai to wo sirf mardon ka hai. Lekin main ne dekha hai kuch women officers ne field mein bohat ache kaam kiye hain. Unki planning aur approach zyada effective hoti hai kabhi kabhi." (Even in our department, some believe that physical tasks are only for men. But I've seen female

officers perform very well in the field. Their planning and approach can sometimes be more effective.)

Expanding the conversation to mental health and emotional pressure, Participant 9 highlights how these myths can negatively impact men by imposing unrealistic expectations of toughness:

"Mujhe lagta hai society mardon se hamesha yeh expect karti hai ke wo har waqt strong banein, rona ya thakna unka kaam nahi. Lekin is pressure ki wajah se bohat se male officers burnout ka shikar hote hain." (I feel society always expects men to always be strong—they're not supposed to cry or get tired. But because of this pressure, many male officers suffer from burnout.)

Theme 4 Challenges Associated with Women in Police Profession

The theme investigates institutional work-related obstacles and social pressure limits which affect female police officers in their profession. Most work related barriers fall on the female police officer since they have to juggle between the need to deliver on their work and the need to deliver on the household duties. Women are required to show the full capacity of a professional, on the one hand, and to complete home and family responsibilities based on social expectations, on the other hand. The working requirements of serving as a police officer demand that the female law enforcement officers deal with the unpredictable working times alongside long, strenuous tasks without sacrificing field-related duties. Women in the ranks of police encounter unrecognized stereotyping of their capacity to work in the occupation besides their performance as leaders and bodytenacity. The hospitable and social groups of the time and the subsequent society have stereotypes stratified between the genders that do not allow women in the police service to access career growth and restrict the working duties and professional acceptance by their colleagues and residents of the locality. Organizations should come up with gender-specific policies to deal with the particular issues since participants express their desires to be provided with flexible shift extension opportunities besides site-based childcare and workplace cultures with focus on performance-independence of such gender measure. Participant 1 describes how society dictates that women play dual roles of caregiving at home and working outside the home leading to substantial demanding pressures.

Jo agar ap gharelo role dekhein, domestic role dekhein to Khandan ko ya ghar ko banany mein female ka role ziada hai, bachon ko palna, ghar mein khana dena, thek hai? (In domestic roles, women play a more significant part, taking care of the family, raising children, and managing household duties.)

This perspective points out a prevalent expectation that women shoulder most domestic responsibilities, which creates a dual burden for female officers. Participant 1 suggests that without supportive family and organizational structures; female officers may struggle to fulfill their policing roles effectively. This reflects a broader social dynamic where women, even in high-responsibility jobs, are still expected to prioritize family duties, highlighting the need for systemic support to address work-life balance.

Participant 2 discusses the particular issue of extended duty hours and their impact on women's social and family lives:

"Work-life balance ka bohat ziada females ko issue hai qk Duty timing jo hai na wo extra ho jati hai mery khyal se, unki social life bohat ziada busy as compared to males. (Females face significant work-life balance issues because their duty hours are often longer, and their social life is much busier compared to men.)

This comment suggests that, in addition to traditional domestic roles, women in policing endure the strain of demanding work hours, which leaves little time for personal or social activities. This intensifies the challenge of achieving work-life balance and suggests a need for policy interventions, such as flexible working hours, to help female officers manage these competing responsibilities.

Participant 4 addresses the difficulties female officers face when pursuing professional growth due to biases affecting their job assignments and hierarchy roles:

**:Aksar dekha gaya hai k senior positions pe women ko kam moka diya jata hai, unki capabilities ko poori acknowledge nahi kiya jata.*

The observation shows that women typically receive fewer senior position opportunities while their abilities remain unvalidated.

The analysis shows that qualified female officers consistently experience discrimination when competing for promotion positions within their professional ranks. A critical evaluation of promotion selection standards must occur to guarantee competency assessment supersedes gender as the primary basis for promotion according to Participant 4. The development of a genuine work environment equality in police departments depends on resolving this essential challenge so women have opportunities to compete and excel in top positions.

6. Discussion

This paper ventured into the polyvalent perceptions and social identities of women policing in the Pakistani social-cultural society. Applying Social Identity Theory as a principle, I realized the phenomena of the experiences of policewomen are determined by strongly rooted gender norms, institutionalized routines, and societal discourses in general. These results serve to show that despite the fact that women have made their way to policing, their access to policing is negotiated, contested and often compromised by overarching masculine narratives. The gendered stereotypes were also a lasting challenge to the whole-hog inclusion. Although both men and women have the same position or roles, female officers are normally evaluated based on their gender instead of their abilities. These perceptions make women less legitimate and in many cases they have to over-practice to be considered to be good at what they do. It aligns with the previous research (Hartley et al., 2014; Inzlicht & Good, 2006), according to which women working in male-dominated fields have to prove themselves constantly at work.

The theme of leadership and negotiation of identity brings out the dual load women had to carry: pursuing professional authority and being feminine by the expectations of the society. Female leaders have to experience institutional dissent, limited opportunities to grow, and a sense of implicit biases that question the female leader ability to lead. Leadership occupations are still male-biased as confirmed by (Shjarback & Todak, 2019) regardless of the mounting professionalism and organizational change. The stigma and cultural myths encompassing women in policing was yet another important finding. The representatives of different focus groups accepted the idea of how traditional views and the media create stereotypes that women are not suited to work in the police. Such stigma does not only reflect the self-concept of female officers but it also reflects their effect on family and community acceptance and restrictions to women in entering the field and causes hesitation among young girls who are still having their perception on whether to make a career in such a field and parents are kept hesitant. Interestingly, the study also examined myths and societal expectations surrounding men in policing, particularly the pressure on male officers to avoid displaying emotions associated with femininity. This observation drives home the message that gender-spawned rigidity is harmful to mainstream officers and it calls into question that there is a redefinition of competence in policing, a redefinition that considers an emotional intelligence and the attributes of communication and convergence, which are stereotypically female, but of utmost importance in contemporary policing (Lord & Friday, 2003).

Moreover, the structural disadvantages brought about by the institutional and familial barriers that female officers have to encounter primarily in the context of work-life balance and insensitivities to gender policies represent the problems of systemic nature. Workers pointed at the importance of having flexible working schedules, childcare support, and performance-oriented culture without gendered expectations. Such reflections were also heard worldwide about structural changes to manage diversity in policing (Prenzler, 2020). Collectively, these results demonstrate a complicated interaction between social identity, cultural norms, as well as institutional structures. They confirm the applicability of the concept of Social Identity Theory in explaining the way female police officers manage their presence in a masculinized field and the

effect of being a part of a group (i.e., gender) on personal perception as well as public image creation.

7. Conclusion

This paper is an insight into the day-to-day experience, perceptions, and social construction of the identity of the women serving in the police force of Pakistan. Although the survival instinct of women in uniform is admirable, the events surrounding women officers are considered by gender, stigmatization, and institutional reluctance. The female officers are not faced with just the demands of doing the job, but they also face the psychological and cultural demands as well. In terms of promoting gender equity in policing, there should also be a united action to destroy the stereotypes, reconsider the rules of promotion and giving responsibilities, and develop a level of work atmosphere which would be tolerant of different qualities. Flexible timings, child support systems and regular sensitization trainings are some of the gender-sensitive changes that should be implemented at the policymaking level. Additionally, favorable publicity in the media and sensitization programs are likely to change the orientation of the society.

7.1. Future Directions and Recommendations

To achieve gender fairness in policing, the institutions should ensure that their policies on divisions of roles, promotion and leadership options are equitable. Such initiatives ought to be complemented with the promotion of flexibility in the work schedule, childcare, and full-service mental healthcare. Consistent sensitization training on gender will be necessary so as to unearth and destabilize hidden tendencies of bias in the workplace. Moreover, community outreach along with positive media reporting can be considered a turning point that will shift the perspective on women in law enforcement in the society. How to include male officers, examine changes in the attitudes between the citizens and institutions over periods, and, lastly, build culturally specific methods of inclusion in the South Asian context is a task that future studies should focus on addressing.

Reference

- Angehrn, A., Vig, K. D., Mason, J. E., Stelnicki, A. M., Shields, R. E., Asmundson, G. J. G., & Carleton, R. N. (2022). Sex differences in mental disorder symptoms among Canadian police officers: the mediating role of social support, stress, and sleep quality. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy*, 51(1), 3-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2021.1877338>
- Bishopp, S. A., Piquero, N. L., Worrall, J. L., & Piquero, A. R. (2019). Negative Affective Responses to Stress among Urban Police Officers: A General Strain Theory Approach. *Deviant Behavior*, 40(6), 635-654. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2018.1436568>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Conor, P., Robson, J., & Marcellus, S. (2019). Police resources in Canada, 2018. *Juristat: canadian centre for justice statistics*, 1-30.
- Crank, J. P. (2014). *Understanding police culture*. Routledge.
- Deschamps, F., Paganon-Badinier, I., Marchand, A. C., & Merle, C. (2003). Sources and Assessment of Occupational Stress in the Police. *Journal of Occupational Health*, 45(6), 358-364. <https://doi.org/10.1539/joh.45.358>
- Fine, M. (1992). *Disruptive voices: The possibilities of feminist research*. University of Michigan Press.
- Frey, F. E., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). Being Seen As Individuals Versus As Group Members: Extending Research on Metaperception to Intergroup Contexts. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 10(3), 265-280. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr1003_5
- Garcia, V. (2003). "Difference" in the Police Department: Women, Policing, and "Doing Gender". *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, 19(3), 330-344. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986203254530>
- Guajardo, S. A. (2016). Women in Policing: A Longitudinal Assessment of Female Officers in Supervisory Positions in the New York City Police Department. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 26(1), 20-36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2014.997418>
- Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field methods*, 18(1), 59-82. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X05279903>

- Hartley, T., Mnatsakanova, A., Burchfiel, C., & Violanti, J. (2014). Stressors and associated health effects for women police officers. *Dying for the job: Police work exposure and health*, 93-114.
- Inzlicht, M., & Good, C. (2006). How environments can threaten academic performance, self-knowledge, and sense of belonging. In *Stigma and group inequality* (pp. 143-164). Psychology Press.
- Lord, V., & Friday, P. (2003). Choosing a career in police work: A comparative study between applicants for employment with a large police department and public high school students. *Police Practice and Research*, 4(1), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1561426032000059196>
- Moore, D. (1999). Gender Traits and Identities in a "Masculine" Organization: The Israeli Police Force. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 139(1), 49-68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224549909598361>
- Prenzler, T. (2020). Remarks by the guest editor. *Police Practice and Research*, 21(5), 439-441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2020.1809826>
- Shjarback, J. A., & Todak, N. (2019). The Prevalence of Female Representation in Supervisory and Management Positions in American Law Enforcement: An Examination of Organizational Correlates. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 29(3), 129-147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2018.1520674>
- Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health Psychology Review*, 5(1), 9-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17437199.2010.510659>
- Somvadee, C., & Morash, M. (2008). Dynamics of sexual harassment for policewomen working alongside men. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 31(3), 485-498. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13639510810895821>
- Stiles, W. B. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 13(6), 593-618. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-7358\(93\)90048-Q](https://doi.org/10.1016/0272-7358(93)90048-Q)
- Sultana, F. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *ACME: An international journal for critical geographies*, 6(3), 374-385. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v6i3.786>
- Swan, A. A. (2016). Masculine, Feminine, or Androgynous: The Influence of Gender Identity on Job Satisfaction Among Female Police Officers. *Women & Criminal Justice*, 26(1), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2015.1067175>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (2000). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In M. J. Hatch & M. Schultz (Eds.), *Organizational Identity* (pp. 56-65). Oxford University Press Oxford.
- Taylor Greene, H., & Del Carmen, A. (2002). Female police officers in Texas: Perceptions of colleagues and stress. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 25(2), 385-398. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13639510210429428>
- Turner, J. C., & Reynolds, K. J. (2012). Self-Categorization Theory. In *Handbook of Theories of Social Psychology* (pp. 399-417). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Walker, S. (1993). *Taming the System*. Oxford University Press.
- Widdicombe, S. (2008). Identity as an analysts' and a participants' resource. In *Identities in talk* (pp. 192-206). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Wilder, D. A. (1984). Empirical contributions: Predictions of belief homogeneity and similarity following social categorization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 23(4), 323-333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1984.tb00648.x>