

## GENDER-INCLUSIVE POLICING: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN LAW ENFORCEMENT

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### **Abstract**

*Of recent, the number of women entering in law enforcement field has increased due to factors like globalization, modern education, and changes in the sociocultural environment during the late 19th century. However, women continue to encounter numerous challenges in their attempts to obtain employment, endure, and advance in their careers because of patriarchal system, which minimises the contribution of women to productive labour. The police profession has traditionally been seen as a masculine, as it is largely dominated by men and associated with masculine traits. The low representation of women and the challenges faced by them in police force indicates the futility of policies aimed at promoting gender inclusivity in the police force. This paper therefore examines the role and challenges of women working in Police and critically analyses the existing participation rate, policies designed for protection and promotion of women in police services.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, Gender, Inclusive policing, Masculine, Police, Policewomen

### **INTRODUCTION**

Police is known as an important organization in the present society. Its existence is considered necessary in all societies as a formal institution of social control because of the diminishing role of family, school and religion as informal institutions of social control and socialization. There are three terms which are used as synonyms to each other i.e., police, policing and policing actors. According to the Stabilisation Unit (SU, 2014) of

the U.K. Government, police serve as the civil institution of a state that are in charge of preserving law and order, preventing and detecting crime, and protecting life and property. On the other hand, policing describes the actions taken by law enforcement officials to safeguard and uphold order, prevent and identify criminal activity, and protect life and property. On the other hand, the term "policing actors" describes the variety of organisations that engage in policing in nations that are unstable or afflicted by conflict. Core state agencies like the police, military, and border guards are usually included in this; local providers with constitutional and legal power; and non-state actors who are not authorised by law to conduct policing but nevertheless do so.

The police profession in India and also in the whole world has traditionally been viewed as a masculine occupation, dominated by men and is symbolized for having masculine attributes such as boldness, authority, power and aggression. The socially constructed feminine features that women are expected to possess, which have been socio-psychologically conditioned since birth, are in sharp contrast to these traits. However, the advent of several technological and social advancements undermined this prejudiced worldview by offering women and other marginalised minorities a wealth of opportunity to catch up to the majority population. Women are now more able to work independently and pursue their interests in occupations regardless of whether they are traditionally associated with a masculine, feminine, or neutral career because of several factors of change like social media, contemporary schooling, and altered work structures and nature. They are taking up many challenging roles which are considered 'masculine' in nature or are only considered for the men, i.e. they are working as engineers, doctors, business persons, administrators and bus drivers etc. Similarly, many women are choosing their careers in the police administration which is socially considered as males' job or men's space even at present.

As it is opined by Krishnamurthi (1996) that as women progressively make their way into this traditionally male-dominated field, they are supposed to perform a completely different role than their colleagues in other occupations and professions. This can be attributed to the macho-police culture, which is marked by hardness, authoritarian attitudes, fear and anger-inducing duty conditions, and an unfavourable public image that

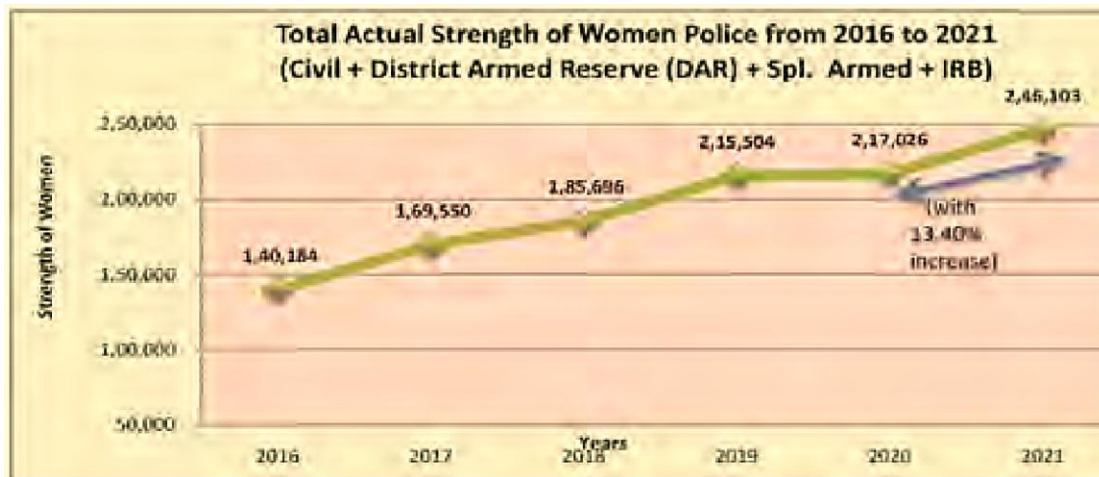
makes the job emotionally dangerous. Therefore, women in law enforcement have a distinct employment position that is in stark contrast to the stereotypes of their sex that portray them as weak, meek, soft, delicate, and fragile, among other things. Compared to women employed in other fields, their jobs are more likely to cause stress, tension, and conflict. According to the BPRD, the women in police play an important role to ensure the safety of women in public places, to reduce crimes against women and are efficient enough to deal with sensitive cases related to women and children. But their poor representation in the police is creating problems for the department to deal with such issues effectively.

### **POLICEWOMEN IN INDIA**

In India the trend of women's entry in the police profession is traced back to the labour strike in Kanpur in 1938. Thus, to avoid any such situation in the future, the Uttar Pradesh government appointed women in Kanpur police in 1939 (Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1962). Women in the police department were first recruited in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra & Kerala in 1939. Later, other Indian states also followed them i.e. Gujarat, Punjab & Delhi induced women in police in the year 1948; West Bengal in 1949; Andhra Pradesh in 1950; Chandigarh in 1977 and so on. In the year 1972, Kiran Bedi became the first Indian woman to join the officer rank of the Indian Police Service (IPS). Initially, Union Public Service Commission did not allow women entering in the Indian Police Service as they were considered unsuitable for this service due to their biology as well as social understanding of gender and patriarchal labelling of work domains, but with the hard work and insistence of Mrs. Kiran Bedi, the Commission not only allowed her to join the police service as IPS officer but it also opened the gates for all women in this profession (Rajeswari & Alagumalai,2017).

### **Strength**

At present, the total strength of Indian women police (Civil+ District Armed Reserve + Special Armed+ Indian Reserve Battalion) is 2,46,103 as on 01.01.2022. It shows an increase of 13.40% in comparison to their actual strength of 2,17,026 in the year 2020. It expresses a positive sign of women's involvement in the police service. It is shown in the following graph:



**Source:** BPRD Data On Police Organisations, 2022

Women Police constituted the 11.75% of the total Police force (Civil + District Armed reserve + Armed + IRB) in the country. Maximum percentage of policewomen (in both states and UTs) in relation to total force is present in Ladakh (i.e. 28.34%), Andhra Pradesh (21.76%), and Chandigarh (21.60%). However, the very recent statistics on the state-wise share of women police officers in India (Jan 2022) indicate that Mizoram had the highest share of women police officers i.e., 21.4 % followed by Uttarakhand (18.1 %), Tamil Nadu (17.9%), Punjab (8.3%), while the lowest was recorded in Lakshadweep (0%), J&K (1.4%), Kerala (2.4%), etc (<https://www.statista.com/statistics>). The maximum number of women police personnel (Civil + District Armed reserve + Armed + IRB) are working in the states of Uttar Pradesh (i.e. 33,425), Maharashtra (i.e. 30,432), and Tamil Nadu (22,547).

### **Women Police Stations**

The total number of women police stations as on 1st January 2022 is 745, out of which 135 are based in rural areas and 610 in urban areas. Overall, the largest number of Women Police Stations (WPS) are in Tamil Nadu i.e. 202 (61 in rural and 141 in urban areas). Next to Tamil are Uttar Pradesh- 77 (2 R and 75 U), and Madhya Pradesh with 52 WPS (all in urban areas). While in Punjab the total number of WPS are 9 and all are in urban areas only.

The total number of women help desk set up in the existing police stations in overall India is 12663 (7488 in rural, 4337 in urban, 838 S.P.) (BPRD,2022). On basis of ranks,

only 8.7% of higher police ranks are held by women in India. Further, the following table represents the actual Strength of Women Police (Civil Police) in India and Punjab (Rank-Wise) as on 1.1.2022

Ranks	Number of Policewomen in India
DGP/ SPL. DGP	8
ADDL. DGP	37
IGP	29
DIG	49
AIGP/SSP/SP/COM.	323
ADDL. SP/ Dy. COM.	239
ASP/Dy. SP/ ASST. COM.	820
INSPECTOR	3,532
S.I.	12,593
A.S.I.	5,857
HEAD CONSTABLE	17,504
CONSTABLE	1,38,616
OTHERS	19,797
Total	1,99,404

Source: Annual report on 'Data on Police Organizations in India' published by BPRD, 2022.

### The Need for Gender Inclusive Policing

At present, the role of women in the police department is considered very crucial in dealing with gender sensitive cases and their ability to deal with crimes against children as well as women. Their increased visibility in the public areas ensures the safe and secure environment for the other women. Their presence in this profession is gradually increasing with the passage of time but still there are some constraints which inhibit women's entry and their stay in this profession.

There have been many news reports on the low-level representation of women in the police service instead of the power and financial security provided to them by this job. It is seen that majority of women who prefer to work on lower ranks in police hail from rural or backward areas. A newspaper report in The Tribune (Sep 11, 2022), which was written by a journalist named Seema Sachdeva, gives us an idea through a case study that women still feel hesitant to join the police force because of the superstitions and fears related to this male dominated area of work. Hence, there is a need to know more about the conditions of women in this service through more primary as well as secondary data.

This research article is based on the review of secondary data (books, journal articles, news interviews) and empirical work. The paper has three main objectives:

- To understand the challenges faced by policewomen in police profession.
- To study the existing policies and initiatives designed for the protection and promotion of women in police service.
- To provide relevant suggestions to solve their problems.

This paper is based on the review of the secondary literature on women in police. The study resorted majorly to secondary methods where the data was collected from research papers, Ph.D. thesis, authentic websites, books etc. An effort has been made to examine the total and rank-wise strength of policewomen in India, their challenges in the police service, and assess the existing policies protecting and promoting women's continuation in police professions.

### **BIAS, BARRIERS AND BALANCING**

In this part of the paper, challenges faced by women in police are discussed which together hinder the effective recruitment and performance of policewomen in this profession. An effort has been made to identify the barriers to women's recruitment and smooth functioning in the police department which hints towards the measures that can be taken for mainstreaming gender in policing in India. It is important to note that there are several challenges faced by women in police can which intersect and overlap; broadly they can be categorized as:



The major factors which are responsible for the challenges women face in police are societal generalization and institutionalized patriarchy. According to feminist theory, power dynamics and gender disparities in law enforcement, and conventional views of masculinity, stereotypes of hypermasculine workplace, force women to fit in or risk marginalisation in such vocations (Connell, 1995).

Other factors are infrastructural, i.e., insufficient transportation and infrastructure facilities (accommodation, shelter to protect them from rain or sunlight at the duty place,

separate washrooms and changing rooms etc.), undervalued and underpaid work, discriminatory behaviour by male police personnel, improper patrolling schedule, pressure of higher authorities, insufficient power in self-governing, lack of physical and military training, dependence on male officers to make decisions which leads to exclusion of women from forces (Jamil & Mohyuddin, 2015).

Jamil & Mohyuddin (2015) in his work highlight the issue of improper patrolling by women police in crime-affected areas, leading to increased cases of theft, prostitution, and car snatching. They argue that women are not allowed to patrol after sunset and lack proper training for emergency use. Higher authorities discourage their posting due to security concerns and inadequate facilities (female washrooms, deficient security arrangements). Women staff members report a hectic duty schedule, feeling insecure and threatened. They also emphasised on the lack of proper training to police women to handle or use the weapons in case of emergency. Some of the policewomen in his study also shared their problems related to the menstruation that they are not permitted to take leave and have to do all the duties without break and presented male prejudice against them.

It is revealed in many of the research works that policewomen face more psychological issues in this field i.e. they suffer from depression, mind or emotional instability etc. The major reasons for such conditions are: household and societal disturbances; encountering accidents, blasts or terror activities which lead to mass killing; confronting death of innocent people, their blood and body parts which cause deeper impacts on their minds and emotional stability etc. Except the presence of such issues among women staff, very less concern is paid to do arrangements at the highest level to provide psychological counselling (Jamil & Mohyuddin, 2015). They also faced problems in relation to lack of fixed duty time, call on duty, and hectic 24 hour duty schedule.

Krishnamurthi (1995) points out the same kind of issues of women police in her research findings i.e. inadequate time availability and the major factors responsible for this were: a family member's illness, unexpected visitor arrivals, improper transportation, insufficient home appliances, and a lack of domestic help are a few examples. In this work the focus

was also given to the role conflict problem of women in the general context where they face problems to fulfil their duties in the family and at workplace.

Belliappa (2013), also emphasises on this issue in the general context of women and work i.e. “women don’t get real satisfaction in professional and family life as women find themselves constantly attempting to ‘get through’ work in order to return home and managing the home, in order to perform satisfactorily within workplace.” In the specific context of women police, the research studies have also found the same issues where women are seen torn between the police job (which involves long and irregular hours of work, call on duty, punctuality etc.) and family (where they are required to play the roles of a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, and homemaker, etc.). While fulfilling these roles they sometimes face conflicting situations which further becomes the reason for psychological imbalances, stress and tensions in women police (Krishnamurthi, 1995).

In his study conducted in Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, Mahajan (1982) identified several factors that contributed to policewomen's ineffective performance, including the role's recentness, lack of training, the police organization's unsupportive behaviour, the older policewomen’s lack of commitment, and the general public's negative attitude (many people to whom I asked about their views regarding police and policewomen, mostly shared negative opinions i.e. calling this job not good for girls, while some said that in their families or in their regions people avoid marrying their daughters to men who work in police).

In the context of Punjab, women face more socio-cultural constraints in relation to career preferences or working outside homes. As the Punjabi society is patriarchal in nature which further marginalises the role of women in productive works i.e. undervaluation of tasks associated with women, discriminatory wage differentials, the values of honour or izzat restrict their freedom, and unfavourable attitude towards sending females to work specially the unmarried girls (Gill, 2003).

Thus, in such a social environment the entry and survival of women in a masculine profession like policing becomes more challenging.

Rizvi (2015) throws light on challenges like the pressure of seniors, frequent contact with anti-social elements; lack of complete integration into service as their roles are only

limited to sensitive cases related to women; lack of job satisfaction in relation to promotion opportunities, working conditions, roles, respect, and recognition.

Sahgal (2007) in the research paper titled as “Gender Discrimination: Beliefs and Experiences: A Comparative Perspective of Women and Men in the Delhi Police” focussed the following findings based on the collected data from policemen and policewomen of Delhi Police. He writes that 70% of policewomen and policemen said that women’s families suffer when they take their career seriously. Some 64% respondents believe that women are constrained from exercising authority and have less freedom to take decisions relating to their work. While more than 50% respondents believe that competent women are perceived to be aggressive.

Other major challenges are like lack of social support in the emotional (i.e. sympathetic care, respect, and recognition) and tangible or instrumental forms (i.e. childcare, house-help etc.); wrong or negative portrayal of policewomen’s image by media; lack of equal opportunities and responsibilities to prove their worth; sexual harassment at workplace etc.

Narang and Randhawa (2013), used the Tokenism theory of Rosabeth Kanter to emphasise the issue of inadequate strength of women in police service. According to this theory “once tokens reach a tipping point of 15 per cent representation in the workplace, they begin to experience fewer workplace problems; otherwise, the members of a token group are likely to have negative experiences at the workplace as a result of their low numerical representation. Narang and Randhawa also in their study found that that female officers working in police agencies with less than 15 per cent representation expressed that they would prefer to pick up a new job, were less satisfied, and were not likely to recommend a career in law enforcement to a women, they felt tired, and felt that their jobs were less important than police agencies where there was a higher proportion of female officers (more than 15 per cent)”.

On the whole it can be said that, the challenges women face in law enforcement are multi-faceted and deeply rooted in societal norms and institutional structures. These issues manifest in various ways, including discriminatory behaviour, insufficient

infrastructure and support systems, inadequate training, and limited career advancement opportunities.

### **POLICIES AND INITIATIVES BY GOI**

The Indian Constitution's seventh schedule lists police as a State subject; hence the States are still largely in charge of implementing police reforms. The Government of India alongside state governments has done various efforts and formulated policies and programmes for mainstreaming women in police and has taken actionable measures to bridge the imbalance between men and women within the police forces. These efforts are discussed below:

**Preventing workplace sexual harassment:** Women employed by law enforcement agencies are protected by the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act of 2013. An Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) must be established in accordance with this Act in order to handle workplace complaints of sexual harassment and carry out awareness campaigns on behalf of the "employer." SHO is regarded as the "employer" in the context of police stations.

**Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 (as revised in 2017):** This law guarantees paid maternity leave to female employees and childcare services. The duration of the paid maternity leave was extended from 12 to 26 weeks.

**Ensuring Gender equality at workplace:** India is required to guarantee equal treatment for women as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and numerous other conventions and treaties. The same holds true for female police officers. Furthermore, in order to put women on an equal footing with men in law enforcement, Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution forbid discrimination based on gender and promote equal opportunities for women officers.

**5<sup>th</sup> National Police Commission (1980):** The Fifth National Police Commission's (1980) recommendations were primarily aimed at bettering the situation and raising the proportion of women in law enforcement. It made the following suggestions:

- Women in law enforcement should be assigned more responsibility for conducting investigations, handling crimes against women and children, and assisting young people who are in trouble with the law.
- To hire more policewomen, ideally in the positions of Assistant Sub-Inspectors or Sub-Inspectors of Police rather than constables.
- The promotion and recruitment of female police officers should not be restricted to their own branch; instead, they should be integrated into the police organisation as a whole.
- Female officers should get equal training as male officers, with a focus on dealing with women and children, as well as public order problems.

**National conferences for women in police:** These are held every two years and bring together all police women from all ranks and states under the direction of the Ministry of Home Affairs' Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD), in partnership with a state police force. The conferences have consistently emphasised the need for greater representation of women and have suggested a number of initiatives, such as a 33% reservation, targeted recruitment campaigns, a shared cadre for men and women, and improved facilities for women. However, shockingly, not a single state complies with those requirements. The state closest to this is Tamil Nadu in southern India, where 12% of police officers are female.

**Parliamentary Committee reports:** The Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women looked at policewomen's concerns in its report titled "Review the working conditions of women police in India" in 2012–2013 and again in 2014–2015. The Committee's conclusions and suggestions not only offer a powerful push for increasing the proportion of women in police organisations, but they also highlight the necessary policy and organisational structure adjustments that must be made in order for women to have a significant role in law enforcement.

**National Police Mission:** The Indian government established the National Police Mission in 2005 with the goal of directing, overseeing, and evaluating the transformation of law enforcement into a "Efficient, Effective, and Responsive agency both as an instrument of state and as a service to citizens." The Empowered Steering Group,

Executive Committee, Mission Directorate, and Micro Missions are the four tiers that make up its operational framework. The last one, which focuses mostly on policewoman issues, is called the Seventh Micro-Mission. It examines gender-related issues and crimes, with rape and police response receiving particular attention. It also addresses issues and concerns pertaining to women in policing.

**Mahila Police Volunteer Programme:** The Ministry of Home Affairs received the operationalization guidelines for Mahila Police Volunteers that the Ministry of Women and Child Development had prepared and submitted for approval. It helps women in need and serves as a conduit between the community and the police. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development (2019), the MPVs are required to report cases of domestic abuse, assault against women, and harassment related to dowries.

**All-Women Police Stations:** Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Indian prime minister at the time, opened Kozhikode, Kerala, on October 27, 1973, as Asia's first police station run entirely by women. The station was designed to deter crimes against women. These are dedicated police stations run by women officers who are primarily responsible for receiving, registering and, when feasible, looking into crimes against women. They are situated apart from the local police station but nevertheless fall under the district superintendent of police's jurisdiction. The idea is to make it easier for women to report crimes to the police in an environment that they feel safer in than a police station that is dominated by men. States are free to establish AWPS; there is no federal guidance or mandate for this. Although not all states have created AWPS, a considerable number of them have. Overall, the largest number of women police stations are in Tamil Nadu i.e. 202 (61 in rural & 141 in urban areas). Next to Tamil are Uttar Pradesh- 77 (2 R & 75 U), and Madhya Pradesh with 52 WPS (all in urban areas). While in Punjab the total number of WPS are 9 and all are in urban areas only (i.e. Jalandhar, Ludhiana, Ludhiana rural, Ferozpur, Amritsar, Bathinda, Patiala, SAS nagar, and Malerkotla- recently added); 1 wps is in Chandigarh (BPRD,2022).

**Model Police Act, 2006:** The 2006 Model Police Act addressed women's representation for the first time, requiring "each police station to have a Women and Child Protection Desk staffed, as far as possible, by women police personnel, to record complaints of

crimes against women and children and to deal with the tasks relating to the administration of special legislations relating to women and children" and calling for "adequate gender representation in the composition of the police service." The total no. of women help desks set up in the existing police stations in overall India is 12663 (7488 in rural, 4337 in urban, 838 in Special Purpose police stations). In Punjab their number is 391 in total (240 in rural, 142 in urban, and 9 are in Special Purpose police stations).

**Reservation:** The majority of States have a policy requiring women to occupy 30% or 33% of available positions in their police forces through horizontal reservation. Under the terms of horizontal reservation, women candidates are advanced up the list to make up for any vacancies left by the minimum number of reserved positions in each of the following categories: SC, ST, OBCs, and unreserved, based only on merit. In October 2020, the state cabinet of Punjab, led by Amarinder Singh, the then-chief minister, approved the "Punjab Civil Services (Reservation of Posts for Women) Rules, 2020," which provided a 33% reservation for women in direct recruitment for positions in Punjab civil services, boards, and corporations.

From 2018 to 2019, the Ministry of Home Affairs started offering financial rewards to States that successfully carry out police reforms. In addition, the MHA's modernization plan includes a unique clause requiring the construction of gender-specific restrooms and the establishment of childcare facilities in each police station. Installation of a police recruitment board in each state for consistent hiring. However, several States lack the authority to conduct regular recruitment drives and do not have a permanent police recruitment board.

#### **GAPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Enacting legislation in a workplace alone is insufficient; the provisions must be carried out in practice. There are many limitations of above initiatives and policies when it comes to the implementation, as there have been many news reports and registered cases regarding sexual harassment of policewomen at workplace, promotion related issues, issues related to late and re-entry, not even one state has met its reservation goals of 10% to 33% women reservation in police recruitment, few states like Kerela, Mizoram, and Goa don't have reservation policy for women in police force (BPRD,2021), lack of

permanent police recruitment board in many states, failure of government and police department to change the negative perception about this occupation which discourages women's entry and survival in this profession with proper dignity and recognition.

Following are some suggestions to deal with the above limitations and to ensure more gender inclusive policing:

- Efforts should be made to change the negative attitudes of the general public and policemen towards police service in general and towards policewomen in specific.
- Due consideration should be given to the psychological health of policewomen by making arrangements for their psychological counselling.
- To create a secure work atmosphere, eliminating women's anxiety about any form of workplace harassment. To stop sexual harassment of women at work, departments must establish Internal Complaints Committees and operationalize the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.
- To increase the recruitment of women in general police stations and also to increase the number of AWPS to ensure large scale involvement of women in productive works, which further enhances their confidence, leadership and decision-making abilities. It will also help to break the traditional gender biased mindset of society. With the large number of policewomen, the duty time can be allotted in a way to reduce the duty hours for each policewoman.
- In the context of accommodation, preference should be given to policewomen in the allotment of houses, irrespective of seniority taking into account the security issues of women.
- Basic infrastructural facilities should be provided such as separate toilets, changing rooms, separate living quarters, childcare facilities, accessible and safe transportation during late night shifts, etc.

- To standardise policies and regulations concerning the hiring, training, and working conditions of law enforcement personnel, including women, a national uniform police act might be implemented. That way, regardless of the state in which they serve, female police would always be provided equal respect and opportunities.
- Pregnancy or child-rearing obligations should not be grounds for discrimination in decisions about work assignments, deployment, promotions, hiring, training, etc.
- Positive discrimination towards police women can be done as prescribed by Indian constitution under Articles 16(4), 4(a) and Article 15 to bring about the participation of the disadvantaged groups in mainstream society. For example, while taking decisions in relation to task assignments and transfer, due consideration should be given to the pregnant women.

## CONCLUSIONS

In western countries, the condition of policewomen is much better than in India, as they are provided more equal opportunities and better facilities. There has been a greater recognition of the importance of gender diversity in law enforcement and concerted efforts to address barriers faced by women in the profession in those countries. However, India still lacks efficient policy execution and has unclear policies regarding women's proper responsibilities in the police force. The condition of women in police service becomes more severe in rural areas and smaller cities. To make policing more gender inclusive, it is therefore necessary to take major steps to increase the representation of women in the field. Some of these measures include addressing societal perceptions, launching educational and awareness campaigns to highlight the variety of opportunities available to women in the force, etc.

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