

## **Social and Organizational Perception Towards Women Police: A Study of Metropolitan Police in Bangladesh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study has examined the societal and organizational outlooks toward female police currently working in the Sylhet metropolitan area of Bangladesh. As the social activity of women increases, societal attitudes toward them are changing, and as an institution, the police department has included several facilities over the years. Now the question is, are these things really happening? To better understand the actual scenario of women police in the Metropolitan area, this study has interviewed 13 field-level officials using purposive sampling from the Sylhet Metropolitan Area through a semi-structured questionnaire. This study found that society's mental inertia and behavioural attitudes toward women have significantly impacted the current situation of female cops in metropolitan police. The public still needs to comprehend women working in such outfits, who must face various struggles to join the force. They often face physical difficulties with tasks, and their male counterparts do not always accept them easily. Although organizational facilities have increased in many areas, there are some problems regarding daycare centres, maternal leave, and separate washroom facilities. Thus, this study recommends improving their facilities based on female cops' capabilities.*

**Keywords:** Bangladesh Police, Metropolitan Police, Social attitudes, Women Police.

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## INTRODUCTION

In contemporary discourse, the integration of women into law enforcement agencies stands as a critical emblem of societal progress, challenging historical gender biases and redefining the dynamics of traditionally male-dominated fields. The increasing representation of women within police forces worldwide has prompted scholarly interest in understanding the multifaceted interplay between social perceptions and organizational attitudes towards women officers.

The global push for gender equality and diversity has underscored the significance of women's participation in law enforcement, not just as a matter of equity, but also for enhancing policing effectiveness and community engagement. A seminal report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2018) emphasized the importance of gender-responsive policing strategies to build public trust and address the unique needs of diverse communities. Bangladesh, like many nations, is navigating a transformative period marked by evolving societal norms and increasing recognition of women's potential contributions to all sectors. Ahmed et al. (2020) study has discussed the broader implications of gender diversity in public service organizations, highlighting how a balanced representation can positively influence organizational culture and overall performance. However, these shifts are not devoid of challenges; traditional gender stereotypes, as noted by Kabeer (2005), can continue to shape perceptions of women's roles and capabilities in male-dominated professions.

The Police of Bangladesh is administered by the Ministry of Home Affairs of the Bangladesh Government. The journey of women in Bangladesh Police unofficially started in 1974. In 1976, a proposal was sent to the government to recruit female police personnel in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, marking its official debut (Bangladesh Police Women's Network, 2022).

According to the Bangladesh Police Women's Network, as of July 2021, the total number of women working in different units is 13,004 - which is 7.10 per cent of the total workforce of Bangladesh Police. The first female police officer in Bangladesh was recruited into the cadre service in 1986 (Pervin, 2021). In 1999, eight women were recruited as Assistant Superintendents of Police by the 18th BCS, reopening the door for women to join the police cadre. With the increase in female police officers, their reputation and level of achievement also increased. Although female members have been serving in different units of the police force, female members have not been seen as traffic sergeants before. Members of the Bangladesh Police have been participating in UN peacekeeping operations since 1989, along with other forces (The Business Standard, 2021).

Studies have found that existing phased approach in subcontinent may be more responsible in strongly patriarchal settings, which have also posed some challenges to the aim of gender equity in police (Nataranjan, 2008). One of the largest projects on women police in South Asia was the study by Nataranjan (2008) performed on the female police of Tamil Nadu. She investigated that men and women were equally engaged in carrying out the complete spectrum of police duties and that there were no discrepancies in the tasks allocated to them during their service. Female officers have a unique perspective on police work, although they share some of their male colleagues' perspectives on preferred jobs and other topics (Fielding & Fielding, 1992). They have had to face various personal, social, and family problems while performing their duties at the field level. The insensitivity of a class of male officers to the issues of female police officers has made this problem even more apparent (The Daily Kaler Kantha, 2021). Due to such insensitivities, the proper responsibilities of female police are not being distributed (Quadrado, 1995). For instance, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police's Detective Branch, Crime Division, and Traffic Division currently have no female officers serving as deputy commissioners (The Business Standard, 2021). One equal opportunity measure, along with the creation of equity within the units and sexual harassment among the officers, is the inclusion of women on all selection and promotion panels (Rabe-Hemp, 2007). Police work has traditionally been a man's realm. Women have faced obstacles, resistance, and exploitation whenever they have entered traditionally "male" professions. However, few professions have faced more adamant opposition to entry on legal, organizational, informal, and interpersonal levels than law enforcement (Martin, 1980).

Police work is seen from an alternate viewpoint by female cops. However, they share some of the viewpoints of their male coworkers on chosen occupations and other subjects (Fielding & Fielding, 1992). Women are at extra risk for any job related to work overload, staff shortages, a lack of senior staff support, and poor communication. These are common drivers of stress in education (Cox et al., 1988), nursing, and management (Davidson & Cooper, 1983).

### **Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to understand the present social and departmental attitudes toward Women Police officers in metropolitan area. On the other hand, specific objectives are being accounted for to understand the present social and departmental attitudes towards female police in Bangladesh while analyzing the existing job environment of female police in Bangladesh. A review of the existing literature has identified variables such as job-centred complications, social attitudes toward female police officers, and personal factors under coverage related to police departments.

## METHODOLOGY

This study has been carried out through applying an exploratory qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach allows us to learn more about the existing perceptions towards female police officers among the police officers in Metropolitan Police, Bangladesh. All the non-cadre female police members of the Sylhet metropolitan area are the population of the study. For conducting in-depth interviews, all the field units of Sylhet Metropolitan Police (SMP), such as the Detective Branch (DB), Special Branch (SB), Criminal Investigation Department (CID), and Thana (police stations) from Sylhet Metropolitan Police, were included in the study. The 13 respondents were selected using the judgmental/purposive sampling method. Female police officials are not available in every unit of the police department. So, purposive sampling has been used to conduct the study. Sylhet Metropolitan Police has a small number of female employees on their board; the researcher tried to reach as many respondents as possible, but whenever data came out repeatedly, the researcher stopped interviewing.

Data was collected through in-depth interviews. Interviews were taken using a semi-structured questionnaire. The independent variables were used to create a checklist. While collecting data from the field units, the researcher noted the issues related to departmental factors associated with female police officials. The researcher's handwritten notes were used to identify the issues addressed in the findings. After transcription of the audio and field notes, several themes and sub-themes were generated based on the research objectives of this study. So, the data collected from the police officials have been analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was used to examine women's responses and identify the significant themes in their responses. The analysis began with numerous readings of the interview transcripts, which were then highlighted to find the initial codes relevant to the critical focuses mentioned in the literature review. Following the coding stage, the codes were organized into highly plausible themes.

The Sylhet Metropolitan Police gave official permission for the study to be carried out. Due to the study's focus on female police officers in Bangladesh, the respondents were asked several extremely sensitive and private questions, some of which would have been harmful to their future employment prospects. Their identities were kept completely confidential to protect the respondents' privacy and job security. According to the convenience of the respondents, the interview location and time slot were set. All of the data was properly gathered and thoroughly examined. To conduct the study, necessary ethical issues have been maintained properly. However, one of the limitations of this study is a small sample size as the number of women police is not available in the Sylhet Metropolitan area.

**RESULT/FINDINGS**

Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with the female police members of Sylhet Metropolitan areas, and the data were analyzed based on the objectives of this study. Women police officials have emphasized various aspects of challenges during their career life. Most of the female members remain unsatisfied with maternity leave; however, they are satisfied with other aspects of their careers, such as social dignity, economic autonomy, and family development. Although women face various challenges in inter-departmental relations, the progress of women is praiseworthy as compared to earlier. The participation of women in the police was significantly less in the past. On the other hand, they faced various struggles and hurdles to continue their job in Bangladesh.

<b>Issues need to be addressed</b>	
Job centered complications	Duty centered difficulties
	Existing facilities within the department
	Presence of Women Officials in police units and posts
Social attitude and Personal factors	Motivation
	Diverse perspective
	General people’s attitude
	Physical capacity
	Family support

The interview results have been organized into three sections. The first section describes the job-centered complications of women police officers. The second section states social attitudes toward women police. The third section has analyzed the personal factors of women police, physical capacity-related difficulties and the sacrificing features of female cops are thoroughly reviewed here.

**Job centered complications for Female police officials**

<b>Job centered complications for Female Police Officials</b>	Sentry duty of the constables
	Day-care facilities
	Maternal leave
	Toilet facilities during menstrual period
	Ratio of Female Officer-in-charge

### **Sentry duty appears to be frantic for lady constables**

A person who is employed at the gate of the police station or unit is called a sentry. Generally, more than one constable performs this duty for 2 hours by getting rest for 4 hours of every 24 hours duty schedule. This task appears hazardous and unsuitable for women police as it seriously affects the healthy life. A female constable in this research said:

*Sentry duty puts a lot of pressure on our body. When I go to rest after finishing my duty, my tension works so much that I must go back to work after a while.*

Many officers in this research urged against imposing this type of duty on a woman as it is hardly bearable for them. Sentry duty seems very stressful for women police as they have little time for rest, and they have to spend very worried time because they think that they need to return to duty shortly. So, most of the respondents in this study expressed that it is better not to have sentry duty for women.

### **Scarcity of daycare facilities**

Daycare services are important for female members with children; however, most police stations or units lack daycare centres. They seem unable to engage in their duties because of the lack of daycare facilities and tend to be always anxious. Due to the lack of daycare facilities, many female members placed their children with relatives. Parents or sisters should be brought from their homes to care for their children.

In this context, a constable revealed her concerns:

*Most of the female police need to bring their sister and mother to look after their house. So that they can leave their baby with them. Nobody wants to bring mother or sister from the outskirts, but they have to do so because there is no daycare center.*

Many mothers bring their children to duty and nurture the kid there. They would not have to take their child to the duty post if there were a daycare facility. They could have done their duty with more relaxation if they had benefited from daycare services.

### **Unsatisfactory maternal leave**

According to the prevailing rules of the Government of Bangladesh, all female government employees are supposed to get maternity leave for six months. Female members of the police are no exception. However, nearly all police officers have stated that the six-month vacation is insufficient. Police members must be on-duty 24



hours a day, so it is often seen that pregnant policewomen take leave earlier due to the pressure of duty. In this case, their leave is inadequate after the birth of the child. Many people can be heard leaving their children at home at a young age and doing their duty. However, since the police job is more exceptional than other jobs, the child cannot get enough affection from the mother. Maternity leave for police officers has been curtailed in several ways. In this regard, one Constable said:

*I had to do my duty with a baby in the womb, I had to take the promotion test then. I didn't take the leave earlier. I also had to leave the baby while breastfeeding and come to duty after maternal leave. If I have 6 months off, the baby is at most 6 months old, but it is very difficult to feed my baby.*

Although women officials have claimed they do not have to face any administrative complications to get maternity leave, senior officials cooperate to get it easily. Nevertheless, most female officers want maternity leave to be increased. Most research respondents said it would have been better if maternity leave was one year. Many are seen not going on vacation at the right time to spend more time later, but many get sick in this scenario. So, it would have been nice if the leave was one year instead of 6 months.

### **Toilet-centred troubles during menstrual period**

Many police units need separate toilets for men and women. Although the situation is different now, distinct toilets for men and women are visible in more units than before. However, there still needs to be more efficiency in this concern. Separate toilets are an important issue for women during the menstrual period. This facility is only available sometimes when working inside the police station or unit; again, the toilet becomes a major concern for women police while outside duty. The toilet crisis is a big problem. Sometimes women officials need to use other departmental toilets for urgency.

### **The dearth of female Officer-in-Charge (OC)**

The officer in charge, abbreviated as OC, is the person in control of a police station. Although the presence of women police officers in various police positions, large and small, is visible, Bangladesh has a tiny number of female OC. Respondents point out that they have never had the experience of working under a female OC. There are many reasons for this. Senior officials generally do not want to give the responsibility of an OC to a woman because they are yet to be capable of a stressful job like performing such stressful duties. It has been seen that the women inspectors themselves want to avoid taking charge of the police station. One of the constables told her way:

*I have worked under the female inspector; I have seen the inspector(investigation), but I have not found the female OC yet. Inspector(investigation) sir didn't want to be OC because of her family. It is often seen that women do not want to take the responsibility of OC.*

The role of the officer in charge (OC) entails overseeing a police station's operations. While women police officers hold various positions across different levels within the police force, the number of female OCs in Bangladesh remains notably small. Respondents reveal that they have not encountered working under a female OC. Several factors contribute to this situation. Higher-ranking officials typically hesitate to assign women to the OC role due to concerns about their ability to handle the demanding and stressful responsibilities associated with it. Additionally, some female inspectors themselves express reluctance to assume OC duties. This phenomenon reflects a common trend where women are often disinclined to take on the OC's responsibilities.

**Social attitudes towards Female police officials**

<b>Social attitudes towards Female police officials</b>	Motivation to become a police official
	Diverse perspective towards women police
	Sexual harassment
	General people’s attitude

**Motivation for becoming a female police officer**

The road is smoother for women than for men to join the police. Family and society do not yet consider police jobs to apply to women. The patriarchal structure of society is the biggest hindrance in this case. So, women must carry different barriers to come to the police. In many cases, it is seen that women must come to the police with various struggles, contumacy, and love for the country. A respondent expressed her perseverance to come to the police,

*No one supported me in coming to the police. I have insisted on myself. My uncle served in the army, but he stopped talking to me, and my father stopped talking. I didn't eat for 15 days; I didn't eat anything. Later, everyone was forced to agree.*

Many constables, alongside other field-level officials, caught that while it is easy for men to get a job, it is difficult for women. Many of them articulated that, no matter what men do, the family does not care so much. However, in the case of women, one must consider society; they need to think about what people will say. Women used to represent



just a tiny percentage of the police force. The situation is steadily improving, and women are increasingly joining the police force. Rising participation of women in police department will surely increase as the country's women eventually triumph in every sector.

### **Seeing women from a diverse perspective**

Women's presence in the workplace once was scarce. Women are gradually gaining prominence in all sectors because of this predicament. However, due to the patriarchal social structure, women are not treated with respect in many areas of society, and various remarks about women are heard even among the public. Women officers have similar experiences inside the police agency. Certain people have complained that male police officers do not pay female authorities adequate respect on many occasions. In this regard, an Assistant Sub-Inspector said:

*All male colleagues will not be the same for you. Some of the male constables used to look at me with cold stares, I got promotions earlier than them and later they didn't want to address me as sir.*

The male colleagues and their perceptions towards women police are a challenge because a male constable doesn't want to call female police sir because of being a woman; such incidents are seen in many cases. Again, it cannot be asserted that women are treated differently in every circumstance. Many female members report that their colleagues and bosses pay close attention to their welfare. Senior officials are always sincere when it comes to approaching them on any issue.

### **The stink of sexual harassment**

According to the literature analysis, sexual harassment of female police officers is not unusual in developing countries. According to an internal report of The Police Department, about 40 per cent testified that female police members get harassed within the department (Ajker Patrika, 2021). Many respondents just mentioned the issue of sexual harassment, but they no longer prefer to talk. When it comes to sexual harassment, respondents no longer want to talk about it. As a result, it reeks of sexual harassment.

The female members have maintained the utmost level of secrecy on this matter. Most female members report that sexual harassment exists, but no one speaks specifically about it. A female constable said:

*There is the existence of sexual harassment, it happens in many ways in many places. But never with me.*

Although many respondents alluded to the presence of sexual harassment, they often

refrain from discussing it openly. The topic of sexual harassment has become a sensitive and avoided subject. Consequently, a sense of pervasive sexual harassment pervades the environment. Female police members maintain a high level of secrecy around this matter. While most acknowledge the existence of sexual harassment, they tend to avoid providing specific details. A female constable expressed this sentiment, stating that while sexual harassment is indeed present and manifests in various forms and places, she personally has not experienced it.

**General people's attitude toward women police uniforms**

Because the police are a law enforcement agency (The Police Act, 1861), they must wear specific uniforms while performing their responsibilities. Police uniforms are an exception to the norms for traditional women in Bangladesh, and in many circumstances, they are considered unsuitable by the public. Many female members claimed to have encountered various challenges due to their outfits. In this topic, an Assistant Sub-Inspector said:

*There is a lot of trouble with clothes, the public is abusive. Someone from the general people told me nastily, 'How can a woman be a cop? See her outfit!' People cannot accept that we work with shirts and pants as a girl. People look at us very badly.*

Although there are some general problems, the female members are still happy with their clothes even though the general people are criticizing them for wearing shirts and pants. They're happy with their outfit because they think it simplifies their assigned work and duty. A female constable said:

*If you don't have such clothes, you can't work properly. You can't run around wearing a saree, this is the right dress for you to run and move.*

In a Muslim-majority country, women members may wear the hijab with their certain clothing by getting permission from higher authority. In addition, women working in the police station get a saree; they can wear it for different duties. So, all in all, the women members are satisfied with their outfits.

**Personal factors of Female Police**

<b>Personal factors of Female police</b>	Difficulties related to physical capacities
	Sacrificing amenities for the family

### **Difficulties related to physical capacity**

Police members ought to perform various duties regularly. They must perform everything from patrol duty to sentry duty. Police members are not allowed to enjoy any weekly leave and must be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Although the male members are physically able, the females are slightly behind in this courtesy. The confession was heard from a female constable:

*If you talk about our physical ability as compared to men, then as a girl I am lagging behind in many ways because of my physical ability. The work that men can do quickly or easily will not be so easy for me.*

Police officers are tasked with a range of responsibilities that span from regular patrols to sentry duties. Their commitment extends to being available round the clock, without the luxury of weekly leaves. This demanding schedule applies equally to both male and female police members. However, there's a recognition that while male members are generally more physically capable, female members might face some challenges in this aspect. Several aspirants, however, have stated that senior officers assign them to duty, considering their physical fitness and ability.

### **Sacrificing amenities for family**

For police officers, there are prospects for advancement and missions. One must complete the exam to take advantage of these benefits, and only qualified candidates are given the mission and promotion. So many times, despite having credentials and chances, female police officers are denied benefits because they are concerned about their families. Sometimes people think of obstacles as simply being women in the family. They are uncomfortable because of their husband or family. An Assistant Sub-Inspector said that despite the qualifications, talent, and hard work, the results were not forthcoming:

*I passed the test for UN Mission for the very first time. But my husband didn't let me go, he was worried about me. What to do there or how to run everything - do not let so much to think.*

Opportunities for advancement and assignments exist within the police force, typically requiring candidates to pass exams for eligibility. However, access to these benefits is selective, and only those who meet the criteria are offered promotions or special assignments. Unfortunately, female police officers often face denial of these opportunities due to concerns related to their families. The perceived obstacles sometimes stem from traditional gender roles within the family. Family-related discomfort, particularly concerning husbands or family dynamics, can hinder female officers from pursuing these avenues.

## DISCUSSION

The study's findings convincingly demonstrate how several complex elements influence social and organizational perceptions of women police in Bangladesh. In the Bangladesh police, women began their journey in the white dress, and they have come a long way since starting their journey. They now hold a relatively stronger position and greater competence both within the police force and across the country. The percentage of female employees in the police department increased from 4.63% in 2013 to 7.1% in 2022 (Bangladesh Police Women's Network, 2022). So, the gradual rise in the number of women working in the police force in Bangladesh certainly demonstrates the stronger position of women in that country.

Women in Bangladeshi society always accept sacrifices more readily than men. There is no exception in the case of women members of the Bangladesh police. Due to the family and social context, they must make many sacrifices, and it is not always possible for them to take advantage of institutional facilities for their family concerns. All these legacies are indicated in a different report on the context of India (Nataranjan, 2008). Women have had a difficult time since joining the police because the social context is not used to seeing women in the police force. At the same time, the country's society and people have not grasped the concept of accepting women's police uniforms. Overall, society continues to see women police from a diverse set of perspectives. A study conducted by Bell (1982) showed a different aspect in this context: society usually supports female cops.

No police station in Bangladesh has a woman officer-in-charge (OC) yet. In the history of women police, Bangladesh has not yet seen a woman OC, which is undoubtedly institutional incompetence. There are insufficient daycare centres, and female employees are dissatisfied with their maternity leave. Another study by Prenzler (2010) found similar evidences regarding maternal leave. There is also a negative attitude among the women members regarding sentry duty. But a study by Belknap (1996) showed that women used to have administrative duties like deskwork, indicating a diverse situation with the present study. All these problems create an unfavourable situation for women police institutionally. Approaches to sexual harassment of female members are unclear; they are hesitant to discuss it as it is not considered positive in society. A study by Martin (1980) found similar results when looking for sexual harassment in female police officers.

Negative perceptions of women police are socially created; however, such perceptions are not recognized by the existing social norms and values. It is a matter of hope that the perceptions have changed positively. Therefore, the number of women police and their activities has developed.

This study indicates that there has been a progress in the position of women within

police departments. However, various factors mentioned in this study hinder the better working condition of female police officers. The following suggestions may improve the working conditions of female police:

- Proportionate recruitment of women in every police unit and the presence of all posts is desirable so that the representation of women police in each unit will be enhanced.
- The duration of maternity leave should be increased from 6 months to 1 year. As a result, women police officials will get more time to look after their children.
- Every unit should have a daycare facility. Mothers do not have to worry about their kids while working if the daycare facilities are adequate.
- Having separate bathroom facilities for men and women in each unit is highly desirable.

Addressing these critical concerned issues could significantly contribute to the improvement of working conditions and job satisfaction for women in the police force.

## CONCLUSION

The study shows that women in police departments are in a better position than previously. But for many factors, female police cannot continue focusing on their work. In that situation, certain details can be highlighted. The respect and attention that female police officers have for their work will significantly grow if the authorities pay strict attention to all these issues. Women are equally skilled at indoor and outdoor employment; the most notable proof is the respectable stride of women police. Women police officers are always working to uphold the rule of law equally with males. As a result, women are increasingly contributing to the Bangladesh Police in all areas. In some situations, women need more particular treatment than males. These amenities are frequently only deemed sufficient in some flats. The appeal and passion for women working in law enforcement will rise if all these needs are addressed to the greatest extent possible. Additionally, the equal rights of women and men should remain intact within the Bangladesh Police by implementing a few policies, such as day-care facilities in every unit, rotational duty hours for every employee and increasing maternity leave for women and creating a separate manual for women police.

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