

Paper to be presented at :
The 7th Australasian Women in Policing Conference
***Police and Community: Making it Happen* , Hobart, Australia 21-24 August 2011**

“A Pilot Study of Women in the New South Wales Police Force 1979 to 2008: Have Thirty Years Really Made Any Difference?”

Dr Susan Robinson PhD, Charles Sturt University, New South Wales
Virginia Arentsen MVET, Charles Sturt University, New South Wales

Abstract

In 1915, for the first time in Australia, the New South Wales (NSW) Police Force employed two female police officers (The Thin Blue Line 2010, Wilkinson & Froyland 1996). These women were chosen from a group of around 500 applicants and once chosen, were required to sign a legal document indemnifying the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) from any responsibility in respect to their safety. Women continued to be recruited under a Quota System that capped the number of female recruits to ensure their numbers were kept low over the next sixty five years. So aberrant was the inclusion of women into the police force in New South Wales that until 1965 they were recorded on a separate seniority list to their male counterparts. The role of women in policing in New South Wales, Australia and internationally, has come a long way in the century that has elapsed since 1915, but is yet to achieve a gender balance reflective of the broader population. In 1980 the Quota System was abolished in NSW by the direction of the Anti-Discrimination Board. A pilot study was undertaken with six currently serving and ex police women from the NSW Police Force. Among this cohort, two women joined the NSWPF in the 1979-1988 time period, two joined in the 1989-1998 time period and two joined in the 1999-2008 time period. The women were interviewed in depth, and their experiences were compared. The pilot study found that over three decades there appears to have been significant improvement in the experiences of women police in the NSW Police Force. This pilot has raised some areas of interest for further study, such as an indication that women who joined the NSWPF in the last two decades are indicating that their experiencing with discrimination and bullying in the NSWPF has come from other women and not from men.

Introduction

In 1915, for the first time in Australia, the New South Wales (NSW) Police Force employed two female police officers (The Thin Blue Line 2010, Wilkinson & Froyland 1996). These women were chosen from a group of around 500 applicants and once chosen, were required to sign a legal document indemnifying the NSW Police Force from any responsibility in respect to their safety. These women did not wear the police uniform. They were assigned the title of “Special Constable” and wore civilian clothes (The Thin Blue Line 2010). Their main role involved “social work” policing duties and crime prevention (Silvestri, 2003, Brown et al, 2000). While these women broke through the gender barrier to pioneer change in the police force, they were forced to work outside the mainstream domain of policing in an atmosphere of great resistance and in some cases overt hostility (Silvestri, 2003). So aberrant was the inclusion of women into the police force in New South Wales that they were recorded on a separate seniority list to their male counterparts and this remained unchanged until 1965.

The role of women in policing in New South Wales, Australia and internationally, has come a long way in the century that has elapsed since then, but is yet to achieve a gender balance reflective of the broader population. In 1996, 13.5% of police officers in Australia were female (Boni, 2005, Wilkinson et al, 1996). In 2005, 20.9% of sworn police officers across Australia were women (Boni, 2005) and although by 2006, this number had increased to 23% (Irving, 2009), it is still not close to being representative of the proportion of male and females in the the broader population. Nevertheless the picture in Australia is marginally better than in Europe where the average representation of female police officers was only 10.6% in 2000 (Scarborough & Collins, 2002) and in the United States, where in 2001 women represented only 11.2% of all sworn law enforcement officers (Lonsway et al 2002).

A study undertaken of gender equity in Australia and New Zealand police departments, by Prenzler, Fleming & King (2010, p 588) shows that the percentages of sworn women police officers is steadily increasing in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory (reduction of .8%) and the Australian Capital Territory (reduction of 2.29%). The NSW Police force has increased the percentage of sworn police women from 24.52% in 2003-2004 to 26.38% in 2007-2008). Although the employment of women in the NSWPF has improved since 2003, the deployment of women remains an area of concern. In 2007-2008, the deployment of women police officers in NSWPF was predominantly in the Domestic Violence and Victim Support and Liaison Officer roles (69.05% female: 30.95% male). Interestingly women are only slightly represented in the crime manager positions (6.02% female: 93.98% male). This is replicated in the criminal investigations (26.11% female: 73.89% male) and Tactical Operations (1.75% female: 98.25% male) areas. Males and females were almost equally represented in the Training (female 44.59% : male 55.41%) and Crime Prevention (female 55.56% : male 44.44%) areas and unsurprisingly males vastly dominated the "duty officer" positions (female 6.85% : male 93.15%) (Prenzler et al 2011; Prenzler & Fleming 2010).

Motivations to Join the Police Force

The reasons why people generally, and women especially, choose to join the police force have been the focus of national and international study. In a study of new recruits conducted by Christie (1996) with the Queensland Police Service in the early 1990's, there was no significant difference found in the reasons given by both men and women for joining the police force. This study found that helping people, job security, a desire to fight crime and a lack of other job opportunities were the dominant reasons given, for becoming a police officer. A study of New York police officers, conducted by Ermer (1978) found that job security, career prospects and relatively high salaries were the main motivating factors for both men and women in making the decision to join the police force. This finding is well supported by other research (Wimshurst, 1995). In the Ermer study, high salary was rated particularly highly by female officers. Wells and Alt (2005) claim that in the past, financial reasons were rarely given by female or male recruits as motivating factors for joining the police and instead idealised motivations such as a belief in making a positive contribution to society were more common. Police recruits in contemporary society however are listing economic benefits, job security, career prospects and excitement of the job as the main motivating factors for joining the police (Wells et al, 2005) and in reference to these factors, there appears to be commanality between what motivates men and women to join the police force (Brown et al, 2000).

Factors that May Discourage or Hinder Women from Joining the Police Force

The selection criteria for many law enforcement positions may be a discouraging for some women and may in fact directly or indirectly discriminate against women. For example, selection processes that

emphasise physical strength and agility may block women from entry into policing even though many of the physical tests applied to the selection of new recruits is not reflective of the ability needed to do the job (Lonsway et al, 2002). The Fitzgerald Inquiry in Queensland in the 1990s found that while the Queensland Police Service was attracting 25% of applicants that were women, only 5-12% of these applicants were getting through the selection process (Wimshurst, 1995). The Inquiry found that “informal” processes had operated to thwart these women from entering the service. Discriminatory selection processes that target men and exclude women, have been identified as hindering women’s entry into policing for a number of years (Scarborough & Collins, 2002). It is suggested by Westmarland (2001), that the masculinised male culture within policing is challenged and placed under threat by the introduction of women into the police force which then fails to recognise or address structural inequality.

There is much evidence to suggest that women are indirectly discouraged and obstructed from entering many areas of policing, including promotion levels and some investigative fields such as undercover policework and emergency response units (Dodge, 2010). A study in the United States, undertaken by Paoline (2001), involved assessing the attitudes, values and norms of 270 police (approx 80% male and 20% female). In this study Paoline concluded that women were not deliberately excluded from the more “masculine” fields of policing but that they self-selected not to enter these areas. He speculated that this was the case because these areas often required police to operate outside of the formal ethical code and many women were reluctant to do this (Paoline, 2001).

Adopting Masculinity or Adapting Femininity?

Wimshurst (1995) suggests that male police feel psychologically threatened by the “destabilising” influence of women and the “feminising” of police work. It is also suggested by Yim (2009) that women police represent a threat to the “natural order” of things in policing. In order to counter this perception and the negative reactions associated with it, some women police have adopted masculine ways of looking and behaving in order to fit in. Ironically this may have been a deterrent to some women joining the police force. This may not be as simple as it first appears however. A study by Silvestri (2007) undertaken with senior police women in the United Kingdom, found that while the women interviewed adapted to taking on a masculine transactional leadership style initially upon promotion, they later adopted a more feminised transformational leadership style that was slowly influencing the dominant culture of the police to change.

Contrary to the point of view that police women are becoming masculinised in order to gain acceptance, it is said by Westmarland (2001) that contemporary police women are more resilient because they are educated professionals and are able to retain their femininity and attractiveness and still be accepted as capable and competent in regard to doing their job (Westmarland, 2001). According to Westmarland (2001), these police women are not as easily intimidated by the masculinised culture and denigrated because of their gender. Despite Westmarland’s optimism however, there is little sign that the police culture is making significant changes in regard to the treatment of women police as the currently reported issues of harassment and discrimination of women within policing (Silvestri, 2003, Lonsway et al, 2007, Carlan & McMullan, 2009) are still the same issues as those reported as existing back in the 1990s (Wimshurst, 1995, Prenzler, 1995). While the police culture is slow to adapt, some women may be discouraged by this continuing lack of equal opportunity for career advancement within the police force and may be influenced away from considering policing as a career option, especially when so many other careers are opening up to women and offering greater flexibility and opportunities.

Factors that may Encourage or Discourage Women from Remaining in the Police Force

A masculinised culture within the police force has traditionally made it difficult for minority groups, including women, to succeed in a policing career (He et al, 2005). A study undertaken by He et al (2005) in the United States, aimed to assess the impact of gender and race on police officer's perception of stress experienced through their work. The preliminary findings of this study suggested that in addition to the extraordinary levels of stress encountered by all police officers on the job, race and gender were especially predictive of stress factors on two measures, being somatization (physical complaints) and depression. It was found in this study that female officers, and in particular those from African-American descent, were more likely to encounter harassment, hostility and negative social interactions than their male colleagues. Research conducted in the United Kingdom in the 1990s supports the findings reported by He et al (2005). The United Kingdom research found that in England and Wales, women police officers frequently encountered overt hostility from male colleagues and direct discrimination in regard to areas of deployment (Brown, 1998).

Sexual harassment, discrimination and differential deployment of women in the police force appears to still be evident despite legislation, policies and education aimed at eliminating these attitudes and practices (Silvestri, 2003, Lonsway et al, 2007, Carlan & McMullan, 2009). Such attitudes and practices may be at odds with the expectations that women police are given during recruitment and may discourage women from remaining in the police force once they have entered the field. In addition to this, discrimination and/or inflexibility on the basis of marital status, childcare responsibilities and pregnancy are additional areas which can discourage women police officers from remaining in the police force or seeking promotion (Wells, 2005). Views exist within the police force, primarily among male officers, that this is not discrimination but a choice on the part of women police to put the role of mother and wife ahead of career aspirations (Brown et al, 2000) but such views are disputed by Dodge et al (2010) who argue that limited opportunities continue to exist for policewomen with women police themselves reporting barriers to promotion (Dodge et al, 2010). Other work related problems cited by women police officers include coworker gossip, inflexible work schedules, poor training, lack of promotional opportunities and administrative policies that disadvantage female police (Lonsway, 2007).

An area of great frustration to many women in policing, is the masculinised design of the uniforms which are arguably not designed to comfortably fit the female body or conversely, the insistence on women wearing tight fitting skirts and accessories that are unsuitable for the job of policing (Wells and Alt, 2005). In addition to this, many women are not provided with appropriate toilet, shower and locker facilities (Wells, 2005). Modern police buildings generally include such facilities but there are several older buildings, still in use, that do not provide separate facilities for women, forcing women police to improvise. Another area that must be considered as relevant to the question of why women might not wish to remain in the police force, is the difficulty involved in lodging a complaint about harassment, discrimination or bullying in general (Wells and Alt, 2005). Reprisals such as ostracism, acts of retaliation, discrediting and unfavourable treatment are frequently experienced by women police who report harassment and discrimination. Work stress is evident among police men and women but for police women it is stress that originates from the behaviour of male work colleagues rather than from undertaking the job itself (Carlan et al, 2009, Zhao et al, 2003). Women police officers suffer higher levels of depression than policemen but this appears to be due to unequal opportunities and adverse treatment rather than the job itself. In particular, the depression experienced by policewomen can be attributed to a perceived lack of opportunities for career advancement, mistrust of coworkers, feelings of isolation and mild regret over career choice (Carlan et al, 2009, Zhao et al, 2003).

The Pilot Study

This qualitative pilot study aimed to determine what, if anything has changed for female police in the past thirty years. Women police who entered the NSW Police Force in the last three decades were selected to participate in interviews where they were asked to tell the researchers about their experiences in the New South Wales police force. The initial intention of the researchers was to conduct in-depth interviews with four women from each of the past three decades (i.e. 1979-1988; 1989-1998 and 1999-2008). The participants were selected on the basis of when they entered the NSW Police Force and were nominated by academics at the Goulburn Police Academy. Each participant was approached personally to establish their willingness to be interviewed for the project and was subsequently provided with information sheets and consent forms pertaining to the project. All participants were advised that they were free to withdraw their consent to be involved at any point of the research process, including during the interviews. The researchers modified the research design to interviewing two women from each decade as some women who had initially indicated interest to be involved in the pilot study, chose not to participate at the last minute. Their withdrawal of consent was related to fear of being identified (n=4) and availability (n=2). Some of the participants were previously known to the researchers.

The sample group comprised six (n=6) women. Four of the women (n=4) had retired from the police force, although all continued to work in job roles other than policing. Two of the women (n=2) were still employed with the NSW Police Force. The participants were given a choice as to where the interviews were held as the researchers wanted the participants to be relaxed enough to talk in narrative style about their experiences. Some of the interviews were held at the Goulburn Police Academy (n=4); one interview was held in the participant's own home (n=1) and one was held in a secluded section of a cafe (n=1). Demographic data was obtained from the participants prior to an interview being conducted. The interview covered the areas of: suitability of the uniform; experiences with recruitment and training; experiences with promotion; general experiences in the workplace; the duties performed; motivations; and reasons for leaving/staying.

Findings

The results of this pilot research project were surprising in some areas. For example, 50% of the participants (n= 3) stated that they experienced some form of harassment on the job, but this harassment came from other women not from male police officers. As was expected, the two women who entered the police force in the 1979-1988 decade related a more negative experience than the women who entered the police force in the following two decades. The women who entered the police force in the 1999-2008 decade reported the most positive experiences of all of the participants suggesting that there have been positive changes in women's experiences in the police force over the past twenty years and particularly in the last 10 years. In regard to gender equity, 50% of participants (n=3) experienced no problems in the NSW Police Force, stating that they were treated the same as male officers at the same level of experience during recruitment and on the job.

The Uniform

The uniform was a source of frustration for most of the participants whose responses were clearly related to the decade in which they entered the police force. The two participants who entered the police force in the decade 1979 – 1988 found the uniform to be impractical and not functional at all for the job they were required to do. They described having to wear a tight A-line skirt that they had to pull

up to their hips when they were required to run or scale a fence. They also described having to carry a handbag and having to wear their gun and appointments under their summer top or winter jacket, making them difficult to retrieve if they had to respond quickly to an incident. The two participants who entered the police force in the 1989 – 1998 time frame had a better experience with the uniform, reporting that it was more functional but still had some frustrations. In this period the uniform consisted of culottes and a specific shade of “Kolotox” pantyhose. The frustration for these women was that the stockings were hard to find, were expensive to buy and they were quickly laddered. By contrast, the two women who entered the police force in the 1999 – 2008 timeframe were very positive about the uniform, saying that it was both practical and functional. The uniform available in this time period was much the same as the male officers and included cargo pants and appointment belt.

Motivations to Join and Reasons for Leaving

In regard to motivations for joining the police force, all the women who participated in this study (n=6) revealed that their main intention was to make a difference and/or to help people. Secondary motivations included rebelling against parents (n=1) and that “policing seemed like a good job to have” (n=3). All participants reported that they had a good impression of the NSW Police Force prior to joining it. The retired participants were asked to talk about their reasons for leaving the police force and of the four participants (n=4) who were retired from the NSW Police Force at the time of this study, 75% (n=3) indicated they would return to policing if things changed. Table 1 indicates the things which were listed by the retired participants in this study, that they considered needed to change in order for them to consider returning to the police force (the participant who did not indicate a desire to return to policing declined to respond to this question).

(N=3)	Number
The system has to stop rewarding poor behaviour.	1
Real support for women	1
Equitable treatment for women, especially in promotions	1
Flexibility around family commitments	2
Value employees	1
More flexibility around the choice of locations	3
The practice regarding equity & diversity needs to match the rhetoric	1

Table 1: Responses to the question: “What would need to change for you to return to policing? (nb.: respondents have provided more than one response to this question).

The findings of this study show that there were three predominant factors that led the women interviewed for this study to resign from the NSW Police Force. The first was work-related injury, the second a lack of flexibility regarding maternity or carers leave and the third reason a lack of flexibility around the allocation of location. There also appears to be a lack of interest on the part of some supervisors in regard to trying to find out why people are leaving the police force, and presenting them with alternative options. This is illustrated by what one participant said: “When I resigned the boss Superintendent never tried to encourage me to stay. I didn’t know I could apply for leave without pay and now I wish I had done that”.

Support for Family Commitments

All of the women described a culture within the NSW Police Force that did not support women police who became pregnant. The women, who did have children while in the police force, described being

made to feel that they were “letting the team down”. In regard to their experiences regarding accessing maternity leave, carer’s leave and the flexibility of the organisation to accommodate family commitments generally, all of the participants with children (n=4) described finding it very difficult to maintain their policing career once they began a family.

- “If you took carer’s leave or maternity leave you were targeted. You had to make a choice between a career or children”.
- “In relation to pregnancy, a lot of police women hid it due to the boss’s attitude. The boss saw it as a nuisance when a police woman got pregnant because they had to roster them to work in the station”.
- “When I had my first child I was put off duty on leave more than three months before the baby was due. By the time I had my second child things had changed. I was transferred to an administrative area and I worked until three days before the birth”.
- “Prior to joining I was concerned about being a mother and balancing this with the police job and I was told by the recruitment people that the organisation was supportive of family commitments. When I was still at the academy I had applied for a regional location because I had young children and the station I applied for was close to home. As a new officer I was told there were no jobs available at the regional location and I was sent to a Sydney metropolitan location. I found out that another female officer had been sent to the same regional location I had applied for even though she had not requested it. I asked for a compassionate transfer on the grounds of family hardship. The organisation was not sympathetic and I had to stay where I was stationed.”

In most instances, the supportiveness of the workplace to family commitments seems to depend on the individual style and leadership approach of the supervisor. The women who had a supportive supervisor did not experience as much hardship related to family commitments as the women who did not have a supportive supervisor.

Recruitment, Training and Promotion

When asked to talk about their experiences with the recruitment process, all participants, with the exception of one (n=5), reported that in their experience the recruitment and training process was equitable. They indicated to the researchers that the items they were tested on were exactly the same items that the male recruits were tested on (n=5). The participant who did not think the recruitment process was equitable was recruited in 1980 and she stated in her interview that: “there was a big emphasis on PT and the exercises chosen seemed to favour the men, such as the upper body strength exercise. I think women were put at a disadvantage because of that.” This participant further commented that during the interview portion of the recruitment process, she was asked (interestingly by the only female panel member): “Do you want a marriage or a career?” This participant described being pressed harder in the physical exercise testing than her male counterparts and having difficulty with some aspects of the physical testing such as push ups, scaling walls and running. She also described being forced to squeeze the testes of male colleagues in the unarmed combat exercises, and said that the men were not required to do that. The other participant, who joined the police force in the same decade, described a much more positive experience in regard to recruitment and training, with chivalry playing a part in making her physical testing process somewhat easier than her male counterparts. She put this down to the fact that she was young and pretty. She did however comment that the running aspect of the test was difficult and offered the insight that: “I have never needed to run 2 km at any time in my policing career, so was this an essential requirement for recruitment?” The practices reported by the two women who entered the police force in the 1980s appear to be a thing of the past,

with the participants recruited between 1989 and 2008 reporting that the recruitment process they experienced was equitable and they did not identify any significant problems with it.

When asked about their experiences around promotion, most of the participants all said that they would not want to become a detective because “it is a boy’s club”. There was a strong perception among the women involved in this study that they would not be accepted in the role and they found it difficult enough to survive as a constable and therefore did not want to take on the extra stress of trying to be accepted as a detective. One participant, who was working part time to meet family commitments, said: I was told by my sergeant that you’ll never get a sergeant’s job while you are part time because you are as good as a man down”. All of the women interviewed described feeling as if they had to scale major barriers in order to achieve promotion. Some of the comments made in relation to promotion included:

- “I was not promoted because I refused to go out with the superintendent”.
- “I never had aspirations toward detective work because of the police there who were chauvinistic. Highway Patrol, Homicide and other squads were all male dominated and chauvinistic. I wanted to apply and I was fit enough to but I decided I didn’t want to be treated like shit so I didn’t choose to apply”.
- “I considered a specialist position but I had a family. If I didn’t have a family I would have pursued a specialist position”.
- “I had to fight for promotion. The female commander favoured another female officer. She was horrendous and I think my failure to get the promotion had something to do with me refusing to march in the gay/lesbian mardi gras.”

Bullying and Harassment

All of the women interviewed described being bullied and exposed to sexual harassment at work but interestingly it was not always men who were responsible for this. In 66% of the cases (n=4) it was other women who were responsible. Comments made by participants in regard to bullying and harassment by other women included:

- “I was sexually harassed by a lesbian and I reported it but nothing was done”
- “I experienced bullying problems from another police woman that spilled over into my personal life”
- “My worst boss was a female. When they get high up some become masculine so that they will be accepted by their male counterparts. “
- “I recently saw a female D.O. who spoke so badly to staff that it upset me and I am a fairly “ballsy” person myself”.
- “I had no problems with males, I had issues with other police women – they are a particular breed”.

The participant who made the last comment, expanded on the term “a particular breed” by explaining that she used to work in the defence force and in her opinion many women attracted to the defence forces and to the police force were similarly masculine and aggressive. The bullying and sexual harassment reported by the participants that reportedly came from male officers and superiors ranged from sexualised comments to having their menstrual periods monitored. Comments made by the participants included:

- “When I first got into a patrol car with a male partner he said to me, ‘do you fuck or what?’”
- “I was frequently told: ‘you look fuckable today’ by the male officers I worked with”.

- “The roster sergeant had a list of period dates and he rostered the women to work in the station when he thought their periods were due. I can’t remember how he found out when they were due; I think we had to tell him.”
- “I had all sorts of things sent to me, like Modess pads with tomato sauce on them, pornographic pictures and condoms filled with clag glue”.
- “The blokes would just walk by and drop their pens into the front of my blouse and slap me on the bottom. It got annoying after awhile.”
- “Almost every day the sergeant would run his finger down my back to find the bra strap to see if I had a bra on.”
- “On my first day on the job I was driven to licensed premises and ordered to stay in the patrol car and monitor the radio. My partner then went inside to drink. I had to go and get him if a call came in. This continued through my whole training and I knew I could not do anything about it or I would be out in the cold. I was a probationer and female”.

The findings of this study suggest that bullying and harassment may be common experiences for women in the police force however the perpetrator can be of either gender.

Discussion

The researchers acknowledge that there are limitations to this pilot study due to the small sample size and therefore acknowledge the inability to generalise the findings beyond this cohort. The depth of interviews undertaken however provides rich qualitative information that aids in the understanding of the statistical information that is frequently presented as illustrating women’s experience in the police force and indicates areas for further research. For example, the findings of Prenzler & Fleming (2010), that the deployment of police women is in areas other than the specialist and tactical response fields, is supported by this pilot study but the women interviewed have provided a narrative that brings those statistics to life and explains why women may not be being represented in the specialist roles currently dominated by men. The findings suggest that the reason the women involved in this study did not pursue specialist positions was due to their perception that these fields were entrenched in chauvinism. In addition, some women were concerned that their responsibilities for caring for children would hinder their ability to fulfil these roles and this prevented them from applying. The differential deployment of women in the NSW Police Force may not therefore be a mechanism of structural inequity as suggested by Silvestri (2003), Lonsway et al, (2007) and Carlan & McMullan (2009) but an expression of career choices made by women police. The findings of this pilot study therefore support the findings of the study by Paoline (2001) suggesting that differential deployment by gender is largely due to self selection. It would seem that in order to attract more women into specialist roles, a policing organisation may want to address the perceptions of chauvinism and inflexibility to family commitments that appear to exist among women police. This is certainly indicating an area for further research.

The New York study by Ermer (1978) and supported by Wells et al (2005) and Wimshurst (1995), finding that job security, career prospects and relatively high salaries were the main motivating factors for both men and women in making the decision to join the police force is not supported by this pilot study which overwhelmingly found that “helping people” and “making a difference” were the main motivating reasons for the women interviewed to join the police force. Additionally, the findings of Scarborough & Collins (2002) that women are hindered from entering policing due to discriminatory selection processes that target men and exclude women, are not supported by this pilot study which found that the women recruited between 1989 and 2008 did not find the recruitment process to be inequitable or discriminatory and only one of the women interviewed thought that the recruitment process was discriminatory. Furthermore, in regard to the suitability of the uniform, Wells and Alt (2005)

suggested that police uniforms for women were often ill fitting and impractical. This was supported by the findings of this pilot study which suggested that there has been significant improvement in this area over the past three decades. In the 1980s for example, women police were forced to wear tight fitting A-line skirts that made movement such as running and climbing almost impossible. By the 2000s the uniform was much the same as the male uniform with cargo pants, trousers and culottes replacing the A-line skirt.

In the study conducted by Silvestri (2007) it was concluded that women police adapted to the policing role by taking on a masculine transactional leadership style, at least in the initial stages of a being promoted. Some of the women interviewed for this pilot study indicated that masculinised women police colleagues and superiors posed a greater problem to them than male police colleagues and superiors. This pilot study has found that while all the women interviewed have experienced sexual harassment and bullying at work, not all were harassed and bullied by men. The surprising finding of this pilot study is the fact that four of the women interviewed (66%) indicated that they were subjected to sexual harassment and/or bullying from other women.

The main area of concern to the women interviewed in this pilot study appeared to be around a perceived lack of support for pregnancy, maternity leave, carer's leave and family commitments in general. One participant described having her request for a specific location rejected due to there being no vacancies in that location and then finding out that there was in fact at least one vacancy at the time her request went in. She had asked for this location for family reasons and had made her reasons known at the time. She felt that she had been deliberately sent to an alternative location and struggled with why this had been done. There may have been many reasons why this young woman did not get her location request however as these were never explained to her, she assumed it was done to thwart her because she was a mother. Inflexibility in supporting police women with child care responsibilities is cited by Wells (2005) as a major factor leading to women police leaving a policing career behind. This is partially supported by this pilot study which found that some of the women interviewed had left the police force due to their experience that the police force was inflexible and did not support them to fulfil their family responsibilities. In addition however, it was found that one of the women interviewed left the police force because she "got tired of fighting for for everything" and another woman said that she had left due to a work injury.

Conclusions

This pilot study has provided rich narrative information that describes the experiences of police women in the NSW Police Force over three decades. The major conclusion reached in this pilot study is that things appear to have improved for women police in the NSW Police Force over this time period. While the women interviewed for this pilot study, who had entered the NSW Police Force in the early 1980s, reportedly experienced overt inequity, discrimination and sexual harassment on a regular basis, the women who entered the police force in the 2000s did not experience this and reported an overall much more positive experience. Of particular interest for further study is the finding that while all the women interviewed had experienced some type of sexual harassment or bullying in the policing role, in more than half of those cases it was another woman police officer who was responsible for the harassment or bullying. This pilot study has indicated several areas for further research which may improve the understanding of the nature and extent of this phenomenon and other areas such as career progression and choices.

References

- Boni N. (2005) Barriers and facilitating factors for women in policing: considerations for making policing an employer of choice. *The Journal of Women and Policing*. 17. pp 13-18.
- Brown, J. & Heidensohn, F. (2000). *Gender and policing*. Houndsmills, U.K.: Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Carlan P. & McMullan E. (2009) A contemporary snapshot of policewomen attitudes. *Women & Criminal Justice*. 19. pp 60-79.
- Christie G. (1996) *The police role: studies of male and female police*. Paper presented at the Australian Institute of Criminology First Australasian Women Police Conference. Sydney 29-31 July.
- Dodge M., Valcore L. & Klinger D. (2010) Maintaining separate spheres in policing: women on S. W.A.T. Teams. *Women & Criminal Justice*. 20. pp 218-238.
- Ermer V. (1978) Recruitment of female police officers in New York city. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 6. pp 233-246.
- He N., Zhao J. & Ren L. (2005) Do race and gender matter in police stress? A preliminary assessment of the interactive effects. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. 33. pp 535 – 547.
- Irving R. (2009) Career trajectories of women in policing in Australia. *Trends and Issues in Criminal Justice*. 370. Australian Institute of Criminology
- Lonsway K., Carrington S., Aguirre P., Wood M., Moore M., Harrington P., Smeal E. & Spillar K. (2002) *Equality denied, the status of women in policing: 2001*. Report from the National Centre for Women and Policing, a division of the Feminist Majority Foundation. April. pp 1-28.
- Paoline E. III (2001) *Rethinking Police Culture: Officers' Occupational Attitudes*. New York, New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing Company LLC.
- Prenzler T., Fleming J. & King A. (2011) Gender equity in Australian and New Zealand policing: A five year review 2003-2008. *The Journal of Women and Policing*. 27. Summer. pp 30-36.
- Prenzler T., Fleming J. & King A. (2010) Gender equity in Australian and New Zealand policing: A five year review. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*. 12, 4. Summer. pp 584-595.
- Prenzler T. & Fleming J. (2010) Where are we now? The status of women in Australian and New Zealand Policing – 2003-2008. *Australasian Policing*. 2,2. Summer. pp 34-39.
- Scarborough K. & Collins P. (2002). *Women in Public and Private Law Enforcement*. Boston: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Silvestri M. (2003) *Women in Charge: Policing, Gender and Leadership*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.
- Silvestri (2007) "Doing" police leadership: enter the "new smart macho". *Policing and Society*. 17, 1. March. pp 38-58.
- The Thin Blue Line (2010) short history of women in policing in NSW (1915 to 1995). Accessed on 24 November 2010 at www.policensw.com/info/history/h7a.html
- Wells S. and Alt B. (2005) *New police women, life with the badge*. Westport, CT. USA: Greenwood Publishing.
- Westmarland L. (2001) *Gender and Policing. Sex, Power and Police Culture*, Devon: Willan.
- Wilkinson V. & Froyland D. (1996) Women in policing. *Trends & Issues In Criminal Justice*. 58. July. pp 1-6.
- Wimshurst K. (1995) Anticipating the future: the early experiences and career expectations of women police recruits in post-Fitzgerald Queensland. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*. 23, 3. pp 278-297.
- Yim Y. (2009) Girls, why do you want to become police officers? Career goals/choices among criminal justice undergraduates. *Women & Criminal Justice*. 19. Pp 120-136.
- Zhao, J., He, N., Lovrich, N. and Cancino, J. (2003), Marital status and police occupational stress. *Journal of Crime and Justice*. 26, 2. pp. 23-46.