

CASE STUDY ON AFGHANISTAN



STRENGTHENING THE AFGHAN NATIONAL POLICE: RECRUITMENT & RETENTION OF WOMEN OFFICERS



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Paper Series on Women, Peace and Security: Afghanistan Case Study

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**Strengthening the Afghan National Police:
Recruitment & Retention of Women Officers**

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Introduction

Introduction

As Afghanistan emerges from decades of conflict and engages in peace negotiations with the Taliban, social and political institutions are being significantly reformed and reshaped. The Afghan National Police (ANP) is accelerating efforts to recruit women into the police force and to increase women's capacity in a variety of positions. Women constitute two percent of the national police force, and increasing their recruitment has the potential to improve the operation of security institutions by creating a more diverse police force, which is better equipped to serve people of different backgrounds and experiences. Women may also serve particular roles within the police that allow them to enhance security conditions specifically for women around the country.

The women who are training to become officers face significant obstacles, both in entering and in serving effectively in the police force. These women hail from a variety of backgrounds and have a wide range of experiences with interpersonal violence, security forces, and statebuilding efforts. Familial and community attitudes about women working outside the home, particularly in the security sector, have been a persistent and prevalent barrier for many women's participation in policing. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan also poses specific risks and operational challenges for women police officers.

Despite these challenges, the women who have chosen to become police officers have the opportunity to change both institutional practices and community perspectives. As attitudes and perceptions of women police officers evolve, these officers can contribute to strengthening community resilience throughout Afghanistan – thus improving security processes – while also creating new pathways for women's leadership in a traditionally male-dominated sector.

The Afghan government and the international community should continue to invest in capacity-building programs for women police officers. This is critical to growing their self-assertiveness, preparing them for leadership positions, and expanding their professional opportunities. Training for women police officers should be targeted specifically for the roles the officers will assume in the police force in order to allow them to be skilled, empowered, and effective officers. The government should establish and strengthen networks for women police officers, encourage male police officers and communities to support women police officers in their work, and protect women police officers from targeted violence. There are multiple potential dividends for empowering women in the national police force: to increase women's visibility in the security sector, to improve community access to civilian security and criminal justice services, and to enhance the operational effectiveness of the security sector. All of these objectives are integral to conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and statebuilding.

Literature Review

Literature Review

The literature on women police officers in Afghanistan is produced by authors across a range of disciplines and with various backgrounds: security sector reform, human rights, military, government, and feminism. Several key themes emerge in the body of literature on this topic.

First, whereas some authors argue in favor of women's inclusion based on the principle of empowerment, others are primarily concerned with operational effectiveness. There is a subset of experts who argue that both empowerment and effectiveness are integral reasons for incorporating women into security forces. The inclusion of women makes security sector reform more effective by improving the capacity of security forces to serve women. Additionally, including women in policing is viewed as part of a broader women's empowerment agenda, supporting both the women working as police officers and women community members. The goal of empowerment aspect is also seen as a part of broader statebuilding in Afghanistan.

Second, while security sector reform and peacebuilding have largely been pursued as top-down processes by national and international government actors, the changes that must occur in order to incorporate women into police forces and create more "women-friendly" security institutions must also happen at the local level. In order for security sector institutions to be able to recruit and retain women, community and family norms about women's employment may need to evolve, and local concerns about security must be taken into account.

Third, Afghan women – including those in the security sector as well as more generally – face professional discrimination, targeted violence, and social marginalization. Afghanistan has experienced decades of violent conflict, as well as endured shocks to and shifts in governance institutions that have bred political instability. Afghan people, and especially women, have had to navigate these tumultuous changes. Women's lives and choices are increasingly viewed as political acts, torn between Western-backed government and anti-government norms and expectations.

Gendered Security Sector Reform and Peacebuilding

In the aftermath of conflict, reform and rebuilding of military and police institutions are crucial for building trust in the post-conflict government and security sector. If the military and police forces were primary actors during the conflict, they may not be viewed as impartial or fair actors in many communities. It is important to rebuild them in a way that instills confidence and trust amongst the general population. Broadly, the literature focuses on the importance of trust, which is engendered through professionalization of security forces. In order to provide security services effectively, military and police forces must have

the trust of the communities in which they operate. This is particularly important for police forces, which have daily contact with citizens. Cornelius Friesendorf argues, “The more people trust the police, the easier it becomes for the police to fight crimes. Trust, in turn, hinges on everyday positive interactions between citizens and security forces.”¹

Reform processes are an opportunity for police forces to become more responsive to women’s needs, incorporating a gendered lens into their work and training, as well as including women in the police force. Security may have different meaning for different people in a society, and a person’s gender plays an important role in defining his or her own security experience. Around the world, women and men experience different security threats and needs.² There is strong evidence, including from the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, and Sierra Leone, that female survivors of sexual violence are more likely to report the crime to a female police officer than to a male police officer.³

Women also play an important role in community outreach and reconstructing institutional culture in security forces. The Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces argues that gender-responsiveness must be implemented across six themes in police forces: performance effectiveness; laws, policies, and planning; community relations; accountability and oversight; personnel; and institutional culture.⁴ These six themes touch on security for women in the community, through performance effectiveness and community relations, and also for women police officers themselves, through institutional culture and personnel policy.

Gendered Security Sector Reform and Peacebuilding in Afghanistan

Existing literature on the Afghan National Police (ANP) shows that the police forces have been plagued by corruption, cronyism, and links to the drug trade. Low pay and other organizational problems contribute to and exacerbate these problems. Results from a series of capacity-building programs that initiated in 2002 indicated that most regular ANP officers were illiterate and knew little about laws, reporting procedures, investigative techniques, and problems such as violence against women and children.⁵ In a 2009 poll, half of respondents said they would fear encountering officers of the ANP.⁶ The United States began to support the ANP in 2003, and the U.S. Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), formed in 2006, trained both the Afghan National Army (ANA) and ANP, drawing them under the umbrella of Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).⁷

¹ Cornelius Friesendorf, “Paramilitarization and Security Sector Reform: The Afghan National Police”, *International Peacekeeping*, 18:1, 79-95 (26 Jan 2011). 80.

² Megan Bastick and Tobie Whitman, *A Women’s Guide to Security Sector Reform*, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces and Institute for Inclusive Security (2013). 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴ Bastick, Megan. “Gender Self-Assessment Guide for the Police, Armed Force and Justice Sector,” Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2011).

⁵ Cornelius Friesendorf, “Paramilitarization and Security Sector Reform: The Afghan National Police”, *International Peacekeeping*, 18:1, 79-95 (26 Jan 2011). 85-87.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 85.

However, the results of these trainings have been mixed, and have not necessarily alleviated issues of drug consumption, extortion, smuggling, and human rights abuses common in the ANP.⁸

In the Asia Foundation's 2015 *Survey of the Afghan People*, the most frequently cited national problem is insecurity, with 42.7 percent of the population reporting that it is a problem at the national level, and 22 percent reporting that it is a problem at the local level. 67.4 percent of people said that they always, often, or sometimes fear for their personal safety, which is the highest percentage in a decade. Seventy percent of people surveyed said they had confidence in the ANP, but 80.1 percent reported that the ANP relies on foreign support to do their job. While only 45.3 percent of people report fear when encountering the ANP in 2015, 53.3 percent of Afghans who had contact with police within the last year said they paid a bribe.⁹

The ANP also has a troubled history when addressing violence against women. The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported 6,000 registered cases of violence against women in 2012, though the true numbers are thought to be higher, as the problem often goes unreported. When women do report abuse, their cases are often not properly registered, and the offenders are rarely prosecuted.¹⁰ The AIHRC found that policemen committed nearly 15 percent of the honor killings and sexual assaults recorded between 2011 and 2013, which makes women even less inclined to ask for help.¹¹

A More Inclusive ANP

Reform of the ANP to be more inclusive of women has been pushed by national and international actors. There are functional and normative goals behind this endeavor, including the intention of creating a more effective police force and the hope of encouraging women to participate in government and security processes. The literature is characterized by the view that Afghan women will be better served by women police officers, especially during body or house searches, but also that Afghan women should be included in the security sector to play a key role in rebuilding and reforming Afghanistan as a country.

The reform of the ANP has been driven by the Law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW)¹² and the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA),¹³

⁸ Ibid., 85-89.

⁹ Sayed Masood Sadat, Christina Satkowski, Renard Sexton, Shamim Sarabi, Sandy Feinzig, Shahim Kabuli, Charlotte Maxwell-Jones, Zachary Warren, *Afghanistan in 2015: A Survey of the Afghan People*, The Asia Foundation (2015). 6-10.

¹⁰ Hancock, Louise, "Women and the Afghan Police," Oxfam Briefing Paper, Oxfam, (September 2013). 9. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/women-and-afghan-police>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² The Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) stresses that the Ministry of Women's Affairs must work with other ministries "to increase the level of confidence in combating violence against women." Article 13 states that "the Ministry of Interior Affairs shall adopt and exercise special protective and supportive measures in all public locations and places." See: "Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW)", Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Justice of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (Aug 2009).

and supported through different international funds and training programs. The EVAW focuses on the role that the security sector must play in reducing violence against Afghan women in the broader population, while the NAPWA views security sector reform as a balance between functional and normative goals for inclusion of women in the ANP. These national commitments are supported by a variety of international actors. The NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), under the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), currently does most of the training for the ANSF, including the ANP; the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan (EUPOL) was established in 2007, and focuses on training and mentoring the ANP, Ministry of the Interior staff, and prosecutors.¹⁴ These interventions are largely top-down projects, though certain trainings and outreach through television programs are meant to address community-level concerns and perspectives. Largely, these programs operate through governmental bodies, while grassroots concerns and security problems remain serious obstacles to the recruitment and retention of women police officers.

However, progress has been made through these reform efforts. Family Response Units (FRUs) were established in 2006 as specialized three-person units to address domestic violence.¹⁵ The National Police Plan of 2010 and accompanying Strategy in 2011 called for 5,000 female police of approximately 157,000 police officers by the end of 2014 – three percent of the total force. The Ten Year Vision called for ten percent of the Ministry of the Interior and ANP staffs to be women by 2024.¹⁶ To some extent, these reforms have been effective. In 2005, the ANP employed 180 women out of 53,400 personnel, and by July 2013, it employed 1,551 policewomen out of 157,000.¹⁷ The *tashkeel*, the organizational structure of the ANP, reserves 3,249 jobs for female civil servants and police officers, though women fill fewer than half these jobs.¹⁸

Women police officers also play critical roles in ensuring security while building trust in communities. A key task for female officers is conducting body searches of women, which cannot be conducted by men due to cultural restrictions. Male suicide bombers are known to have exploited the dearth of female officers to conduct screenings by disguising themselves under *burqas*. Women police officers are also seen as having an important role during house

¹³ The 2007-2017 National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) recognizes the lack of gender perspectives employed in the security sector as a constraint to the mission and vision of the report. The security sector lacks an institutional culture that is sensitive to women, and as a result, the strategies developed to address insecurity and organize Afghanistan's security services are often created without provisions for women's needs. The NAPWA argues that the number of women in the Ministries of Interior and Defense are too few, and women in these ministries are too outranked and marginalized to be able to influence the processes and substance of decision-making. A critical mass of women, no less than thirty percent, across ranks and positions is necessary in order to have a compelling presence in the work of the sector. See: National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2007-2017.


¹⁴ Hancock, "Women and the Afghan Police," 2013.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

¹⁷ Ibid., 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 3.



searches, searching areas of houses usually filled with women and interviewing female occupants.¹⁹

¹⁹ Samuel Hall Consulting, "Women's Perceptions of the Afghan National Police," Heinrich Böll Stiftung (2011). 19.

Methodology

Methodology

This study explores the motivations that drive women's participation in the ANP, their experiences as police officers, their perceptions of the role of police officers in Afghan society, and how the training may align with expectations of police officers. The study also examines the barriers women face in accessing police training and becoming police officers, as well as the opportunities for women police officers to demonstrate their capacity and leadership. By examining and highlighting these women's self-perceptions, concerns, and aspirations, the study seeks to inform donors and development agencies about how to create more effective training programs. At the same time, this report adds to the body of evidence-based literature on women in Afghanistan's police force. The case study focuses on Afghan policewomen who participated in a basic training program at the Sivas Police Training Academy in Turkey from June to December 2015. Field research was conducted at the Academy from October 13 to 27 in 2015.

The trainee women police officers included in the case study are between the ages of 18 and 37, with an educational level of at least a high school diploma. Approximately 93 percent of the women are between the ages of 18 and 24, and were newly recruited by the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) in April 2015. A small subset of the sample had already been serving as police officers prior to the training.

In addition to the trainees, the research team interviewed eight MOI staff members and mentors to collect information about the MOI's policies and programs on capacity-building for women police officers.

The case study used the following data collection tools. The research team administered an in-depth survey questionnaire, including both multiple-choice and open-ended questions, to the 389 female Afghan trainees. The team collected 378 responses, resulting in a 97 percent collection rate. The questionnaire covered the following topics:

- Socio-economic background (e.g. age, ethnicity, marital status, educational level, economic status, and family composition);
- Past history (e.g. work experience and personal experience with violence and conflict);
- Motivations for becoming a police officer;
- Experiences during training; and
- Future aspirations and prospects.

In addition to the questionnaires, a series of 29 focus group discussions were held with 232 participants, who were organized into groups of eight or nine trainees, to further probe on the aforementioned topics. Furthermore, 31 individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with trainees, as well as an additional set of interviews with representatives

from the MOI's Department of Gender, Human Rights and Children's Rights, the Sivas Police Training Academy, and mentors from the Afghan National Police.

All human subjects research was voluntary. Informed consent was sought and obtained from all participants. The respondents were briefed about the case study's purpose, its independent and impartial nature, and assured that their confidentiality and anonymity would be respected. For individual interviews, a female Afghan interpreter was employed. In order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the respondents, all the names provided in this study are fictitious.

There are a few noteworthy limitations to the methodological approach of this case study. The case study focuses on a single training facility in Turkey, which differs from training facilities in Afghanistan. Due to security constraints in Afghanistan, field research was conducted only in the Turkish facility. Additionally, male police officers were not interviewed. Focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted with one female and two male interpreters who are familiar with the issues that many Afghan women police officers experienced. However, because the focus groups used a semi-structured approach, certain information or nuance may have been lost during the course of the interviews, as a single interpreter worked to interpret statements from eight or nine participants. All individual interviews were conducted by a female interpreter, taking into consideration the sensitivity of the information provided by participants. Additionally, all interpreters were given training on how to conduct interviews and the importance of gender sensitivity prior to the start of the field research.

**Who Are the
Women?**

Who Are the Women?

Afghan women police officers come from a diverse set of backgrounds. While the women are recruits from across the Afghan population – with varying socioeconomic status, levels of education, and family composition – they are not necessarily representative of it. They are more highly educated than Afghan women overall, 69.3 percent of whom report having no formal or home schooling.²⁰ Police officers are required to have a high school diploma, at minimum, and over 40 percent of the women recruits are currently enrolled in college or university.

Additionally, some of the women police officers have lived outside of Afghanistan. Of the respondents, 35.6 percent said they had previously had the experience of living abroad. Of these women, most had lived in Iran,²¹ followed by Pakistan and other countries, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Furthermore, the women police recruits overwhelmingly belong to ethnic minorities. Over 60 percent of the women identify as Hazara, a group that makes up only nine percent of the Afghan population.²² Only 8.3 percent of the recruits are Pashtun, which is the majority ethnic group in the country and represents 40 percent of the overall Afghan population²³. The remainder of the recruits identify as Tajiks (20.8 percent) and Uzbeks (6.8 percent), compared to a national composition of 27 percent and nine percent respectively.²⁴ While the data does not make clear if or how ethnic background influences the recruits' perspectives, it is important to note that the composition of their ethnic group affiliation is different from the country at large, and may play a role in the decision to become a police officer.

²⁰ Saday et al., "Survey of the Afghan People," 9.

²¹ 18.6 percent

²² Central Intelligence Agency, "Afghanistan," World Factbook, Accessed June 29, 2016. https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print/country/countrypdf_af.pdf.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Recruitment: Obstacles and Opportunities

Recruitment: Obstacles and Opportunities

Effective gender-responsive security sector reform is a multi-step process that includes both increasing women's access to security institutions, as well as making these institutions more women-friendly. The first step, however, is recruitment. The recruitment of women police officers should take into account their motives for joining the force, environmental factors in support of their motives, and the barriers and resistance they face in making such a decision.

Motivating Factors

Given the limited numbers of Afghan women police officers, it is critical to examine the motivations of the women who have selected police work as a professional opportunity. Motivations ranged from the idealistic to the pragmatic, including both the desire to act for justice, as well as the pressure of economic necessity. There were two broad categories of motivations: personal drivers and professional incentives. A better understanding of these reasons that women engage in police work can yield stronger and more supportive policies to encourage future women recruits.

Many women police recruits were motivated to join the police force because of their personal experiences. Some women expressed long-held hopes of becoming a police officer. A 27 year-old woman from Kabul noted,

“After high school, I didn't have another opportunity and ended up working as a beautician. I was very good at it and owned a shop in Kabul, earning as much as US\$2,000 a month. But I couldn't give up on my dream to become a police officer. The current situation of Afghan women is very difficult. I want to become a police officer who helps women.”²⁵

The persistence of childhood dreams was especially present in women who had police officers as members of their immediate family. In fact, nearly 20 percent of all respondents counted police officers among members of their family. One such respondent, a 25 year-old from Kabul, explained, “Because my father was a policeman, I admired the job since childhood. As I was washing and ironing his uniform, I always liked to try his hat or uniform on. Police[woman] is my dream job and I didn't want to lose the chance, so I decided to apply.”²⁶

Another common theme was the recognition of the sacrifices made by fathers, brothers, and other family members who were in the security forces. Some women emphasized their determination to carry on the legacy of family members who had been killed in action.²⁷

²⁵ Interview No.22, 26 October 2016.

²⁶ Interview No.24, 27 October 2016.

²⁷ Interview No.2, 20 October 2016.

Other women recruits were driven by events that had shaped their and their families' lives. Some of the women had previously experienced poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, discrimination, and other difficult challenges. Rates of violence against women in Afghanistan are very high, but reported incidents are low, and the rate of prosecution even lower.²⁸ Prosecution is hampered by a culture of impunity; laws, such as one law passed in 2014, which includes "relatives of the accused" in a list of people who "cannot be questioned as witnesses" in a criminal case, significantly reducing the likelihood that a domestic violence case could ever be prosecuted.²⁹ Police work offered an opportunity to move away from beyond these past events.³⁰ For many recruits, past challenges coalesced into a deeply rooted drive for justice, especially for women victims. One 26-year-old woman from Kabul stated, "I was a victim of violence. I want to keep working for the police until people are fully aware of women's rights." This sentiment was echoed by 30.4 percent of survey respondents, who selected "justice for perpetrators of violence against women and children" as one of the three most important reasons they joined the police force. A 20-year-old recruit from Kabul reiterated that women must be specifically considered in the justice process, stating, "I decided to become a police officer to help socially-vulnerable people like us. I will continue working as a police officer until there is stability and justice in the society and no violence against women."³¹

While some women police recruits were inspired to become police officers through personal experiences, others made the choice to become a police officer for pragmatic reasons. Some women sought out police work as a means for career development. Focus group discussions revolved around how police work was useful preparation for other professions – be that as a lawyer, doctor, pilot, or politician – and a step toward achieving their goals.³² One 22-year-old woman from Kabul summarized this idea, saying, "I actually want to become a pilot. However, the police work was the first job opportunity for me after graduating from high school, so I applied."³³ A common theme among those who saw police work as career development was that the job was a means to finance the future education needed to achieve their goals. A separate study of education for Afghan girls found that poverty was viewed by teachers, parents, and girls as the single biggest barrier to their education.³⁴ In the survey of women police recruits, a quarter of all respondents said they plan to use earnings from the police force to pay for their future education. A 22-year-old recruit from Ghazni highlighted that her earnings could be used to alleviate financial constraints of her future education:

²⁸ Dija Nijhowne and Lauryn Oates, "Living with Violence – A National report on Domestic Abuse in Afghanistan," Global Rights: Partners for Justice (March 2008).

<http://www.globalrights.org/Library/Women's%20rights/Living%20with%20Violence%20Afghan.pdf>.

²⁹ Human Rights Watch, "World Report 2015: Afghanistan," Accessed June 29, 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2015/country-chapters/afghanistan>.

³⁰ Interview No.12a, 24 October 2016; Interview No.12b, 24 Oct 2016; Interview No.11, 24 October 2016.

³¹ Interview No.9, 23 October 2016.

³² Focus Group Discussion No.10, 20 October 2016; Interview No.13, 24 October 2016.

³³ Interview No.7, 23 October 2016.

³⁴ Jackson, Ashley, "High Stakes: Girls' Education in Afghanistan," Oxfam International: Joint Briefing Paper, (February 2011). <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/high-stakes-girls-education-afghanistan>.

“My family is poor and my father is not interested in women’s education, but I got the help of my relatives to graduate from high school. When I told my father I would be a police officer, he was against it, but he eventually agreed after I convinced him that this was the way to provide financial support to the family. I told my father that I would return to the community after I become a police officer, but I actually don’t have the intention. I plan to work in Kabul and continue studying there.”³⁵

The pressure of financial constraints was a significant factor in many of the recruits’ decision to join the police force. Less a choice than an economic necessity, many women sought out economic stability through the regular and reliable salary offered by the police force. The typical salary of a police officer in Afghanistan is approximately US\$165 per month, and women police officers have a higher salary than men – an additional incentive for recruits.³⁶ A quarter of respondents identified financial support for their family as one of the most important motivations for becoming an officer. Given the low percentages of Afghan women participating in the labor force,³⁷ these young women were expected to help provide for their families. Many of their families were dealing with debt, unemployment, and ill health,³⁸ among other challenges. Even where familial obligations were not present, financial need was a pressing factor. A 21-year-old recruit from Ghazni explained, “In Afghanistan, many young people give up on their dreams due to economic reasons. I’m one of them. I wanted to study English at school so I can work abroad, but I had to give up because of financial needs.”³⁹ Given the limited professional opportunities for Afghan women with high school diplomas, police work was a viable option.

Supporting Factors

The Afghan women recruits who made the decision to become police officers were motivated by a variety of factors. The social and cultural environments they encountered in their daily lives had a significant impact on their perceptions of police work and their ability to envision themselves in such a role. Supportive family members, the presence of role models, and the influence of popular culture were also critical factors.

For those who enjoyed it, family encouragement was the most critical marker of a supportive environment. A key theme that emerged from the data was the strong influence of family units on recruits’ professional choices. 86.7 percent of all respondents noted, “There was someone supportive of my decision to become a police officer.” The support of immediate family was especially crucial, with fathers, mothers, and siblings frequently

³⁵ Interview No.31, 27 October 2016.

³⁶ Interview with Hekmat Rasooli Shahi, General Director of Gender, Children and Human Rights, Ministry of Interior, 19 October 2016.

³⁷ Central Statistics Organization of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, “National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-2012,” (2014). 29.

³⁸ Interview No. 27, 27 October 2016; Group Discussion No.13, 20 Oct 2016.

³⁹ Focus Group Discussion No.5, 19 October 2016.

providing a boost to action.⁴⁰ The encouragement that recruits found in their families stood in contrast to a more widespread rejection of police work as a suitable job for young women.⁴¹ A 21-year-old woman from Ghazni reflected, “When I was becoming a police officer, my father’s cousin and other relatives were opposed, as they believed women shouldn’t be a police officer in an Islamic society, but my father supported me.”⁴² Another recruit echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that her mother’s support was a catalyzing factor in her decision to join the police force. The 23-year-old from Kabul noted,

“My mother is illiterate but she’s a strong woman. I learned a lot from her. After my father passed away, she let me go to school with a meager amount of money for the family. When I told her I would be a police officer, she got angry at first, but soon she changed her mind and supported me. She helped me to convince my elder brother, who was against the decision.”⁴³

With family support, these women recruits were able to pursue their personal dreams and professional goals.

Some women cited strong role models – other Afghan women who had proven capable of police work as a factor – in being able to envision themselves as police officers. Whether these role models were in popular culture or at the local police station, the visibility and presence of women police officers had a significant impact on recruits. Seeing women police officers depicted on television shows and in movies opened the possibility of police work to several recruits, who were inspired by on-screen depictions.⁴⁴ Positive representations of women police officers in popular culture also contributed to the recruits’ overall positive impression of police work. Police recruits identified “helpful,” “respectful,” and “effective” to describe their impressions of women police officers.⁴⁵ These impressions were solidified for some recruits who themselves had interacted with women police officers prior to joining the force. These personal encounters had a considerable impact in their decisions to become police officers. The recruits noted that women police officers had been helpful, sincere, and caring towards other women.⁴⁶ The recruits’ experiences align with research that indicates that the presence of role models is a crucial factor in women’s professional achievements.⁴⁷

Challenges

There are many cultural and structural barriers to the successful recruitment of women into the Afghan police force. Afghan women face serious challenges, and Afghan women police officers face specific additional obstacles. Community bias and entrenched cultural attitudes against women in the workplace, security risks and the threat of violence, and

⁴⁰ Focus Group Discussion No.8, 20 October 2016; Group Discussion No. 10, 20 October 2016.

⁴¹ Focus Group Discussion No.8, 20 October 2016; Group Discussion No.18, 21 October 2016.

⁴² Focus Group Discussion No.8, 20 October 2016.

⁴³ Interview No. 14, 25 October 2016.

⁴⁴ Focus Group Discussion No.11, 20 October 2016.

⁴⁵ Focus Group Discussion No.26, 22 October 2016.

⁴⁶ Focus Group Discussion No. 8, 20 October 2016; Group Discussion No. 12, 20 October 2016; Interview No. 10, 24 October 2016.

⁴⁷ Hancock, “Women and the Afghan Police,” 2013, 3.

sustained opposition from family members are among myriad factors that limit women's participation in the police force. If these underlying tensions go unaddressed in security-sector reform, it will remain challenging to recruit adequate numbers of women to the police force.

Afghan society is widely segregated by gender, with significant opposition to women working outside the home remaining widespread.⁴⁸ Women confront restricted movement, limited opportunities for secondary and higher education, and lack of recognition of women's professional capacity.⁴⁹ Women police officers, by working alongside men and by necessity of their work of engaging communities, fundamentally challenge these cultural attitudes. Policing itself is considered a low-status occupation, making recruitment a challenge for both genders,⁵⁰ and female police are regarded as having particularly low status because they mix with men in the workplace, spend nights away from home, and share living and eating quarters with men.⁵¹ Furthermore, allegations of prostitution within the ANP and widespread rumors of abuse and harassment make it harder to attract educated women.⁵² Given that only 41.4 percent of Afghans believe it is appropriate for women to work in the army or police force,⁵³ women recruits must be prepared to face significant resistance when they decide to enroll. In fact, an overwhelming 77.9 percent of the respondents said there was someone who opposed their decision to become a police officer.

Such opposition is made all the more difficult by the social pressure of conforming to cultural norms, as well as the very real threat of violence against women who thwart those norms. Indeed, violence against women is an endemic problem in Afghanistan. Many women interviewed in the study expressed fears of threats or reported prior threats.⁵⁴ One 21-year-old from Kabul voiced this fear: "Because the Pashtun culture is opposed to women becoming police officers, I'm worried about getting beheaded once I return to the community as a police officer."⁵⁵ Another woman, a 36-year-old from Herat, relayed her experience: "I have been working as a police officer for the past six years, and because of the job, my son received numerous threats. He has fled to Switzerland."⁵⁶ Threats of violence are not simply threats for women police recruits, but constitute a dangerous reality they must learn to negotiate and manage.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Tonita Murray, "Peace-Building in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Civil Security Reform," *International Peacekeeping*, 14:1, 108-126 (2007). 115.

⁵¹ Hancock, "Women and the Afghan Police," 2013.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Saday et al., "Survey of the Afghan People."

⁵⁴ In response to question as to what kinds of concern they have to work as policewomen, 56.2 percent of the respondents said they were afraid of assault or harassment by their male colleagues and community people.

⁵⁵ Focus Group Discussion No. 5, 19 October 2016.

⁵⁶ Interview No.4, 20 October 2016.

An additional challenge facing women recruits is that the most significant opposition to their professional choice comes from their own families. While noted earlier that supportive family members are a key factor to engaging in police work, many women's families discouraged them from joining the security sector due to perceived risks, low pay, and concern over society's rejection of women working in a male-dominated branch of the government. In fact, respondents indicated that the biggest concern about their pursuit of police work was the opposition of their immediate family members and relatives.⁵⁷ While application regulations required recruits to obtain a letter of consent from two male family members, a number of recruits admitted that they had kept the job application a secret from their family members.⁵⁸ Multiple recruits also noted that they had received threats from their families since arriving at training locations in Turkey.⁵⁹ The sustained threat of violence that recruits face remains a major obstacle in recruiting more women officers, as well as retaining them.

⁵⁷ 77.9 percent of the respondents of the questionnaire survey said there was someone against their decision to become police officers.

⁵⁸ Focus Group Discussion No.8, 20 October 2016.

⁵⁹ Focus Group Discussion, No. 5, 19 October 2016.

Future Duties as Police Officers

Future Duties as Police Officers

The majority of women who participated in this study had never served as police officers before, and their perception of police officers, ideas about their future duties, and their preferences related to work environment are important to understand in order to support future recruits and current officers.

Perception of Future Roles

In Afghanistan, police work is often considered to be inappropriate work for women, and policewomen are often subject to harsh treatment, especially in rural areas, because they work closely with men and often work at night, both of which are considered inappropriate activities for women.⁶⁰ However, the women interviewed as part of this study showed positive perceptions of women police officers; they see policing as a profession that will enhance their financial stability, as well as allow them to contribute to society. Many of the women interviewed displayed a strong desire to change the negative perception of women police officers and to contribute to community security, often specifically mentioning protection of women and children as a key component of their role.

The participants' perceptions of their future roles as police officers and their potential to create positive change in their communities was often a reaction to challenges they had faced personally. Many women expressed concern that many women in Afghanistan are functionally deprived of their rights to choose a spouse, receive an education, go outside freely, speak freely, and participate politically. A 27-year-old woman from Kabul said,

“My mother was treated like a commodity by her in-laws. It hurt me so much to see her being treated like a slave since I was a child. As a police officer, I’m determined to work for women regardless of the duty station. I’m economically well-off and can choose to get other jobs, but these women need the police’s help. I definitely want to get promoted as a police officer and change the current situation.”⁶¹

Some women spoke about their hopes that they could be effective police officers that could protect the rights of other women, as part of a larger goal to transform Afghan society.

Several women explained that joining the police was a way to improve the protection of women and women’s rights. A 21-year-old woman from Balkh said,

“Women are treated like an object in Afghanistan...Women cannot sue their husbands even when they are victims of violence. They are just told to put up with it. It’s a society where women are always blamed. I think police work is the shortcut to assisting women. There are women’s organizations, but police officers are the ones

⁶⁰ Hancock, “Women and the Afghan Police,” 2013.

⁶¹ Interview No.22, 26 October 2016.

that can directly solve each woman's issues. I think being a police officer is the fastest way to change the current situation of women."⁶²

Preferred Future Duties

Of the women surveyed, 84.5 percent reported that they hoped to do "clerical work (office work)." In focus groups, women expressed different opinions as to why this was their ideal type of work. For many of the women, administrative work was seen as one of the safest positions available in the police force, and these positions are a way to limit their risk and a way to provide reassurance to their families. A 20-year-old woman from Ghazni argued, "The current security situation is deteriorating in Afghanistan, and it's not an environment where women can work in the field. Therefore, I wish to do clerical work."⁶³ However, choosing to do clerical work because it is seen as a safe position does not preclude women from being the effective officers they hope to be. A 20-year-old woman from Kabul said, "I wanted to become a police officer since childhood. Due to the security situation, I want to do clerical work. But I want to do clerical tasks that respond to the needs of female victims, such as entering information about them."⁶⁴

Some women considered administrative work to be particularly appropriate for women as opposed to fieldwork, and some women preferred administrative work to fieldwork because doing clerical work has a higher status than working in the field. One woman stated, "Anybody can do a body search, and people look down on women doing body searches. I want to be engaged in higher level duties."⁶⁵ Others noted that many field activities, such as traffic duties, are considered low-level and undesirable jobs. The women who felt this way preferred the relatively higher status of administrative work.

Fifteen percent of the women surveyed reported that they hoped to engaged in field duties rather than clerical work. These duties include crime investigation, prosecution of perpetrators, protection of victims, intelligence work, and work for the Special Forces. These responses were often guided by a desire to do specific types of work, such as bomb disposal or prosecution of perpetrators of domestic violence. A 21-year-old woman from Balkh who wanted to work in the field noted, "I want to conduct crime prevention education at school or awareness-raising about the rights of women and children and crime prevention for community people."⁶⁶ Many of the women who expressed a desire to work in the field understood why many women officers would prefer to do administrative work, but they stated a desire to be engaged in policing in the field. These women came from a variety of backgrounds, but there was a tendency for women who had experienced severe poverty,

⁶² Interview No.13, 24 October 2016.

⁶³ Focus Group Discussion No. 27, 22 October 2016.

⁶⁴ Focus Group Discussion No. 27, 22 October 2016.

⁶⁵ Interview No 30, 27 October 2016.

⁶⁶ Focus Group Discussion No.18, 21 October 2016.

violence, or who had previous work experience to prefer field-based work.⁶⁷ A 21-year-old recruit from Kabul argued, “I don’t want to be assigned to clerical work. We won’t know the real situation of women and children through clerical work. I want to work in the field as a police officer.”⁶⁸ A 25-year-old woman from Kabul said, “Once you put on a police uniform, you need to work for human rights and justice. Otherwise, it doesn’t do justice to the police uniform.”⁶⁹

As part of the survey administered by the research team, recruits were asked, “Are you willing to serve in remote areas?” Approximately 42 percent responded that they would prefer not to work in remote areas far from their families. Many women said that they did not want to work in remote areas because of their concerns about security. However, 20.2 percent of the participants said that they had no problem working in remote areas, and 36.9 percent said that they were willing “depending on the conditions.” This means that the majority – 57 percent – was willing to work in provinces far from their homes, provided that they received support for appropriate living conditions and transportation to and from work.

Some of the women surveyed were already living away from their families to go to universities and school in Kabul; these women often had no resistance to working in remote areas or places far from their families. Other women hoped to work far from their families because they feared they would not be safe if they returned, especially if members of their community think it is inappropriate for women to serve as police officers, or if the participants had experienced violence in their hometowns. One participant said, “There are people linked to the Taliban in our community, so I don’t want to work in my hometown,”⁷⁰ and another said, “I haven’t told my relatives and neighbors I became a police officer. I’m scared of them finding out.”⁷¹

The recruits also expressed a desire to work as a police officer for as long as possible. When asked in the survey how long they would like to work for the police, 44.2 percent of women said, “Until I retire,” followed by “As long as my family supports me” and “Until I find a better job.” Only 5.1 percent of women said, “Until I get married,” and none said “Until I have a child.”

Security Concerns

Many women police officers experience physical threats and life-threatening violence, such as injuries and kidnapping, while on duty, and some women have lost their lives to

⁶⁷ In response to the question about the type of work they want to do as policewomen, 15.5 percent of the respondents said they wanted to be engaged in field duties. Among them, more than 80 percent experienced physical, sexual and economic violence directly or indirectly. Also 58 percent of them had working experience prior to becoming police officers.

⁶⁸ Interview No. 13, 24 October 2016.

⁶⁹ Interview No 24, 27 October 2016.

⁷⁰ Focus Group Discussion No.5, 19 October 2016.

⁷¹ Focus Group Discussion No.5, 19 October 2016.

policing.⁷² Women police officers, especially in leadership positions, face the additional threat of being targeted by insurgents for being members of the ANP.⁷³ The recruits interviewed in this study were aware of the security risks in Afghanistan, and the majority expressed concern about their safety as officers. The participants specifically spoke about their concerns about being assigned night patrol duties, which could increase their chance of being assaulted or raped. One 23-year-old woman said that the Taliban and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) were aware that the participants were receiving training and would be targeted for violence.⁷⁴ A 20-year-old recruit from Kabul said, “I’m worried I may be assigned to an unsafe area. Even in Kabul, there are dangerous areas for women to go out at night.”⁷⁵

Women police officers in Afghanistan are often threatened, whether for being part of the police force, being a woman in a job that has been dominated by men, or both. Attacks on women in public life have been relatively common in Afghanistan, from politicians to police officers. In July and September 2013, two senior women police in Helmand province were killed, and other women officers have faced threats or violence.⁷⁶

Perceptions of Future Work Environment

After they have been recruited, women police officers often lack the basic items, such as uniforms, which male colleagues receive. Many have to perform menial tasks, such as making tea, and receive little or no training. Some male police officers lack basic skills or motivation to serve their communities, but they have still been promoted to jobs reserved for women, which has undermined confidence in women police officers and fueled negative male attitudes toward them.⁷⁷ The women interviewed in this study also expressed serious concern that the current work environment of the police force is not responsive to women’s needs. They particularly emphasized the lack of changing rooms and bathrooms for women. A 33-year-old woman from Kabul said,

“The Afghan MOI has established a Women’s Council. Women representatives from all 17 police stations in Kabul are the members of the Council, and I’m one of the members. We visit different police stations in Kabul once a month, listen to policewomen’s issues, and concerns and try to resolve them. Many women share their difficulties at work due to the lack of women’s changing rooms and bathrooms.”⁷⁸

Not being able to change clothing in privacy may be a serious security risk for women police officers, as walking to and from work in a police uniform may increase the likelihood of

⁷² Hancock, “Women and the Afghan Police,” 2013.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview No 20, 26 October 2016.

⁷⁵ Focus Group Discussion No. 9, 20 October 2016.

⁷⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, *A Way to Go: An Update on Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women in Afghanistan*, (2013). <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/HRReports.aspx>.

⁷⁷ Hancock, “Women and the Afghan Police,” 2013.

⁷⁸ Interview No. 23, 26 October 2016.

officers being attacked. This danger is especially acute for women officers. A 23-year-old active-duty officer from Daykhundi said,

“We don’t have a bathroom and changing room for women at the office. It’s inconvenient, but there is nothing we can do about it. We share bathrooms with men. Because we cannot put on a police uniform at work, all policewomen wear their uniform from home. Even if I want to go shopping on the way back from work, I don’t feel safe to walk around in my police uniform. I think we need women’s changing rooms the most.”⁷⁹

For this reason, many of the women interviewed also emphasized a need for housing and transportation support for women officers, as they face severe security risks as they travel to and from work.

The Afghan government has given three orders since 2012 to install facilities for women in police stations, but they have not been implemented, despite the promise of government funds to pay for them. The facilities that women do have access to often have peepholes or doors that don't lock. International partners, such as the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOFTA), have made separate toilet and changing room facilities for women police officers a priority, but implementation has not been widespread or sufficient.⁸⁰

Providing a safe working environment to policewomen has been identified as an urgent need by various sources. The lack of infrastructure, such as women’s bathrooms, changing rooms, and rest rooms, in the workplace not only makes it more difficult for them to work, but also aggravates negative public opinions about women police officers, especially if women officers need to stay at the office overnight or rest in the same place as men.⁸¹ According to the General Director of Gender, Children and Human Rights under MOI, the Afghan Government has accelerated its efforts to create a women-friendly environment. The efforts include the establishment of women-only locked bathrooms and women-only changing rooms and rest rooms, provision of means of transportation, construction of women’s training centers, and the construction of dormitories for female trainees. However, as these efforts have just started, many policewomen are still faced with various inconveniences at work.⁸²

Challenges in the workplace for women officers extend beyond lack of infrastructure to include difficulties in working with their male colleagues. Workplace harassment is a serious problem, and female police officers are frequently the targets of harassment and assault. The lack of safe changing rooms and toilets can endanger female police officers; many cannot travel to work in their police uniforms because of security threats posed by Taliban insurgents or others opposed to women working as police officers. In 2012, the

⁷⁹ Interview No.19, 26 October 2016.

⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch, “Afghanistan: Urgent Need for Safe Facilities for Female Police--Inadequate Facilities Imperil Women Officers,” Accessed June 29, 2016. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/04/25/afghanistan-urgent-need-safe-facilities-female-police>.

⁸¹ Hancock, “Women and the Afghan Police,” 2013.

⁸² Interview No.17, 25 October 2016; Interview No. 19, 26 October 2016; Interview No.23, 26 October 2016.

AIHRC received 105 complaints related to harassment and sexual abuse carried out by the police, and complaints about unfair promotion practices concerning female police.⁸³

One of the major concerns expressed by women interviewed in this study was resistance and harassment by their future male colleagues. Many expressed concern about whether men would welcome them at work, that male colleagues would have a low opinion of them, that sexual favors would be expected in exchange for promotions, and that men would not want to share their work space with women. Working with male colleagues was one of the primary concerns expressed by the participants, and the concern was more commonly shared among women who had not studied or worked with male colleagues and supervisors previously.

Some of the women interviewed had experienced harassment from male police officers during the process of applying to become officers. Several women stated that male officers had asked for their phone number, asked them to dinner, or harassed them while they were in the application process.

Some of the active-duty officers shared their experiences with discrimination and harassment by male colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. A 30-year-old woman from Herat shared her experience with sexual harassment, saying,

“My first assignment as a police officer was at the department to deal with domestic violence. I worked there for two years. However, because I didn’t accept my male supervisor’s request [for sexual favors], I got kicked out of the department. I respected him at the beginning because he appeared to be nice. But one day he called me to his office and said, ‘If you find any loose woman [sexually active woman] who comes to your office, please introduce her to me.’ I told him, ‘I work here to help women and solve their issues. Police officers are not supposed to do that,’ and refused outright. Then he told me to leave.”⁸⁴

Harassment and discrimination can seriously challenge women officers’ ability to demonstrate their capacity and work effectively. A 26-year-old woman from Balkh said,

“I became a police officer at the age of 19. Unfortunately, at all the departments I worked for, I was harassed by men. Luckily, I haven’t experienced any sexual violence, but even when I made a small mistake, they told me, ‘That’s why women are incompetent,’ or ‘Two women make one man.’ My female colleague couldn’t take such harassment and reported it to the management. However, they transferred her to another department. It was the woman who lost in the end. Based on this, unless there is a sincere response, I think we should rather be silent regardless of what happened.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Hancock, “Women and the Afghan Police,” 2013.

⁸⁴ Interview No.17, 25 October 2016.

⁸⁵ Interview No. 8, 23 October 2016.

Although sexual harassment is a serious problem, women also face a variety of other forms of harassment, including those similar to hazing. A 30-year-old woman from Herat said,

“Once a policeman forced my younger colleague to drink alcohol, saying it was water. She had never had alcohol. She was shocked and couldn’t come to work for a while. I advised her to report it, and the case went to the prosecutor’s office. However, the guy bribed the office and they pretended nothing had happened. Although she still works there, she’s labeled as a bad person in the office.”⁸⁶

Many women voiced the urgent need to increase awareness among community men and policemen on gender and human rights. A 26-year-old active-duty police officer argued, “Policemen must understand that women have the equal rights as men. Policewomen are needed for duties such as body search and investigations. Therefore, I want policemen to understand that policewomen are their ‘colleagues’ and the same human beings.”⁸⁷ Another 30-year-old active-duty officer argued that increasing male officers’ awareness of women’s rights can improve respect for human rights on the societal level, saying, “We have to improve the male-dominant society of Afghanistan. In order to do that, it’s important to increase men’s knowledge. They should receive more education and learn women’s rights at social and household levels.”⁸⁸

Research, particularly by Natarajan,⁸⁹ shows that a “gendered model” of policing, which promotes the use of women police officers specifically to respond to the needs of women and children rather than promoting a Western ideal of gender equality through integration of the police force, supports the long-term advancement of the status of women police officers. Natarajan argues that the “gendered model” promotes gender equality by strengthening segregated roles of men and women, allowing women to develop capacity as police officers without risking their lives.

However, a majority of the women who participated in this study expressed a desire not to limit the role of women police officers and wanted to take on the same duties as their male colleagues. In the survey, when asked, “Do you think policewomen should have the same duties as policemen?” 42 percent answered, “Duties should be the same for women and men in any position,” and 50.1 percent responded, “Yes, but certain duties should be male-only.” In addition, 70 percent of the participants responded “No” to the question, “Do you think female police officers should only deal with cases related to women?” Furthermore, almost 80 percent of the respondents answered “Yes” to the question, “Do you think female police officers should work in the same office space as male police officers?”

⁸⁶ Interview No.17, 25 October 2016.

⁸⁷ Interview No. 8, 23 October 2016.

⁸⁸ Interview No. 3, 20 October 2016.

⁸⁹ Natarajan, Mangai, *Women Police in a Changing Society: Back Door to Equality*, (Ashgate: 2008).

In order to support the sharing of duties between men and women, the participants felt strongly that male and female officers should receive the same training,⁹⁰ that men should understand women's rights,⁹¹ and that men and women should work more collaboratively. A 22-year-old woman from Ghazni argued, "[Policing] is not effective unless men and women work together on field investigations. Policewomen or policemen alone cannot solve problems."⁹²

However, 21 percent of the recruits believed that women police officers should work only on issues related to women. While many of the women agreed that men and women should work in the same space, they were also concerned about their security when working with men. Some women emphasized the need to establish separate departments and workspaces for women to create an environment in which women officers can work safely and effectively. Some women also suggested that it would be helpful for women to begin working in separate environments, then move into working with men once they have become accustomed to their position. A 22-year-old woman from Kabul said, "I want to only work with women first. I may be able to work with men someday. But if I start working with policemen without any experience as a police officer, I may be controlled by men and it would be difficult for me to grow."⁹³ Another recruit from Kabul echoed, "I prefer to work in the same space with men after I gain more experience and confidence and my ability is recognized by the people I work with."⁹⁴

The participants seemed aware that it is not enough to hope that men and women will work well together, but that women officers will need to work hard to ensure they are respected by their male colleagues. A 19-year-old from Kabul argued, "Women should speak up and work together with men from the beginning in order to fulfill their duties. We must walk the walk on gender equality, not just talk the talk. Otherwise, nothing will be solved."⁹⁵

While the majority of the recruits hoped to work in the same capacity as men, many also argued that there are roles that only women can play. One participant argued, "Men in Afghanistan cannot conduct search operations of someone else's house without the presence of women,"⁹⁶ and another said, "Because we are women, we can listen to female victims."⁹⁷ Many of these women expressed the desire to contribute to tasks that are assigned only to women or that specifically address the needs of women, while also collaborating with men to ensure community and national security.

⁹⁰ Focus Group Discussion No. 18, 21 October 2016.

⁹¹ Focus Group Discussion, No.18, 21 October 2016.

⁹² Focus Group Discussion No. 9, 20 October 2016.

⁹³ Focus Group Discussion No. 9, 20 October 2016.

⁹⁴ Focus Group Discussion No. 9, 20 October 2016.

⁹⁵ Focus Group Discussion No. 10, 20 October 2016.

⁹⁶ Focus Group Discussion No. 10, 20 October 2016.

⁹⁷ Focus Group Discussion No. 10, 20 October 2016.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women entering the police force come from many different communities and join for a variety of reasons, often to further their broader professional and personal goals. However, they face serious challenges from their home communities, from the security situation in Afghanistan, and from particular vulnerabilities of working as a police officer as a woman.

At the time of this writing, women officers constitute only two percent of the police officers in Afghanistan. The government of Afghanistan and international partners are accelerating their efforts to recruit and build the capacity of women officers. It is important to understand the reasons that women are motivated to become officers and the ways to support them in being effective members of the police force. This study has provided insight into the motivations and perceptions of recruits, and aimed to improve the understanding of the needs and aspirations of women police officers in Afghanistan.

The increased recruitment and retention of women police officers is a challenge for the MOI, police forces in communities across Afghanistan, and the female officers themselves. Incorporating women into the police force at greater numbers will require policies from the MOI supporting women officers, financial support from the Afghan government and international partners, open environments in local police forces, and opening of opportunities for women in communities across Afghanistan.

Recommendations for Building Individual Capacity

Psychological Support and Violence Prevention

This research revealed that many recruits had experienced violence, regardless of their social class or economic status. According to the survey, 48.8 percent of participants experienced physical or sexual violence, and many of them appear to continue to struggle with their traumatic experiences. Some of the tasks assigned specifically to women police officers in Afghanistan are the protection of victims of domestic violence and sexual violence, as well as the prosecution of perpetrators. However, if police officers themselves are psychologically or physically vulnerable, it may be difficult for them to provide appropriate assistance to other women who have experience violence. External specialists should be provided by MOI and international partners to help women police officers address their psychological needs in order to promote both their effective participation as officers and their leadership. External specialists are appropriate to ensure confidentiality and impartiality.

Tailored Training

It is important to provide training to women police officers that is tailored specifically to their capacities and job descriptions. The training program examined in this study offers the same curriculum to all recruits, regardless of their future duties. Additionally, while a majority of the women have not served as police officers before, some have served as officers

for years and require a different kind of training. According to the interviews conducted in this study, newly recruited police officers felt positively about the training they received in increasing their knowledge, capacity, and confidence as police officers, while women who already had experience as officers requested for practical training that can be applied in the field, such as self-defense techniques for use during protests. The training program should be tailored to the officers' different levels of knowledge and experience, as well as the different duties they may eventually perform.

Practical Training Exercises for Assertiveness, Self-Expression, and Interpersonal Skills

In addition, capacity-building should include not only lecture-style training, but provide practical exposure to the police work in other countries and field operations, such as networking efforts among the police and relevant agencies to support victims of violence and crime. Such practical approaches are deemed effective for building technical capacity of policewomen. For women recruits, it is important to promote their self-assertiveness, self-expression, and interpersonal skills. Afghan society is largely gender-segregated, and because women's interactions outside the household are extremely limited, they may have limited interpersonal and communication skills, especially when working with men. They may also struggle to be assertive and to express themselves professionally and appropriately. Some of the women in this study noted that they do not feel confident or able to express themselves, which is a barrier to their participation and leadership in security. Leadership training would help address this issue, and would also strengthen the recruits' conflict management skills. The recruits as well as the police force are diverse, not only along gender lines, but also in other areas, such as ethnicity, age, and educational level, and it is important to have the skills to manage conflict appropriately within the police force.

Recommendations for a More Inclusive and Effective Police Force

Establish, Cultivate and Expand Networks of Women Police Officers

The women in this study who had worked previously as police officers argued that the increase in the number of women police officers and networking among them is an effective way to raise their voice to strengthen women's roles in the police force. The creation, cultivation, and expansion of networks for women police officers support interpersonal and institutional connections, and also provide additional training opportunities. Women can leverage these networks to exchange information and experiences in order to help facilitate their professional success and efficacy.

Enable and Ensure Support from Male Colleagues

Awareness, understanding, and support from male colleagues are indispensable for policewomen's effective participation and leadership. The case study found that the existence of understanding male supervisors and colleagues is a key supportive factor for policewomen. However, their support for policewomen seems to only stay at the individual level, and lacks facilitation of such support at organizational level. According to women with police experience, regardless of policewomen's level of education and capacity, unless

policemen are aware and supportive of their role, they have limited space to play an active role and exercise leadership. In this respect, it is important to work with male officers to facilitate training on women's rights and support for women officers.

Recommendations for Creating Community Support

Civic Education and Awareness Raising

While institutional reform is essential to better integrating women into the police force, changing people's mindsets to be more accepting and supportive of women police officers is equally important. As revealed in the interviews with participants surveyed for this study, the receptivity and response of family members, community leaders, and the general public towards the recruitment and presence of women police officers are significantly consequential. Lack of supportive environments not only hampers the ability of women officers to perform their jobs as needed, but also discourages new recruits from joining the police force. Civic education through awareness raising in the media, advocacy campaigns, encouragement of senior public leaders, and curricular reform are a few key ways to create a culture of acceptance that can help women police officers thrive in their profession, and also build trust between communities and the police force. Sensitization of male colleagues through training and accountability measures for harassment are salient to changing mindsets. Although normative change is a slow process, there are many creative initiatives – such as TV and radio programs – that have the potential to reassure and inspire future recruits, increase the retention rates of women who join, and enable their effective functioning.

