The Research Probe
Volume 6 Issue 2 December 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.237

Breaking barriers and building support: Women's lived experiences in law enforcement

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Abstract

Women in law enforcement continue to face systemic challenges that hinder their growth and well-being. Despite their contributions, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles and often encounter discrimination and stereotypes, requiring them to repeatedly prove their strength and competence. This qualitative phenomenological study, using Moustakas' technique, explored the lived experiences of women officers through focused group discussions and in-depth interviews. From fifty-nine significant statements, four emergent themes were identified. Two themes highlighted challenges: Striving for Balance in Career, Family, and Equality and Managing Work-Life Balance Through Faith and Flexibility. The other two emphasized their impact: Breaking Barriers and Facing Challenges and Mentorship and Support as the Foundation for Strong Officers. Findings revealed that women often struggle with balancing professional and personal responsibilities while navigating biases in a male-dominated field. Yet their resilience, adaptability, and reliance on mentorship enabled them to thrive and influence organizational culture. By breaking barriers, they demonstrated that gender is not a limitation in policing, paving the way for future generations. This study underscores the importance of institutional support, mentorship, and equitable opportunities to enhance women's well-being and career advancement in law enforcement.

Keywords: *women in law enforcement, gender equity, phenomenological study, lived experiences, work-life balance, mentorship and support*

Article History:
Received: *March 18, 2026* ***Revised***: *October 10, 2026*
Accepted: *October 30, 2026* ***Published online***: *November 17, 2026*

Suggested Citation:
Mamar, R.J.E., Brillantes, J.S., Arroz, M.M.C. & Olarte, S.B. (2026). Breaking barriers and building support: Women's lived experiences in law enforcement. *The Research Probe*, 6(2), 48-66. https://doi.org/10.53378/trp.237

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1. Introduction

Law enforcement remains one of the most gender-stratified professions globally, shaped by longstanding institutional traditions, sociocultural expectations, and structural inequalities. Despite increasing awareness of gender equality, policing continues to reflect deeply rooted masculine norms that influence recruitment, assignment, and advancement processes (Angehrn et al., 2021; Todak, 2023). Women remain underrepresented, particularly in leadership and middle-ranking positions, a phenomenon described as the "police progression paradox," where female participation declines as rank increases (Bailey et al., 2025).

The persistence of gender inequality in policing is closely linked to broader legal and sociocultural frameworks. In many Asian contexts, constitutional and legal systems formally promote gender equality; however, the implementation of these principles is often constrained by entrenched patriarchal values (Rubio-Marín et al., 2023; Szołtysek et al., 2026). This disconnect between policy and practice creates systemic barriers that limit women's opportunities in male-dominated sectors such as law enforcement. Scholars argue that achieving gender equity requires not only legal reforms but also a transformation of institutional culture (Clinkinbeard & Rief, 2022).

Empirical studies consistently reveal that women in policing face multiple challenges, including workplace discrimination, limited access to operational assignments, and restricted career advancement opportunities. Female officers are frequently assigned to administrative or support roles, which limits exposure to fieldwork essential for promotion (Todak, 2023; Jassal & Barnhardt, 2024). Additionally, women in leadership positions often confront the "glass cliff" phenomenon, whereby they are placed in high-risk roles with greater scrutiny and fewer support systems compared to their male counterparts (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Such structural inequalities contribute to slower career progression and reinforce gender disparities within police organizations.

Workplace culture further exacerbates these challenges. Studies show that women police officers experience discrimination, harassment, and social isolation, which negatively affect job satisfaction, mental health, and retention (Schafer et al., 2024). Moreover, women must often balance demanding professional responsibilities with societal expectations related to family and caregiving roles, resulting in work–life conflict and increased stress (Todak, 2023). These factors create additional barriers to career advancement and highlight the need for inclusive workplace policies.

Despite these challenges, women bring valuable contributions to law enforcement. Research indicates that female officers demonstrate strong communication skills, collaborative leadership, and community-oriented approaches that enhance policing effectiveness (Negrão et al., 2025; Detalla et al., 2024). Global initiatives such as the 30×30 Initiative aim to increase female representation and promote gender equity within policing organizations by encouraging structural and cultural reforms (McGough & Roman, 2024).

Furthermore, resilience among women officers is often supported by coping mechanisms such as mentorship, peer networks, and spiritual or existential strategies. However, scholars emphasize that while individual coping strategies are important, they are insufficient to address systemic inequalities (Dell'Anno et al., 2026). Sustainable change requires institutional commitment to gender-sensitive policies, leadership development, and inclusive organizational cultures.

This study seeks to examine the experiences of women in law enforcement within this broader context of structural inequality and cultural norms. By exploring the challenges, coping strategies, and contributions of female officers, the research aims to generate insights that can inform policy development and promote gender equity in policing. Ultimately, addressing these issues is essential not only for fairness and inclusion but also for enhancing the overall effectiveness and legitimacy of law enforcement institutions.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Women in Law Enforcement

Women in law enforcement face a wide range of challenges influenced by institutional bias, workplace culture, and societal expectations, both globally and in the Philippine context. Studies emphasize that gender inequality persists in policing organizations due to entrenched structural and cultural barriers (Cabilan et al., 2023; Todak, 2023). Workplace culture plays a significant role in shaping women's experiences, particularly in male-dominated environments where informal networks often determine access to career opportunities (Keddie, 2022). These systems of influence frequently exclude women, reinforcing disparities in advancement and participation and hindering progress toward gender equality. In addition, female officers experience difficulties balancing professional responsibilities and personal obligations (Degerstedt et al., 2025). The demanding nature of police work, combined with societal expectations regarding caregiving roles, contributes to work–family conflict, heightened stress,

and reduced job satisfaction. Without adequate institutional support, these pressures may lead to higher attrition rates among women in policing.

Research further shows that women in law enforcement frequently encounter discrimination, harassment, and unequal access to career advancement opportunities (Angehrn et al., 2021). They are often excluded from specialized training, denied critical assignments, and subjected to workplace harassment or teasing, all of which negatively affect both recruitment and retention (Schafer et al., 2024). Moreover, gendered workplace practices, such as unequal pay, limited leadership roles, and stereotypical task assignments, continue to reinforce perceptions of male superiority in policing roles.

Policing institutions are widely regarded as "gendered organizations," where both formal systems and informal norms have been historically shaped by masculine standards (Cabilan et al., 2023; Detalla et al., 2024). These organizational structures often marginalize women by imposing expectations aligned with male-dominated values. Despite increased representation, women continue to navigate a "machismo" culture that subjects their competence to greater scrutiny compared to their male colleagues. This culture is evident in practices such as differential deployment, where women are frequently assigned to administrative or less physically demanding roles. In the Philippine setting, female officers are often relegated to "simpler" tasks, limiting their exposure to operational fieldwork essential for promotion (Cabilan et al., 2023). Additionally, women are often treated as "tokens" in predominantly male teams, which can result in social isolation and pressure to outperform others to gain acceptance (Detalla et al., 2024).

2.2. Work-Life Balance and the "Second Shift"

A major challenge for women in policing is managing the conflict between professional duties and domestic responsibilities. The "second shift" concept highlights how women disproportionately handle caregiving and household roles alongside their careers. In Cebu City, female police officers, especially mothers, experience significant stress due to rigid organizational structures, including sudden transfers that disrupt family life (Arbuis & Sabijon, 2025). These constraints lead to emotional strain, as officers report guilt and frustration when unable to fulfill parental responsibilities, such as caring for sick children or attending important family events. Similarly, international studies reveal that women are often advised to choose between career advancement and family life (Torres et al., 2024; Lopes, 2024), reinforcing the

perception that achieving both is difficult. Consequently, work–life imbalance is not only a personal issue but also a structural concern contributing to burnout and attrition.

Policy reforms have also been introduced to support work–life balance, including flexible schedules and part-time work options for officers with caregiving responsibilities. In the Philippines, initiatives such as the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710) and the establishment of all-women police stations demonstrate efforts toward gender mainstreaming (Cabilan et al., 2023). However, studies indicate that a gap remains between policy implementation and the actual experiences of female officers, suggesting that formal equality does not always translate into practice (Detalla et al., 2024).

2.3. Faith and Coping Strategies

Women in law enforcement operate in highly stressful environments marked by frequent exposure to violence and organizational challenges (Elliot et al., 2015; Bourassa Rabichuk et al., 2025), which are further intensified by gender-related barriers in a male-dominated profession. Despite these conditions, many women demonstrate resilience by relying on adaptive coping mechanisms, including faith and spirituality. Jacobs and Barnard (2022) found that authenticity, particularly from a best-self perspective, plays a crucial role in enabling women officers to cope effectively, as it fosters a mature sense of self, spiritual groundedness, and alignment with personal values, all of which enhance psychological well-being. Supporting literature indicates that faith-based coping, such as prayer, meaning-making, and reliance on spiritual beliefs, helps individuals manage stress, maintain emotional balance, and find purpose in adversity (Nepali, 2026). Thus, spirituality not only strengthens resilience but also reinforces authenticity, allowing women in law enforcement to sustain positive functioning and career satisfaction in challenging work contexts.

2.4. Breaking Barriers and Facing Challenges

Women in law enforcement continue to face significant structural and cultural barriers that hinder their professional growth and performance. Arquero (2023) highlights that female police officers remain underrepresented and frequently encounter discrimination within a predominantly male-oriented organizational culture. These challenges manifest through limited access to leadership opportunities, unequal support systems, and workplace environments that do not fully accommodate gender-specific needs. Additionally, factors such

as motherhood responsibilities and the absence of female role models in leadership positions further complicate women's career advancement and job performance. Despite these adversities, women officers persist in breaking barriers by demonstrating resilience and commitment to their roles; however, their continued struggle underscores the need for institutional reforms that promote inclusivity, equal opportunities, and organizational support. These findings emphasize that while women contribute significantly to law enforcement, systemic challenges still shape their experiences and performance in the profession.

2.5. Mentorship and Support Systems

Mentorship plays a crucial role in supporting women's professional development in law enforcement. It enhances confidence, provides career guidance, and helps women navigate male-dominated environments (Todak, 2023). However, access to mentorship remains inconsistent. Studies reveal that in-group competition among women, often driven by limited opportunities, can hinder supportive relationships (Liu et al., 2021). This may discourage senior female officers from mentoring junior colleagues, thereby perpetuating underrepresentation in leadership roles. Furthermore, research suggests that organic mentorship relationships, based on mutual compatibility, are more effective than formal mentoring programs (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014).

2.6. Theoretical Framework

This study articulates the arguments of Keddie (2022) that gender inequality in paramilitary organizations such as law enforcement cannot be addressed solely through policy reforms or increased representation of women. Instead, it requires a deeper transformation of the hierarchical and masculinized cultures embedded within these institutions. Policing organizations are structurally gendered, characterized by norms, practices, and power dynamics that privilege masculine values such as authority, control, and dominance. These entrenched cultural patterns contribute to persistent issues such as sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and exclusionary practices, which hinder women's recruitment, retention, and advancement. As a result, gender inequality is not simply an issue of individual bias but a systemic problem rooted in institutional structures.

A central concept in this framework is the integration of organizational justice theory, which focuses on fairness, equity, and inclusivity within workplace systems. Keddie (2022)

highlights that addressing gender inequality requires aligning gender equality initiatives with broader principles of organizational justice. This means ensuring fairness in decision-making processes, transparent promotion systems, and equitable treatment of all personnel. Without this alignment, gender-focused reforms risk becoming superficial and ineffective, as they fail to address the underlying systemic issues that sustain inequality.

The framework is further enriched by Nancy Fraser's social justice theory, which conceptualizes justice as comprising three key dimensions: redistribution (fair allocation of resources), recognition (respect for diverse identities), and representation (inclusive participation in decision-making). Keddie (2022) integrates these dimensions into the context of policing, arguing that meaningful gender equality reforms must address all three aspects simultaneously. For instance, redistribution involves equitable access to training and promotion opportunities; recognition involves valuing women's contributions and challenging gender stereotypes; and representation involves increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

Within policing organizations, gender equality reforms have often focused on increasing the number of women (representation) without adequately addressing deeper cultural and structural barriers. Keddie (2022) critiques such female-focused approaches, noting that while they are necessary, they are insufficient on their own. Instead, a broader social justice approach is required, one that transforms organizational culture, challenges power imbalances, and promotes institutional accountability.

This theoretical framework is particularly relevant to the present study as it provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing the experiences of women in law enforcement. It allows for an examination of how organizational structures, cultural norms, and justice-related processes interact to shape gender inequality within policing. Moreover, it highlights the importance of moving beyond surface-level reforms toward systemic change that fosters fairness, inclusivity, and equity.

In applying this framework, the study explores how gendered institutional practices influence women's experiences, opportunities, and coping strategies within the police organization. By situating gender equality within the broader context of organizational justice, the study aims to contribute to the development of more effective, gender-sensitive policies and reforms.

Employee mindset plays a critical role in shaping creativity by influencing how individuals perceive challenges and develop confidence in their creative abilities. Drawing on social cognitive and resource-based perspectives, this framework posits that work–care conflict acts as an antecedent that can strain cognitive and emotional resources, thereby constraining a growth-oriented mindset and reducing creative engagement. In turn, creative self-efficacy mediates the relationship between employee mindset and creativity, as individuals with a growth mindset are more likely to believe in their capacity to generate innovative ideas and persist in creative tasks. Additionally, work-related rumination serves as a moderating factor, such that maladaptive rumination amplifies the negative effects of work–care conflict on both self-efficacy and creativity, while constructive rumination may help mitigate these effects.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a phenomenological research methodology to explore and understand individual lived experiences regarding the phenomenon under investigation. Phenomenology is grounded in philosophical traditions that emphasize describing and interpreting human experiences as they are consciously perceived, without preconceived assumptions. It is particularly suitable for capturing the depth and richness of participants' subjective realities, allowing researchers to gain insights into how individuals make meaning of their experiences.

The approach involves in-depth data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews, reflective narratives, or personal accounts, followed by thematic analysis to identify essential structures and patterns of experience. Through processes such as bracketing and careful interpretation, the researcher seeks to present an accurate and faithful representation of participants' lived realities. This methodology is widely applied across social sciences, humanities, and health disciplines due to its capacity to reveal the essence of human experience despite its conceptual and philosophical complexity (Dodgson, 2023). In this case, the phenomenon is the intersection of gender, professional identity, and institutional challenges within law enforcement. Unlike quantitative methods, which measure variables and outcomes, phenomenology emphasizes the essence of lived experiences, providing rich, descriptive insights into the meanings participants attach to their roles and struggles.

This study utilizes a transcendental phenomenological approach, focusing on understanding the lived experiences of participants by bracketing the researcher's assumptions. Data are collected through semi-structured online interviews, enabling in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives. For analysis, the study applies Creswell's (2007) modified Stevick–Colaizzi–Keen method of Moustakas (1994), which involves extracting significant statements, clustering them into themes, and developing textural and structural descriptions to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, phenomenology aligns with the study's purpose of informing gender-sensitive policies and institutional reforms. By grounding findings in authentic narratives, the research provides context-specific insights that can guide practical interventions, mentorship programs, and organizational strategies aimed at supporting women in law enforcement.

3.2. Participants of the Study

The study involved eight participants: five women law enforcers who underwent in-depth interviews and three women law enforcers who participated in a focus group discussion, all affiliated with Bacolod City Police Office (BCPO). Participants were selected through purposive sampling, with the inclusion criteria requiring only women in law enforcement. Preparation included securing permissions from relevant agencies and validating the interview guide with experts in Psychology and Criminology.

3.3. Instrumentation

Data were collected using a validated, semi-structured interview guide focusing on challenges face by women in law enforcement, and how do women in law enforcement see their role and impact. Interviews were recorded with participant consent. To secure the validity of the questionnaire, the researchers consulted experts with knowledge, expertise, and competence in the fields Criminology and Psychology.

3.4. Procedure

The study followed the research protocols set by the College of Criminal Justice Education at STI West Negros University. Researchers obtained permission from institutional authorities and from the Bacolod City Police Office to interview women in law enforcement. Participants were informed of their rights through an informed consent form and voluntarily

participated in interviews and focus group discussions conducted in Hiligaynon. Discussions were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed, with data securely stored in password-protected files, and audio recordings were securely deleted after processing by the set guidelines set forth by the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

To strengthen the validity of the study, ratification of results was conducted through participant debriefing and member-checking. After transcription and preliminary analysis, participants were invited to review and confirm the accuracy of their statements and the themes derived from their narratives. This process ensured that interpretations faithfully represented their experiences and minimized researcher bias. Ratification also enhanced credibility by allowing participants to clarify or expand on their insights, thereby reinforcing the authenticity of the findings.

Additionally, peer review was incorporated by consulting experts in Criminology and Psychology, who validated the thematic analysis and confirmed that the emergent themes were consistent with the data. This triangulation of participant feedback and expert validation strengthened the trustworthiness of the study and ensured that the results were both reliable and ethically sound.

3.5. Data Analysis

The research design of this study was phenomenological, using the Moustakas' modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method to capture participants' experiences while ensuring researchers bracketed their biases through reflective journaling during data collection. The bracketing process was followed by identifying significant statements from interviews and focus group discussions, grouping them thematically to create textural and structural descriptions of the lived experiences. Finally, researchers crafted an abstract description to encapsulate the overall meaning of participants' experiences. Collaboration with the experts who helped refine the themes, enhancing the accuracy and authenticity of the findings.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study followed the research ethics guidelines of the College of Criminal Justice Education, STI West Negros University, and the Helsinki Declaration, prioritizing participants' rights and confidentiality. Researchers secured participants' privacy through informed consent, anonymized coding, secure storage of data, and proper disposal of physical copies. Following

the interviews, debriefing sessions were held to validate participants' statements, ensuring data trustworthiness. The research also underwent a thorough review to uphold scientific rigor and ethical standards in treating human subjects.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings highlight the interplay between personal resilience, professional demands, and systemic support structures. The results are presented through four major themes.

Theme 1: Work-Life Balance

This theme describes how women in law enforcement struggle to balance professional duties and family responsibilities while relying on time management and emotional strength to meet both demands.

> *"The obstacles we face could be considered as our duties as wives and mothers to our children. We need to balance our time with these responsibilities. And before we decide on our careers, especially when it comes to schooling, we need to make sure that it's necessary for our advancement. We must be certain that further education will help us improve our position in the future. But before making that decision, we always ensure that there's someone to take care of our family while we're away for school."* **(IDI 2. L:1)**
>
> *(As women, we really need to balance our lives, and time management is key. We also need to make sure our children understand our work field, which is different from a typical employee's job. We should let them know that our time is flexible. Our time is flexible, and we can be called at any time, unlike in other situations.)* **(IDI 2. L:4)**

The findings reveal that women in law enforcement experience significant challenges in balancing professional duties and family responsibilities. Participants emphasized the importance of time management, emotional strength, and family support in managing their dual roles.

These findings are consistent with the literature, which highlights work–family conflict as a persistent issue among female officers due to the demanding nature of police work and societal expectations regarding caregiving roles (Arbuis & Sabijon, 2025; Torres et al., 2024; Lopes, 2024). The concept of the "second shift" further explains how women continue to bear a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities, leading to increased stress and reduced

job satisfaction (Arbuis & Sabijon, 2025). Moreover, the unpredictability of police work, including flexible and on-call schedules described by the participants, intensifies this imbalance. The findings reinforce the argument that work-life balance is not solely an individual concern but a structural issue requiring institutional support and gender-sensitive policies.

Theme 2: Faith and Flexibility

This theme explains how female officers turn to faith and adaptability to manage the emotional stress and unpredictable demands of their work.

> *"Faith in God, and prayer everyday that you can manage your work."* **(IDI 1. L:5)**
> *"The need for flexibility, adapting to whatever task is assigned, whether in the field or office, in order to perform effectively."* **(IDI 2, L:5)**

Faith emerges as a foundational source of inner strength and emotional stability. For many female officers, daily prayer and trust in God provide a sense of guidance, reassurance, and control in situations that are often beyond their influence. Policing exposes individuals to high levels of stress, trauma, and uncertainty; thus, spirituality functions as a protective resource that helps officers process difficult experiences and maintain psychological balance. The act of prayer allows officers to reflect, release tension, and reaffirm their purpose, fostering resilience and mental clarity. This aligns with research suggesting that faith-based coping, such as prayer and reliance on spiritual beliefs, enhances emotional regulation and helps individuals find meaning in stressful situations (Jacobs & Barnard, 2022).

Alongside faith, flexibility is equally emphasized as a practical coping mechanism. The unpredictable nature of police work requires officers to constantly adjust to varying roles, whether performing administrative duties or responding to field operations. Female officers highlight the importance of adaptability in maintaining effectiveness across these different contexts. Flexibility enables them to respond to shifting demands, manage workload pressures, and navigate organizational expectations. This adaptive capacity reflects resilience and a willingness to embrace challenges, which contributes to both professional competence and psychological well-being.

Importantly, faith and flexibility are not separate strategies but are mutually reinforcing. Spiritual grounding can strengthen an individual's ability to adapt by fostering patience, optimism, and acceptance in the face of uncertainty. At the same time, flexibility allows officers to apply their values and beliefs across diverse work situations, reinforcing authenticity and a sense of purpose. Jacobs and Barnard (2022) emphasize that authenticity, supported by spiritual groundedness, enables women officers to align their personal values with their professional roles, thereby enhancing resilience and overall well-being.

Theme 3: Breaking Barriers and Facing Challenges

This theme highlights how women overcome gender-based biases and prove their capabilities through determination and commitment to their role.

> *"In all honesty, I joined the organization since it was my childhood dream. That time, as a kid, I wanted to stand out from other kids my age. I wanted to push boundaries and dispel the myth that women are not capable of becoming as effective leaders as males. I was always fascinated by my neighbor, who is a policewoman. The authority and her presence that she imposes motivates me to join the service. And as I get older and see the big picture, I can honestly say that I see the stability of this line of work. As a police officer, I feel that my presence changes the community. When people begin to trust and relate to me, and I become a role model for the young girls and women in the community, I can also influence or make a difference to my team by bringing different perspectives and methods to our work, which can improve decision-making and enhance teamwork." (IDI 3, L:6 & 7)*
>
> *"Both men and women are treated equally, each having designated roles and responsibilities." (IDI 1, L:7)*

The contrast between perceived equality and documented challenges highlights an important tension in the experiences of female officers. While official policies may promote fairness, informal practices and organizational culture can still create disparities in opportunities and support. For example, Arquero (2023) notes that factors such as motherhood responsibilities and the lack of female mentors can hinder career advancement. These realities suggest that equality in roles and responsibilities does not always translate into equity in experiences and outcomes. Despite these barriers, the participant's narrative reflects resilience and agency. Her commitment to making a difference in her community and influencing her

team demonstrates how women officers actively navigate and challenge structural limitations. By embracing their roles and contributing unique perspectives, they not only fulfill professional expectations but also gradually reshape organizational norms.

The integration of personal motivation, perceived equality, and structural challenges illustrates the complex realities faced by women in law enforcement. While individual experiences may reflect empowerment and opportunity, systemic issues continue to shape the broader landscape. As highlighted by Arquero (2023), addressing these challenges requires institutional reforms that foster inclusivity, provide equal opportunities, and support the professional growth of women officers.

Theme 4: Mentorship and Support

This theme shows that guidance from mentors and support from peers and family help female officers cope with job stress and build professional confidence.

> *"Mentors encountered during our college years and early career provided guidance, making us value our journey in the organization." (IDI 1, L:10)*
> *"Senior male colleagues are supportive and willing to assist female officers, emphasizing that both genders are equally capable." (IDI 5, L:9)*

The findings emphasize the importance of mentorship, peer support, and encouragement from senior colleagues in helping women navigate challenges and build professional confidence. This is strongly supported by existing studies, which show that mentorship enhances career development, self-efficacy, and retention among women in law enforcement (Todak, 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Hurd & Zimmerman, 2014). Supportive workplace relationships also play a critical role in reducing burnout and improving job satisfaction (Khan et al., 2025). Interestingly, participants noted that both male and female colleagues can serve as mentors, highlighting the importance of inclusive support systems. This aligns with literature suggesting that collaborative and supportive organizational cultures are essential for promoting gender equity (Clinkinbeard & Rief, 2022). However, research also indicates that access to mentorship is often inconsistent and influenced by organizational dynamics, including competition and limited opportunities for women (Todak, 2023). This underscores the need for structured mentoring programs within police organizations.

5. Conclusion

Women in law enforcement continue to navigate a professional landscape marked by systemic challenges, cultural expectations, and personal sacrifices. Their journey reflects the broader struggle for gender equity in traditionally male-dominated institutions. The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of their experiences, highlighting the interplay between professional demands, personal responsibilities, coping strategies, and institutional support.

One of the most persistent challenges for female officers is maintaining equilibrium between professional duties and familial responsibilities. The dual burden of managing household roles while fulfilling the demands of policing reflects entrenched cultural expectations about gender roles. In the Philippine context, this challenge is particularly pronounced due to strong familial obligations and societal norms that emphasize women's roles as caregivers. Married and mothering officers often face heightened pressures, with childcare and domestic responsibilities intersecting with unpredictable work schedules and high-stress assignments. This dynamic not only affects retention but also limits opportunities for career advancement, as women may be perceived as less available for leadership roles or specialized assignments. Addressing work-life balance requires institutional recognition of these realities and the implementation of policies that support flexible scheduling, parental leave, and equitable distribution of assignments.

Policing is inherently stressful, and female officers often bear additional emotional strain due to gendered expectations and workplace discrimination. High-pressure assignments, exposure to traumatic incidents, and the constant need to prove competence in a male-dominated environment contribute to emotional fatigue. Yet resilience emerges as a defining characteristic of women in law enforcement. Their ability to adapt, persevere, and maintain moral commitment to their roles reflects both individual strength and collective determination. Emotional resilience is not merely a personal trait but a survival mechanism cultivated through peer support, family encouragement, and institutional resources. Recognizing and fostering resilience through structured programs, counseling services, and peer mentoring is essential to sustaining female officers' effectiveness and well-being.

Systemic gender bias remains a formidable barrier to women's full participation in law enforcement. From recruitment to promotion, women often encounter assumptions of incompetence, limited exposure to operational roles, and exclusion from leadership pathways.

These biases are reinforced by institutional cultures that valorize masculine traits and undervalue women's contributions. To ensure the sustained effectiveness and well-being of women in law enforcement, institutions must develop gender-responsive programs, mentorship initiatives, and accessible mental health support. These measures are crucial for improving workplace equity, promoting career advancement, and enhancing the resilience of female officers within a male-dominated profession.

However, this study is not without limitations. The small number of participants, confined to a single locality, restricts the generalizability of findings. Reliance on self-reported data may also introduce bias or selective memory, and the focus on Bacolod City may not capture the broader experiences of women officers nationwide. Challenges in participant availability further limited deeper data collection.

Future research should therefore expand the scope to include women law enforcers across different regions and agencies, providing comparative insights into institutional challenges. Long-term studies are also encouraged to assess the effects of gender-based stress, coping strategies, and support mechanisms on professional growth and psychological resilience. Such research will not only deepen understanding but also inform the development of inclusive policies and practices that empower women in law enforcement.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was not supported by any funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards and research protocols of STI West Negros University. All procedures involving human participants complied with the Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research and the institutional policies for the protection of research participants.

AI Declaration

The authors acknowledge the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the preparation of this manuscript. All AI-assisted content was thoroughly reviewed, verified, and edited by the author to ensure accuracy, integrity, and consistency with the study's objectives. The authors assume full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

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