

## Lived Experiences of Women Police Officers: A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

Women police officers bring diverse perspectives and valuable skills to law enforcement, enhancing the effectiveness and fairness of policing. This research explored the lived experiences of women police officers in one of the police stations in Misamis Occidental. This study utilized a qualitative approach using the phenomenological research design. The study focused on the lived experiences of ten (10) women police officers from Misamis Occidental. They were selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria: must be a female police officer; with a minimum of three years of service; and willingness to participate. A face-to-face interview was used to gather data. Analysis of the response was done through Moustaka's transcendental phenomenology. The research identified five themes emerged from the responses of the participants, these were: Navigating Gender Dynamics in Law Enforcement, Balancing Personal and Professional Life, Seeking Recognition and Career Advancement, Nurturing Inclusive Work Environments, and Advocating for Gender Equality and Representation. The study emphasizes the importance of mentorship programs, gender-sensitive policies, and organizational support in fostering an inclusive work environment, programs to foster a more inclusive and supportive work environment. This research contributes to the broader understanding of gender dynamics in policing and offers actionable recommendations for creating a more supportive and equitable law enforcement landscape. Implementing gender-inclusive policies, enhancing work-life balance through flexible scheduling and family support, and establishing robust mentorship programs supports and empowers women in law enforcement.

**Keywords:** Balance; Career; Experiences; Enforcement; Gender dynamics; Lived experiences; Mentorship; Policing; Women officers; Work-life.

### 1. Introduction

Women police officers play vital roles in law enforcement, contributing diverse perspectives and skills to the field (Diaz & Nuño, 2021). Women officers often excel in communication, empathy, and de-escalation techniques which are crucial in diffusing tense situations and minimizing the use of force (Milam, 2023). Women have always shown their strength, resiliency, and relentless dedication for change everywhere in the world throughout history. Women have continuously demonstrated their ability to be instruments of positive change, whether it is by nurturing families, molding the minds of future generation, or leading the way in revolutionary developments in politics, arts, science, and many other fields (Ahmed et al., 2023). The diverse contributions of women to society are significant and should not be overlooked or underestimated.

In the field of law enforcement, women police officers are essential as they add to the diversity and efficiency of police forces (Gonzalez et al., 2022). Women policing, or women in law enforcement, pertains to the involvement, representation, and participation of women in law enforcement and policing (Ahmed et al., 2023). They also carry out wide range of duties and responsibilities in law enforcement, alongside male police officers. When women police officers actively participate in law enforcement, it improves trust in the community, improve effectiveness in operation, and reduce corruption (Sharma, 2022). Women in law enforcement are crucial for the success and development of a department (Uvalle, 2021).

Given the diversity of communities, having women in law enforcement helps make sure that they can help the needs of society. The presence of women police officers is important especially in addressing sexual and gender-based violence as they improve the overall effectiveness of law enforcement in dealing with these issues

(Miller & Segal, 2019). Women officers are often more effective in handling crimes against children because they can emotionally relate and bring nurturing characteristics to the situation. Women are natural nurturers because of their motherly instincts, and they tend to be more caring through compassion and emotions (Boyd, 2022).

Before, women are still underrepresented in law enforcement despite numerous studies showing that women officers have higher success rates in responding to domestic abuse calls, use a lesser amount of force, and receive fewer complaints from the public than male officers (Martz, 2021). However, recently, more and more women are joining in policing around the world. They are taking in important roles in law enforcement, making police forces more diverse and dynamic (Ahmed et al., 2023). This shift shows that people are realizing how important it is to have gender diversity in law enforcement which presents positive impact on promoting safety, building trust, and effectively help tackle the complex issues we face in the society.

In the Philippines, the Philippine National Police (PNP) has been working more closely with the Commission on Women to boost its gender mainstreaming, aiming to have more female officers. In September 2019, the PNP established the first all-women police station in Maria town, Siquijor province. By the next year, all the officers at the police community precinct of Bonifacio Global City were women. Also in 2019, the House of Representatives had passed a bill aiming to improve gender mainstreaming by raising the quota for female police officers to 20 percent (Cabalza, 2022).

The purpose of this study was to have a better understanding of the problems women encounter and how they overcame those problems within the field of law enforcement. By exploring their lived experiences, this research aimed to promote gender equity and thereby increasing diversity within the police force. As women progress in police divisions, it becomes evident that female officers bring specific skills and qualities to the profession (Neely, 2019). Additionally, this study sought to highlight how women officers excel in areas such as communication, and community engagement, leading to improvements in policing practices. The researchers conducted this study due to a notable gap in the existing literature regarding the lived experiences of women police officers in Misamis Occidental. Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of gender diversity in law enforcement and the crucial contributions women make into policing, there is still a lack of research focusing on this specific demographic within the region. By delving into the experiences of women police officers in Misamis Occidental, this study aimed to provide valuable insights to the broader discussion on gender and policing.

The significance of this study was to enhance awareness and education among the target audience, which may include current law enforcement officers or future female recruits. As future law enforcers, this study will provide them with a better understanding of their future job and help them prepare for the challenges they might face when they start working. This study aimed to inspire positive changes in law enforcement practices and create a more supportive environment for women officers in Misamis Occidental.

## 2. Material and Methods

In this study, a phenomenological approach was employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the different experiences, accomplishments, and difficulties encountered by women who work in uniform, especially in the police force. It is a type of qualitative research that focuses on the experiential and lived aspects of human life

(Fuster Guillen, 2019). The phenomenological approach in research helped us understand human experiences by focusing on how individuals perceive and interpret their own lives. It helped us understand the significance of individuals' lived experiences, delving into what they have experienced, and emphasizing their experience of a phenomenon. In order to collect rich and detailed narratives about the lived experiences of women in uniform, this qualitative research included interviews.

The study was conducted in one of the police stations in Misamis Occidental. The Province of Misamis Occidental is located in the region of Northern Mindanao in the Philippines. Its capital is the city of Oroquieta. The province borders Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur to the west and is separated from Lanao del Norte by Panguil Bay to the south and Iligan Bay to the east. The research was conducted in Misamis Occidental with a total inhabitant of 140,334 as determined by the 2020 Census and a total land area of 65.62 sq mi.

The participants of this study were women police officers and the data arrived saturation in 10 participants. Purposive sampling was used in choosing the participants. The selection was based on the following criteria: 1) female police officer; 2) must have at least three (3) years of experience; and 4) willing to participate in the study.

The study involved using an interview guide administered to the women police officers of one of the stations in Misamis Occidental who served research participants to collect information. The researchers devised their own interview guide questions approved by the panel members. The instrument consisted opening questions aimed at gathering the necessary profile information from the participants, followed by the core questions, and concluding with closing questions. Additionally, during the interviews, the researchers recorded the conversations to aid in future reference during the data interpretation process.

Before the researchers conducted the interview with the identified participants, the researchers asked permission first, from the Dean of the College of Criminology department and from the Adviser of this subject allowing the researchers to pursue the study and to conduct the interview. Once the approval was obtained, the researchers asked permission first from the Officer-in-Charge of one of the PNP stations in Misamis Occidental, allowing them to conduct the study within their respectable station. After obtaining the necessary permissions, the researchers identified the participants of the study. PNP women officers from various positions, ranks, age and years of service was chosen from a broad pool of participants through purposive sampling. Additionally, an interview guide with open-ended questions was created. Participants were given their informed consent before each interview, stressing the value of privacy and confidentiality. With the participants' permission, audio recordings of the interviews were created. To verify the validity and breadth of the findings, thematic analysis was done to the transcribed interview data together with member verification and data saturation considerations. All stages of the study process were conducted in accordance with ethical principles and reflexivity.

The research began by seeking approval from the appropriate authority, ensuring that the study adheres to established ethical guidelines and standards. This study raised ethical considerations that revolved around the principles of respect, confidentiality, and participant well-being. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, researchers ensured that the dignity and privacy of the women participating in the study are safeguarded throughout the inquiry process. The researcher followed the guidelines outlined in the Republic Act No. 10173

known as the “Data Privacy Act of 2012”. Informed consent becomes paramount, with participants fully understanding the purpose, potential risks, and benefits of their involvement. Additionally, the researchers adopted measures to protect the anonymity of the women, especially considering the potential impact on their professional and personal lives. Frequent oversight and ethical evaluations are essential to uphold the integrity and responsibility of the research process, ensuring that it aligns with ethical standards and the well-being of the participants.

This study employed the transcendental phenomenology technique developed by Moustakas (1994) for data analysis. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed according to Moustakas' method, following these steps: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizontalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

Bracketing was a technique used to reduce the influence of preconceived notions and biases before a study begins. It involved setting aside judgments and biases. This led to an in-depth investigation from the choice of topic and population, through the design of interviews, to the collection and interpretation of data, and finally to the dissemination of research findings.

Horizontalization refers to listing all verbatim expressions relevant to the study. Initially, researchers treated all statements with equal importance. Then, any statements that are irrelevant, repetitive, overlapping, or beyond the study's scope are disregarded. The remaining statements, known as horizons, are considered meaningful parts of the phenomenon. Moustakas noted that "Horizons are infinite" and described horizontalization as an ongoing process (Moustakas, 1994).

Clustering was the next step in drawing inferences from the study. It involved condensing experiences into invariant horizons, developing core themes, and validating these horizons using various data sources. Researchers grouped statements into themes, ensuring each theme had a singular meaning when reduced to horizons. To validate the invariant horizons, researchers reviewed findings from other studies using different methods like observation, field notes, focus groups, and related literature. This validation was crucial for ensuring the accuracy and clarity of the representations.

Textural description details how participants perceive the phenomenon. To create this description, researchers used verbatim excerpts from interviews and narrated the meaning units derived from themes. Structural description, or the explanation of how the phenomenon occurred, incorporated imaginative variation—a creative perspective—to enhance the textual description.

In the textural-structural synthesis process, researchers combined each participant's meaning units into a composite textural and structural description shared by all participants. This narrative, written in the third person, aimed to encapsulate the essence of the phenomenon's experience, achieving the primary goal of Moustakas' method.

### 3. Results and Discussions

This part presented the different themes that were derived from the different responses of the participants of the study during the conduct of the interview. The study explored the lived experiences of PNP women officers in one

of the stations in Misamis Occidental using qualitative approach through Moustaka's transcendental phenomenology and participated by 10 selected women police officers. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. The selection was based on the following criteria: must be a female police officer; have an experience of at least three years in service; and willingness to participate in the study.

### **3.1. Profile of the Participant**

The participants that the researchers selected being a women police officer and having at least three years in service work experience. These women police officers are selected based on their time availability from their work.

Furthermore, the study participants' rank varied from Police Corporal to Police Staff Sergeant and has a length of service from 7 to 10 years according to their responses.

### **3.2. Navigating Gender Dynamics in Law Enforcement**

In the complex landscape of law enforcement, gender dynamics play a significant role in shaping officers' experiences (Silvestri & Tong, 2022). This theme explores the multifaceted challenges and triumphs faced by women handling societal perceptions and cultural expectations within the realm of law enforcement. The responses from participants P1, P3, P6, and P7 offer valuable insights into the diverse challenges and experiences encountered by women in law enforcement. P1 discusses the difficulty of winning community trust amid cultural differences, while P3 emphasizes the importance of clear and empathetic communication for female officers. P6 addresses the issue of gender discrimination and the stereotype of female officers being perceived as weak, and P7 acknowledges the intricate dynamics of gender within law enforcement, describing it as both challenging and rewarding. These shared perspectives highlight the multifaceted nature of gender-related challenges within the field, underscoring the nuanced experiences of women in uniform. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the conduct of the interview:

*"It's difficult for us to win their hearts because there are many people with different traditions and cultures." (P1)*

*"As a police officer especially as a woman, for me, the ability to communicate clearly and empathetically is a must..." (P3)*

*"Some people cannot be pleased, especially regarding gender discrimination. They might claim that female police officers are weak." (P6)*

*"Navigating through the intricate dynamics of gender in the law enforcement community has been both challenging and rewarding." (P7)*

The responses provided by participants shed light on the intricate dynamics of gender within the law enforcement domain, unveiling a nuanced landscape where women grapple with multifaceted challenges in their professional undertakings. The struggle to foster trust and acceptance among diverse communities emphasizes the complexities inherent in policing, demanding officers, especially women, to adeptly navigate through varying traditions, cultural norms, and societal expectations (Montgomery, 2023). This journey toward building trust often entails

confronting entrenched stereotypes and biases, requiring female officers to employ not only their professional acumen but also their interpersonal skills to bridge divides and establish meaningful connections (Babel-Smith, 2020).

Moreover, the acknowledgment of gender discrimination serves as a poignant reminder of the persistent barriers encountered by women in law enforcement, reflecting broader societal inequities and systemic biases (Wilson, 2019). From the perception of inherent weakness to the insidious nature of institutional discrimination, these challenges emphasize the imperative for profound structural reforms and cultural shifts within policing organizations (Butts-LaMore, 2022). Embracing inclusivity, promoting diversity, and fostering environments where women officers feel valued, supported, and empowered are critical steps toward dismantling these barriers and cultivating an equitable and inclusive law enforcement landscape (Muff, 2021). By championing gender equality and fostering environments where all officers, regardless of gender, can thrive and contribute meaningfully, law enforcement agencies can not only enhance their effectiveness but also uphold their commitment to justice and public service (Bishu & Headley, 2020).

The insights from the participants' responses emphasize the urgent need for law enforcement agencies to address gender dynamics within their ranks. Failure to recognize and mitigate the challenges faced by female officers can perpetuate systemic inequalities and hinder organizational effectiveness. To this end, agencies must prioritize initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity, promoting diversity, and addressing gender-based discrimination. Implementing comprehensive training programs, instituting equitable policies, and establishing support mechanisms tailored to the unique needs of women in law enforcement are essential steps toward creating more equitable and supportive work environments. By embracing gender equality as a fundamental principle and empowering female officers to thrive and advance within their organizations, law enforcement agencies can enhance their overall effectiveness and better serve the communities they are sworn to protect.

This theme highlights the persistent biases and stereotypes faced by women police officers. It emphasizes the systemic barriers to their professional growth and effectiveness, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to promote gender equality. Addressing these issues is crucial for creating an inclusive work environment, allowing all officers to perform their best, free from discrimination and bias.

### **3.3. Balancing Personal and Professional Life**

Handling the delicate balance between personal obligations and professional responsibilities is a pervasive challenge faced by many individuals, particularly those in demanding careers such as law enforcement (El Sayed et al., 2024). This theme delves into the lived experiences of women in uniform as they navigate the intricate dynamics of balancing personal well-being with the demands of their profession. The participants, particularly P2, P5, and P8, showed a pervasive challenge of maintaining a work-life balance while serving in law enforcement. They highlighted the delicate balance they must maintain between their personal and professional lives, emphasizing the need to compartmentalize personal issues from their duties on the job. These responses provide insight into the struggles faced by women in uniform as they navigate the complexities of their roles, juggling the demands of their profession with their personal responsibilities and well-being.

These are evident in the responses of the participants during the conduct of the interview:

*"One of the challenges that we are facing is about work-life balance." (P2)*

*"When you are having problems at home, you can't bring that to the work station. It is so difficult because as a human being and also a police officer, you need to find a way so that your personal problems won't affect your work." (P5)*

*"Women in uniform share their struggles of juggling the demands of their profession with their personal lives, highlighting the delicate balance they must maintain." (P8)*

Managing the intricate terrain of work-life balance is a formidable challenge faced by many women in law enforcement (Lillard, 2020). Research indicates that the demanding nature of police work often blurs the boundaries between personal and professional life, leading to heightened stress and burnout among officers (Griffin & Sun, 2022). Studies suggest that women, in particular, may experience additional pressure due to societal expectations regarding their roles both at home and in the workplace (Uddin, 2021; Parlak et al., 2021). The struggle to maintain equilibrium between fulfilling familial obligations and meeting the rigorous demands of law enforcement can take a toll on their mental and emotional well-being (Casas, 2021). Furthermore, the hierarchical and male-dominated culture within police organizations may exacerbate these challenges, creating barriers to achieving a satisfactory work-life balance (Keddie, 2023).

Moreover, the pervasive nature of work-related stressors can have detrimental effects on various aspects of officers' lives (Perez-Floriano & Gonzalez, 2019). Studies have shown that persistent exposure to high levels of stress can lead to adverse health outcomes, including increased risk of cardiovascular disease, depression, and anxiety disorders (Hahad et al., 2019; Dar et al., 2019). The cumulative impact of chronic stressors may also manifest in strained interpersonal relationships, both within the family unit and among colleagues (Santini et al. 2021). Furthermore, the lack of institutional support and resources tailored to address the unique needs of women in law enforcement further complicates their ability to achieve work-life balance (DeCruise, 2020). Without adequate support structures in place, female officers may find themselves grappling with feelings of isolation and disillusionment, exacerbating the challenges they face in managing the complexities of their dual roles (Lillard, 2020).

The findings emphasized the pressing need for law enforcement agencies to implement comprehensive policies and support mechanisms aimed at promoting work-life balance, particularly for women officers. Failure to address these challenges may lead to heightened levels of stress, burnout, and attrition among female personnel, ultimately compromising organizational effectiveness and morale (Chambers-Holder, 2019). Moreover, the implications extend beyond individual officers to the broader community, as officers struggling to balance personal and professional responsibilities may experience diminished job performance and compromised public safety outcomes (Burke, 2020). Thus, prioritizing initiatives that foster a supportive work environment, offer flexible scheduling options, and provide access to mental health resources is imperative for ensuring the well-being and retention of women in law enforcement roles (Ahmed et al., 2023).

Balancing personal and professional life is a significant theme highlighting the unique struggles women officers face in managing dual roles. It emphasizes the personal sacrifices and stress of police work, emphasizing the need for supportive policies to facilitate work-life balance. Addressing these challenges can improve job satisfaction, reduce burnout, and enhance the well-being and performance of women officers.

### **3.4. Seeking Recognition and Career Advancement**

In the world of law enforcement, many women are eager for recognition and chances to move up in their careers (Du Plessis et al., 2021). As they navigate the complexities of organizational dynamics, these women strive for acknowledgment of their contributions and opportunities for professional growth (Cosentino et al., 2021). The statements from participants 2, 3, and 7 entail a shared theme of the importance of recognition and appreciation within the law enforcement community, particularly for women. They highlight how receiving awards and commendations during ceremonies not only boosts morale but also instills a sense of inner strength and validation among female officers. The acknowledgment of their achievements not only benefits individual officers but also has a broader impact, inspiring and uplifting the morale of all women within the organization. This collective recognition fosters a supportive and empowering environment that encourages women to continue striving for excellence in their careers. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the conduct of the interview:

*"The PNP organization recognizes our achievements though giving us awards and commendations during raising flag ceremony." (P2)*

*"It boosts my morale and helps me a lot to gain a bunch of inner strength when being recognized on stage in front of the team and in public because of our accomplishments we had successfully made." (P3)*

*"Recognizing women's success boosts the morale of all women in the PNP organization." (P7)*

In law enforcement, seeking recognition and career advancement, particularly for women, is essential for fostering a sense of inclusion and professional growth within the organization (Bishu & Headley, 2020). Research suggests that acknowledgment of achievements through awards and commendations can significantly impact an individual's morale and motivation (Hassan & Jiang, 2021). When organizations implement recognition programs that highlight the accomplishments of women officers, it not only validates their contributions but also reinforces their sense of belonging and value within the workforce. Furthermore, such recognition serves as a powerful tool for inspiring other female officers to strive for excellence and pursue career advancement opportunities. Studies have shown that when women feel recognized and appreciated in their roles, they are more likely to remain engaged and committed to their careers, leading to greater job satisfaction and retention rates (Irabor & Okolie, 2019; Waltz et al., 2020). Therefore, creating a culture of recognition and appreciation within law enforcement agencies is crucial for promoting gender equality and supporting the professional development of women officers (Newton & Huppatz, 2020).

Moreover, recognition and career advancement initiatives play a vital role in addressing gender disparities and promoting diversity within law enforcement organizations (Rigaux & Cunningham, 2021). Research indicates that



women in male-dominated professions often face barriers to career progression, including biases and stereotypes (Starks, 2021). By implementing programs that highlight the achievements of women officers and provide equal opportunities for career advancement, organizations can mitigate these challenges and create a more inclusive work environment. Additionally, recognition programs can help combat gender-based discrimination and bias by showcasing the diverse talents and contributions of female officers (Paolillo, 2021). When women see themselves represented and celebrated within the organization, they are more likely to aspire to leadership roles and pursue opportunities for advancement. Therefore, investing in recognition and career development initiatives is not only beneficial for individual officers but also for the overall diversity and effectiveness of law enforcement agencies (Hilal & Litsey, 2020).

This theme is vital as it addresses the aspirations of women police officers and highlights gaps in recognition and growth opportunities. The study emphasizes the need for structured pathways and support systems to help women achieve their career goals, leading to a motivated, competent workforce with diverse leadership to inspire future generations.

The implications of recognizing and supporting women's career advancement in law enforcement are far-reaching. By acknowledging the achievements of female officers and providing equal opportunities for career growth, organizations can cultivate a more inclusive and equitable work environment (Bishu & Headley, 2020). This not only boosts morale and job satisfaction among women officers but also enhances the overall effectiveness and diversity of law enforcement agencies. Moreover, investing in recognition and career development initiatives can help address gender disparities and biases within the profession, ultimately contributing to improved retention rates and better community relations (Chuang, 2019). Overall, prioritizing the recognition and advancement of women in law enforcement is not only a matter of equity but also essential for ensuring the success and sustainability of policing efforts (Clinkinbeard & Rief, 2022).

### **3.5. Nurturing Inclusive Work Environments**

In the dynamic landscape of law enforcement, the imperative to nurture inclusive work environments emerges as paramount, fostering a culture of equity, effectiveness, trust, collaboration, and resilience within organizations (Stamatakis, 2024). Participants like P4 and P5 talk about how mentorship programs are important for helping both men and women grow in their careers in law enforcement. They, along with P8, agree that it is essential to give everyone a fair chance to succeed, no matter their gender. They also mention that it is not easy and needs many different ways to make sure everyone feels included and valued at work. This shows that they believe in programs like mentorship and special training to help everyone do well in their jobs and feel like they belong. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the conduct of the interview:

*"The PNP has implemented mentorship programs to support not just women but also men in pursuing their career aspirations and professional growth." (P4)*

*"In addressing systematic barriers to women's full participation and ensuring a level playing for career success involves a multifaceted approach..." (P5)*

*"Participants discuss initiatives aimed at fostering inclusivity, such as mentorship programs and tailored training opportunities." (P8)*

In fostering inclusive work environments, mentorship programs play a pivotal role in supporting career development and growth for both men and women in law enforcement (Wilson, 2019). These programs offer guidance, share insights, and help navigate career challenges, contributing to greater representation of women in various ranks and enhanced skills and competence. Research suggests that mentorship can be particularly beneficial for women officers, providing them with the necessary support and guidance to navigate male-dominated environments and overcome gender-specific challenges (Lavender & Todak, 2022). Moreover, mentorship programs highlight successful female officers as role models, inspiring others to aim for similar achievements (Wilson, 2019). By fostering a culture that values diversity and inclusivity through mentorship initiatives, law enforcement agencies can create an environment where women feel empowered to excel in their roles and contribute effectively to their organizations and communities (Perkins, 2023).

In addition to mentorship programs, tailored training opportunities are instrumental in nurturing inclusive work environments (Arias et al., 2019). Such training programs should be specifically designed to accommodate the particular needs and experiences of women police officers, offering guidance on managing work-life balance, managing male-dominated environments, and addressing gender biases. Research emphasized the importance of providing women officers with the necessary skills and resources to overcome challenges and succeed in their roles (Blumberg et al., 2019). Furthermore, scenario-based training exercises that simulate real-world situations can enhance confidence and preparedness among women officers, ensuring they feel equipped to handle any situation they may encounter on duty (Augustine, 2020). By investing in tailored training programs, law enforcement agencies can empower women officers to excel in their roles, enhance organizational effectiveness, and promote gender diversity and inclusivity within their ranks (Lwamba et al., 2022).

The implications of the findings suggest that law enforcement agencies need to prioritize the implementation of mentorship programs and tailored training opportunities to foster inclusive work environments for women officers. By providing guidance, support, and skills development through mentorship initiatives, agencies can empower women officers to navigate the challenges they face in male-dominated environments and overcome gender biases. Moreover, investing in tailored training programs that address the unique needs and experiences of women officers can enhance their confidence, preparedness, and effectiveness in their roles, ultimately contributing to improved organizational outcomes and greater gender diversity and inclusivity within law enforcement agencies. These initiatives have the potential to not only support the career advancement and professional growth of women officers but also strengthen organizational culture and promote equitable opportunities for all personnel (Newton & Huppatz, 2020).

Nurturing inclusive work environments reflects the broader police organizational culture, emphasizing the need for all officers to feel valued and supported. This theme highlights the benefits of mentorship programs, diversity training, and inclusive policies. Such a workplace enhances job satisfaction, morale, collaboration, and innovation, which are critical for an effective and adaptable police force.

### 3.6. Advocating for Gender Equality and Representation

In the domain of law enforcement, advocating for gender equality and representation remains a pivotal endeavor (Goss, 2020). The pursuit of gender parity within police forces is essential not only for fostering inclusive work environments but also for upholding principles of fairness and justice within society (Khosha, 2019). Participants across the spectrum, including P1, P3, P6, and P8, emphasize the pressing need to advocate for gender equality within law enforcement agencies. They articulate a shared commitment to demonstrating the equal worth and capabilities of both male and female officers, emphasizing the importance of fostering an environment where all personnel are treated with respect and given equal opportunities for success. Moreover, they highlight the significance of implementing measures and support mechanisms to address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in law enforcement. Their discussions collectively emphasize the pivotal role that women officers play in advocating for gender equality not only within their respective organizations but also within society as a whole. Through their insights and experiences, they contribute to the ongoing dialogue aimed at promoting inclusivity and equity within the law enforcement realm. These are evident in the responses of the participants during the conduct of the interview:

*"Our challenge is to demonstrate that there is equality and that both male and female police officers deserve respect and obedience." (P1)*

*"Through these measures, the organization can create a more inclusive and equitable environment where women have the same opportunities for success as their male counterparts." (P3)*

*"Women officers share their perspectives on the organizational culture and the support mechanisms in place to address their specific needs and challenges." (P6)*

*"Participants discuss their roles in advocating for gender equality within law enforcement and society at large." (P8)*

Gender equality and representation within law enforcement agencies have gained increasing attention in recent years (Miller & Segal, 2019). Research suggests that fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce is essential for enhancing organizational effectiveness and responsiveness to the communities served (Kuknor & Bhattacharya). Studies have shown that organizations with greater gender diversity tend to exhibit higher levels of innovation, problem-solving, and overall performance (Hemmert et al., 2024). Moreover, diverse teams are better equipped to understand and address the varied needs of the populations they serve, leading to improved community relations and trust (Ely & Thomas, 2020). In this context, advocating for gender equality and representation within law enforcement not only aligns with principles of fairness and social justice but also serves as a strategic imperative for enhancing organizational outcomes (Keddie, 2023).

Efforts to promote gender equality and representation in law enforcement are multifaceted, encompassing various initiatives and strategies (Okunade et al., 2023). Mentorship programs, for instance, have emerged as a valuable tool for supporting the professional development and advancement of women officers (Yu & Lee, 2021). Research indicates that mentorship can provide women with access to valuable guidance, support, and opportunities for skill

development and career growth (Mcilongo & Strydom, 2021). Additionally, organizational policies and practices aimed at mitigating gender biases and discrimination are crucial for creating an inclusive work environment where all officers feel valued and empowered to succeed (Perry et al., 2021). Furthermore, ongoing training and awareness-raising initiatives are essential for challenging stereotypes, promoting gender-sensitive practices, and fostering a culture of respect and equality within law enforcement agencies (Macharia, 2023). Through these concerted efforts, organizations can work towards realizing their commitment to gender equality and representation in law enforcement.

This theme captures the systemic change needed in law enforcement. It highlights the active role of women officers in promoting equality and fair representation. The study emphasizes the importance of diverse perspectives in decision-making and policy formulation. Ensuring gender equality can lead to more equitable practices, enhance public trust, and improve law enforcement efficacy by reflecting community diversity.

The implications of advocating for gender equality and representation within law enforcement are significant and far-reaching. By prioritizing diversity and inclusion, agencies can enhance their effectiveness in serving diverse communities and addressing complex societal challenges. Embracing gender equality can also improve organizational culture, morale, and retention rates among officers, leading to greater job satisfaction and commitment (Shortland & Perkins, 2020). Additionally, promoting gender diversity can help law enforcement agencies attract top talent and foster innovation, as diverse perspectives and experiences contribute to more creative problem-solving and decision-making processes (Perkins, 2023). Moreover, by championing gender equality, law enforcement agencies can set a positive example for other sectors and contribute to broader efforts to advance gender equity and social justice in society (Strobl, 2020). Embracing gender equality and representation in law enforcement not only strengthens organizational outcomes but also fosters a more equitable and inclusive society (Lau et al., 2023).

#### 4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were crafted by the researchers: The participants varied in rank from Police Corporal to Police Staff Sergeant, with lengths of service ranging from 7 to 10 years. This variation provided a comprehensive view of different stages of career development among the women officers, highlighting their diverse experiences within the police force.

The study revealed the complexities women police officers face in navigating gender dynamics within law enforcement. Challenges included cultural differences and perceptions of female officers' capabilities. Achieving work-life balance was identified as a significant issue, impacting their ability to manage both personal and professional responsibilities. Recognition and career advancement were also noted as areas where women faced challenges, yet acknowledging their achievements significantly boosted morale and contributed to a more inclusive work environment. This underscores the importance of creating organizational cultures that value and recognize the contributions of women in law enforcement.

Mentorship programs and support from senior officers were crucial in helping women navigate their careers and cope with workplace challenges. Participants demonstrated high levels of personal resilience, relying on

problem-solving skills, empathy, and effective communication with the community to overcome obstacles. Strategies to balance work and personal life were essential for maintaining well-being and professional performance.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are crafted by the researchers: To the law enforcement agencies, it may be recommended that law enforcement agencies review and update their policies to ensure they are gender-sensitive and provide support mechanisms specialized to the unique needs of female officers. This includes understanding and acknowledging the diversity within the ranks, which can inform more effective policy interventions. Creating a detailed understanding of the profiles of female officers can help in crafting specific support systems that cater to their career development and personal well-being.

To the Philippine National Police, it may be advisable to prioritize initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, such as unconscious bias training and mentorship programs. It is crucial to develop and implement policies that are gender-sensitive and support work-life balance. Formal recognition programs to highlight the accomplishments of women in law enforcement may be established, alongside mentorship opportunities for career development. Promoting a culture of inclusivity and gender equality within agencies is imperative. Ensuring transparency and fairness in promotion processes is essential for equal opportunities for all officers, regardless of gender. The PNP may implement initiatives to create supportive environments where women officers can thrive, including mentorship programs, diversity training, and policy reforms to address gender biases. Encouraging open dialogue and collaboration between agency leadership, officers, and community stakeholders may be necessary to cultivate a supportive environment.

To the Women Police Personnel, mentorship programs may be provided for crucial support and guidance, helping women officers navigate the challenges of their roles and advance in their careers. Offering training opportunities that cater specifically to the needs and experiences of women officers, helping them develop skills and strategies to cope with their unique challenges. Access to mental health and wellness resources to help women manage the stresses associated with their roles.

To the future researchers, consider exploring the ongoing impacts of mentorship programs on the career advancement of women in law enforcement. Expanding the study to include diverse geographical regions and varying law enforcement agencies could provide a broader understanding of the challenges and successes experienced by women officers. Additionally, incorporating mixed-method approaches could improve the data, offering both quantitative and qualitative insights into the lived experiences of female police officers.

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### Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

### Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis and manuscript writing equally.

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