

## **Challenges and Coping Strategies of Female Detectives in Bahir Dar City Administration, Amhara Region, Ethiopia**

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### **Abstract**

*Crime investigation is an applied science which includes the study of evidence, used to recognize, detect, and verify the guilt of illicit activities. Males are the main actors of crime investigation in Ethiopia though few female police officers are involved in this job. Therefore, the objective of this study was to identify the challenges that female detectives face during their careers and the coping mechanisms they used to overcome problems in the study site through exploring their lived experiences. To achieve these objectives, a qualitative approach with phenomenological research design was employed. Primary data were collected from eight purposively selected participants using in-depth interviews and were analyzed thematically. The findings of the research indicated that the motivation for women to join the police force were found to be peer pressure, influence of family members, interest of helping others and marital relationship. Even though female officers enjoyed opportunities like psychological satisfaction, being role models for family members, and enhancing social acceptance; the findings of this study indicated that female detectives face tremendous and serious challenges throughout their careers. Some of these challenges include administrative problems, low scale salary, lack of conducive work environment, family responsibility, attitudinal challenges, discrimination, and harassment. To overcome these challenges, female officers use the following coping mechanisms. These include confronting the administration, appealing to concerned bodies, and finding family support. In conclusion, the working condition for female detectives in the study area was dominated by challenging work environment that was both extensive and multifaceted in nature. Therefore, all concerned bodies should properly address the existing complex problems of female detectives through empowering their capacity and participation.*

**Keywords:** Crime investigation, female detectives, lived experiences, challenges, coping strategies

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### **1. Introduction**

Policing activities previously viewed as secondary as and less important than the traditional crime-fighting responsibilities by males have attracted women as usual activities due to their different skill sets (Arlether, 2016). Since then, increased policing efforts have transitioned the traditional model of policing from "crime fighting" to placing a greater emphasis on

collaboration and partnerships with citizens, which would align closely with many of the traits that women are believed to bring to the profession. Hence, this transition could increase recruitment and retention of women in police organizations and more closely align with their skill sets. Few would argue against the fact that women have different experience compared to that of men in the crime investigation profession, taking into consideration tokenism, discrimination, socialization/culture, promotional and mentorship opportunities, and structural barriers that still exist.

Global policing is tremendously evolving on a daily basis and has led to the enlistment of women in policing as compared to early ages where the profession was only meant for males. In U.S.A., research has revealed that in entering police work, women have encountered enormous difficulties primarily as a result of the negative attitudes of the men. Male police officers anticipate women failing (Brookshire 2012), and they perpetuate myths about women's lack of emotional fitness. Similarly, according to Horne (2010), the biggest challenge facing women police officers include the resistance attitudes of male police officers toward women. Despite popular rhetoric associated with police departments' integration and acceptance of female officers, women are still being marginalized and much of this rhetoric is simply a façade (Hughes, 2011; Novak et al., 2011). Other major socially structured problems include family responsibilities (Bell, 2012) role strain and role conflict doubts about competence and self-worth (Glaser and Saxe 2012) sexual harassment (Arlether, 2016) and a concomitant fear of complaining about abuse (Bell 2012). Almost all of the past research on women police has focused on the capabilities of women to perform police work; virtually all conclude that women, indeed, do have such capability that include physical as well as mental and emotional fitness (UN Women, 2015).

In developing countries like Uganda, the policing system is also evolving and the police service has had female police officers. Since 2005, a steady increase in the number of female officers has been observed to meet the 30% gender parity rule of 2010 constitution (UN Women, 2011). Serving in their various capacities, these female police officers face challenges that interfere with their effectiveness in service delivery. In Ethiopia, the challenges are different because of the socio-cultural setting of the country. Women in the Ethiopian national police service and, in

particular, women in the administration of police services have faced various challenges different from the ones listed by the above researchers (Hirut, 2009). Among all, community negative attitudes and other major socially structured problems are inherent in the larger community and have played prominent roles in the low participation of women in policing (Alemayehu, 2010).

Despite the fact that much research has been conducted in some areas to explore how female police officers are able to adapt successfully, female detectives face additional challenges as they endeavor to carry out their responsibilities with complex needs and challenges. Accordingly, the issues of female detectives can be a matter of debate globally; otherwise, one can simply extrapolate their dangerous future lives.

In practice the role of women in law enforcement is remarkable; people tend to trust women police officers especially when it comes to matters of sexual and gender-based violence, i.e. women trust female officers in investigating gender-based violence cases which eases and speeds the process of delivering justice (Filtering, 2014). Women police officers utilize a different policing style and rely less on physical force and more on communication skills, potentially violent confrontations are less likely to occur, or escalate into excessive force situations (Balon, 2013). However, women police officers face different challenges and the implication for not having a representative number of female officers is clear in most countries around the world, especially in developing countries. For instance, in Ethiopia, the few women police officers already in the system face numerous challenges, i.e. organizational challenges like transfers, housing and poor remuneration; personal challenges like balancing work and family, intense scrutiny, proving oneself, and professional issues such as bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination (Hirut, 2009).

Limited studies conducted on the participation of women in law enforcement professions across the globe show that the number of female police officers remains low because of a lack of qualified applicants. However, women still face internal and external obstacles when seeking equality in law enforcement because of socio-cultural settings (UN Women, 2008).

In addition to different global studies conducted by Montgomery (2012), Waltham (2014), Wilson (2016), Novak (2011), and Weitzer and Brunson (2015); some studies have been

undertaken in Ethiopia. For instance, Alemayehu (2010) assessed the knowledge, attitude, and practice of women police in Adama town that revealed that women had made some progress in the profession and at one point accounted for nearly 14.3% of all police officers in 2005. However, since 2007, that number has steadily declined to approximately 11.3%, with women comprising 7.3% of supervisory positions in large departments. Although there has been a tremendous outpouring of support and suggestions from female networking and mentoring organizations, few women have attained administrative positions. Other studies conducted by Hirut (2009) demonstrated that female police officers still faced continued resistance, sexual harassment from male colleagues, and a proverbial glass ceiling to promotions. She outlined that while sexual harassment is prevalent in many male dominated organizations, 12% female police officers experienced sexual harassment from colleagues. Consequently, affirmative action programs have not been successful in diversifying police departments or increasing women's representation in the police profession. This indicated that though legislation to date has been helpful, a stronger commitment to affirmative action goals, effective implementation and monitoring is needed.

Although different local and international empirical studies have been conducted in relation to women in policing, it was possible to find certain conceptual and methodological limitations. Thus, the intent of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities as well as coping mechanisms of female detectives as viewed from their perspective as previously targeted male participants couldn't clearly pointed out the existing challenges women faced from the points of women in policing. This study adopted a qualitative research approach of a phenomenological philosophical paradigm by taking Bahir Dar City Administration as a case of research site to answer the central question "What is the overall lived experience of female detectives in Bahir Dar City Administration" and to address the following objectives. The general objective of this study is to explore the lived experience of female detectives in Bahir Dar City Administration, Amhara region.

### **1.1 Theoretical framework**

This study has explored the lived experiences of female detectives, and accordingly the researchers conceptualized the issue within feminist theories based on different literature reviews

made. There are many feminist theories which explain the root cause of gender inequality and women's subordination with justifications and solutions to achieving gender equality. Feminist theories aim to understand the nature of inequality and focus on gender politics, power relation and sexuality. They also focus on analyzing gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, interests and issues. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression and patriarchy (Mutoro et al., 2019).

The findings of the current study are conceptualized by having the liberal feminist theoretical perspective. The main view of liberal feminist theory is that all people are created equal by God and deserve equal rights. Liberal feminists believe that oppression exists because of the way in which men and women are socialized, which supports patriarchy and keeps men in positions of power. Liberal feminists also believe that women have the same mental capacity as their male counterparts and should be given the same opportunities in political, economic and social spheres. Women should have the right to choose, not have their life chosen for them because of their sex (Stamarski et al., 2015). Essentially, women must be like men, unless women are forced to remain marginalized them and participate in different illicit activities (Friedan, 1963).

Liberal feminists create and support acts of legislation that remove the barriers for women. These acts of legislation demand equal opportunities and rights for women, including equal access to jobs and equal pay. Liberal feminists believe that removing these barriers directly challenges the ideologies of patriarchy as well as liberates women. These feminists are responsible for many important acts of legislation that have greatly increased the status of women, including reforms in welfare, education and health. Unfortunately, liberal feminism has been known to only concentrate on the legislation aspect to fight against patriarchy. Many productive women laborers are not fully engaged in the formal business sector due to lack of education and job opportunity (Beauvoir, 1989).

## **2. Description of the study area**

This study is conducted in Bahir Dar City Administration. Bahir Dar is the capital city of the Amhara National Regional State (ANRS) and is growing fast in its size with modern infrastructure. Since 2006, the city administration has reorganized its structure in a metropolitan system and has nine city *kebeles* (geographical area representing the smallest administrative

unit) and four satellite *kebeles*. Related with its growth, significant number of people is facing different kinds of social problems. The police institution was established to serve the public to ensure the observation of rights of the people and to maintain the safety and welfare of the public and to successfully run its duties and responsibilities. According to Bahir Dar City Police Department, there are five different directorates, and the crime investigation directorate is one of them. The crime investigation directorate by itself has seven police stations in which twenty-two male (60%) and fifteen female (40%) female detectives are currently working (BDCPD, 2018).

### **3. Research methodology**

#### **3.1 Research approach, design, and data management tools**

In this study, qualitative research was employed since exploring the lived experiences of individuals is more subjective and it requires deep qualitative investigation as compared to other research approaches. In order to achieve the study objectives, phenomenological research design was applied for the reason that a phenomenological study explores the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Moreover, this design focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. Groenewald (2004) noted that phenomenology is a powerful tool to be used for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people motivations and actions and cutting through the clutter of taken for granted assumptions and conventional wisdom. Holloway and Todres (2003) also stated that the phenomenological research design is the most appropriate for exploring, understanding and describing lived experiences.

In order to attain the ultimate objective of the study, convenience non-probability sampling technique was employed. To select the participants who were experiencing the phenomenon specific inclusion criteria that included a minimum of one year experience in crime investigator position and willingness to assertively explain experience was used. In a phenomenological study, it is possible to conduct study with up to 10 participants. However, the sample size of the current study was determined through data saturation point, which was attained after 8 respondents.

Data was collected from eight respondents using in-depth interviews because as briefly noted by Lisa et al. (2006), in-depth qualitative interviews are excellent tools as they employed an open-ended, discovery-oriented method, which allows the interviewer to deeply explore the respondent’s feelings and perspectives on a subject. This can then help to get rich firsthand background information that can shape further questions relevant to the topic. It also helps to capture thoughts, feelings and lived experiences of study participants and allow participants to narrate a situation from their own perspective and in their own words. The interview was conducted in Amharic and transcribed later.

Data analysis finally was done using thematic analysis adopting Creswell’s approach of a five stage cyclical analysis process (Creswell, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data analysis process began with the data collection stage and was followed by stages that included note taking and recording, transcribing and coding; categorizing into emerging themes and subthemes; followed by describing, classifying and interpreting data and finally reporting by well describing similarities, categories, themes and comparisons; presenting and visualizing the findings.

**4. Results**

The main results of the study are categorized into five sections. The first section summarizes the profile of the study participants; the second section discusses the aspirations for becoming police officers; the third and fourth sections deal the opportunities and challenges experienced by female detectives; and the fifth is concerned with coping strategies used by female detectives.

**4.1 Demographic characteristics of respondents**

The following table (Table 1) shows participants’ profile comprising of demographic and social characteristics. The study participants are found in active working ages (28-40 years old), except one. They are all married and are mothers who carried out multiple responsibilities and played multiple roles as mothers, wives and detectives. They had lower educational qualifications ranging from grade 10 to having diplomas), and their positions and income were proportional to their educational qualifications.

Table 1: Demographic and social profile of participants

<b>Participant Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>N0. of Children</b>	<b>of Educational Status</b>	<b>Work Experience Total Experience</b>	<b>Crime Investigator</b>
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						<b>Police Officer</b>
CIFPO 1	31	Unmarried	-	Diploma	8	3
CIFPO 2	34	Married	2	12	15	13
CIFPO 3	35	Married	2	Certificate	13	8
CIFPO 4	40	Married	3	10	18	11
CIFPO 5	28	Married	1	Diploma	5	1
CIFPO 6	38	Married	3	Certificate	16	14
CIFPO 7	28	Married	1	Certificate	6	2
CIFPO 8	39	Married	2	Diploma	18	11

Source: (Own data)

## 4.2 Motivation for being a crime investigator

The first theme that emerged from the data collected from the participants was the inspiration for becoming a detective. The participants discussed their reasons for choosing their profession. The participants also shared their perceptions and four subthemes emerged such as peer influence, interest of helping others, the influence of family members and marital relationships.

**4.2.1 Peer influence:** Two study participants identified the subtheme of influence of friends as their motivation for engaging in the profession of policing. CIFPO6 shared her experiences about the influence of her friends. She said,

*Just seeing most of them under the influence of our best friends, I have lots of friends who are cops in my circle and back then I just needed a job. So I guess you can say, I was encouraged by my friends.”* CIFPO5 added her experience about the influence of her best friend as follow: *“I have one best friend, she has been working as a police officer for a long time, and I just saw how confident she was and I was influenced her.*

### 4.2.2 The Influence of family members

Two study participants reported influence of family members as their motivation for engaging in the profession of policing. When asked what influenced their decision to become police officers, CIFPO1 provided a short answer, “Some of my family members are in the police force and I am motivated by them.” Recalling her immediate inspiration for becoming a police officer during a career day at her elementary school, she said the following:

*Well my dad and my step dad, both were in the army and one day, I think I was in the 3rd grade or 4th grade and they had career day at my school and my uncle, he*



*was different from my parents and I asked him, “Are you in the army” and he said, “No, I am a police officer” and I asked him what he did and he replied, “I arrest criminals.” And I told him I wanted to do that. He said, “You do?” I said “Yeah, I want to do that.” So I wanted to arrest criminals and put them in jail. And ever since then it stuck with me.*

The other participant CIFPO3 stated, “My father is the one who influenced me.” She elaborated further and stated, “Well, in the beginning it was my father, but as time went on I started to like it,” when referring to her reasons for remaining in the profession.

#### **4.2.3 Interest in helping others**

The study participants mostly stressed giving back to their communities and helping others as inspiring their career. Three of the participants mentioned encouraging and advocating for others as guiding their career aspirations. CIFPO 4 said, “It was my dream to be a police officer and now I enjoy working with other co-workers and helping others, I feel like I can be a blessing.”. Similarly, CIFPO 8 added, “It was honestly helping my community in the profession of policing through securing peace.” and CIFPO7 said, “To be honest, I like helping people.”

#### **4.2.4 Marital relationship**

One of the participants of the study discussed having marital relationships with other law enforcement officers as influencing her motivation to a detective. CIFPO2 revealed, “Well my husband is a police officer and he talked me into joining it. I have never dreamed about becoming a detective, but my husband convinced me to become one.”

#### **4.3 Opportunities for being a detective**

The participants recognized that there are different opportunities for becoming a detective. Six of the participants further shared the opportunities or advantages of becoming detectives individually and for the entire family as well as at the community level. Participants have identified their opportunities for becoming detectives including enhancing self-reliance and self-confidence, protecting of family, cohesiveness of family and social acceptance.

#### **4.3.1 Enhancing self-reliance and self-confidence**

The participants of the study stated that there are many opportunities for becoming detectives individually. The participants discussed and identified the psychological benefit of being a detective as a female, including enhancing self-reliance and self-confidence, feeling independent as well as getting happiness and satisfaction. CIFPO6 stated, “You know, your time and energy to help and protect the community does not just make the world better, but it makes you better at what you cannot explain.” CIFPO4 also described her psychological benefits of becoming a detective: “I believe that if you want to be happy and to cope better with stress, serve others, especially your community. Usually, my happiness is related to my job.” Participant CIFPO1 described her individual feeling as: “I got satisfaction when I saw peaceful environment in our community. What makes us happier than helping others to live peacefully?”

Participants also identified their personal advantages like being capable of developing problem-solving skills, enhancing their self-confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance, communication skills as well as their ability to manage behaviors demonstrated by the criminals in the process of investigation. According to the findings, their challenging career helps to improve their ability to manage stress as well as reduce depression and increase sense of happiness and life satisfaction when they performed on a regular basis.

#### **4.3.2 Role model for family members**

With regard to being a role model for family members, four participants of the study said that there are positive impacts as role model including enhancing the discipline of their families. FPO3 noted that the capability of the family to learn discipline and demonstrate compassion has increased since she started working as a police officer. Participant CIFPO6 stated family related benefits as:

*You know I am energetic to help and protect the community and I tried to help individuals be able to be disciplined through respecting rules and laws, I don't know how much my work is effectively contributing to bringing change, but I always show my efforts to my family, especially for my children.*

The other participants (CIFPO2 and CIFPO8) who had long experience in policing argued that there were consistent feelings of unity and overall discipline as well as cohesiveness of their family members.

The study participants noted that it was important for their children to understand concepts of rule of law, the situation of the community and their ability to assist others through law enforcement and protecting stability of the society. The participants further recognized that their profession had some risks, but they expressed that it was more helpful for their families because of the long-lasting effects that these experiences of policing had.

#### **4.3.3 Family cohesiveness**

With regard to the family overall, three participants described that there were positive impacts on the unity of their families. In addition, CIFPO2 noted that the capability of the family to learn and demonstrate compassion since working in her profession had increased. For those participants who were working as detectives and as a couple in particular, there were consistent feelings of unity, increased strength and overall cohesiveness.

Participants noted that it was important for their children to understand the needs of others, and their ability to assist others less fortunate. Two of the participants further recognized the long-lasting effects that these experiences of their profession may have; however, they expressed that it would be more helpful than hurtful to continually build character and compassion in their families.

#### **4.3.4 Enhancing social acceptance**

Participants of the study stated that the benefits of policing are the impact it had at community level and helping others is often the glue that holds a community together. CIFPO2 stated the social benefit as follows: *“Working with people and helping them allows you to connect to your community and make it a better place.”*

CIFPO6 described the situation as: *“When a female works out of home, especially in the law enforcement sector it allow you to connect to community and make it a better place in different socio-cultural activities.”*

Other six participants also shared the social benefit of working in law enforcement. They said it helps them ensure justice that strengthens their relationship with community. They had a hard time meeting new people but after some years and understanding the work environment, it gave them the opportunity to know the social behavior of communities, practices and develop their social skills through participating in different social/community activities in their localities.

Participants recognized that dedicating their times as detectives helped them to make new friends, expand their network and boost their social skills throughout their careers. Respect and giving back to the community boosted their happiness and sense of well-being.

#### **4.4 Challenges of female detectives**

Female detectives who participated in this study experienced different problems and challenges throughout their careers. From the overall interviews, it is apparent that the challenges facing female detectives are extensive and can be overwhelming at times. All the participants have raised different challenges they encountered starting from the beginning of their work. Administrative problems and attitudinal challenges were frequently raised by most female detectives. This section describes the challenges experienced by female detectives including administrative problems, low scale salary, lack of conducive working environment, family responsibility, attitudinal challenges and discrimination and harassment.

##### **4.4.1 Administrative challenges**

The participants of this study experienced different problems and challenges related to administration of their office throughout their careers. According to the participants related to administrative problems, female detectives are facing extensive challenges. The participants shared the administrative challenging experiences and two subthemes merged such as absence of proper merit system and lack of relevant training.

###### **4.4.1.1 *Absence of a proper merit system***

One of the major problems faced by the whole participants of the study alike is the absence of a proper merit system for recruitment, promotions and transfers. It was also discussed during the

interview that women were not being inducted and assigned the required quota, as mostly males were preferred especially in field jobs. As there were no enough quotas at senior level, so very few women were promoted to senior ranks.

CIFPO4 stated, *“There’s a lot of favoritism that excludes women, there is no proper and clear merit system for promotion, in the absence of some staff due to work, for instance, you find someone promoted and everybody is shocked when announced.”*

CIFPO1 discussed the lack of fairness in her department’s promotion process. She reported, *“It’s more about who you know or who likes you. They might decide what they want without standard merit system and setting clear criteria which mostly excludes women.”*

According to the participants, in certain areas, female officers have been assigned neither to higher positions nor have they been delegated any specific duty. There are only shoulder promotions and enhancement in rank, which amounts to only a cosmetic change.

#### **4.4.1.2 Lack of relevant training**

It was a general opinion of the participants of the study that there was a lack of training imparted to enhance the capacity of female detectives. The participants further stated that they were not given adequate technical training and orientation at the time of recruitment as crime investigators and their capacities are not developed in keeping with the job requirements of detectives. Two participants reported that they did not feel better equipped to work in their current positions, if there had been some sort of technical training or materials offered to them through the process of working.

CIFPO1 explained the following related to the limitation of training: *“Due to the reluctance of females in working in crime investigation and in some cases there are lack of capability and experience related to lack of relevant training not the problem of commitment.”*

The other participant (CIFPO8) argued that:

*Detective is a hard position and it needs sustainable technical and technological training but there is no provision of enough types of relevant training by our office, higher officials prefer to appoint experienced male staff to various posts, while the females are assigned to support duties, but they have no idea about the enhancement of female staffs.*

Also, CI FPO4 stated the following: *“Women detectives should undergo the same physical, technical training scientifically as male colleagues for effective, integrated policing including use of firearms and investigation training, but in reality there are not equal opportunities.”*

According to the participants of the study, female detectives argued that females should be trained in how to investigate crimes and deal with victims/survivors of violence as well as the accused in a very sensitive and organized manner, but there are no proper and effective capacity building programs, appropriate training, and in-service training for female detectives.

#### **4.4.2 Low salary**

According to the participants of the study the issue of salary emerged as one of the major challenges. All participants recognized that the salary was low and did not feel that it was sufficient as compared to the workload. They noted that the low salary would not cover their living expenses, and due to lack of relevant facilities to do their work properly, they were more stressed both at home and at work.

On the other hand, the participants stated that the total hours of work, including breaks, sometimes their working hours might be spread over more than 13 hours a day. They also recognized that female detectives worked for more than eight hours a day or for more than forty-eight hours a week, but they were not paid for overtime work.

Related to salary, the participants frequently mentioned that it was not enough for all their needs and mentioned that they would like the government to provide other social services like transport, housing and health insurance to compensate for the lower wages.

#### **4.4.3 Lack of optimum work environment**

The participants discussed absence of comfortable work environment including transportation services, especially for mothers. They recognized that none of the women police stations had a day care facility; there is an overall lack of infrastructure and facilities within the police stations. CIFPO5 argued the challenging situation in the workplace as: *“Adequate provisions of facilities for females are not available at the workplace.”*

#### **4.4.4 Family responsibilities**

The participants of the study argued within the culture women are also expected to take care of the household, which becomes very difficult for the ones who have adopted their profession. CIFPO8 stated the challenging situation of family responsibility: *“As you know women are expected to maintain a balance between their jobs and family, while the men mostly do not face such a dilemma. It’s so difficult for women to balance their job and family responsibilities.”*

Three of the participants recognized that, due to the unconventional nature of this job, long hours, tough duty, field postings and other risks, the family members did not encourage women to join the police force. Some participants also mentioned even women themselves prefer a desk job, rather than being posted in the field. CIFPO5 discussed the following: *“All family members expected me to cover all things, that means overwhelmed with my personal responsibilities, motherhood and wifely duties.”* Two of the female participants also shared that their families did not support their induction into the police to the extent that some faced life threats. This is again due to the prevalent mindset within the society.

#### **4.4.5 Attitudinal challenges for women**

According to the attitude of the public towards female police officers, the prevalent culture and social mindset were identified as challenges by most of the participants. The participants argued that some groups of the society did not encourage women to join the police force. Because of the influence of the community, women themselves prefer a desk job, rather than being posted in the field.

CIFPO4 argued:

*I think some groups of people don’t understand that women have to work harder than men simply because we have to earn respect. A man can walk into a room and his presence will give him respect, but a woman...you’ve got to go the extra mile.*

The participants discussed and exposed the attitudinal problems of policing toward women in their experience and revealed the expectations male officers placed on each other. According to the participants, numerous male police officers believed policing was still a man’s job. The participants also stated that male police officers had been reported to be uncomfortable serving

under a female officer or even saluting one. Such types of attitudes in the police sector are one of the attitudinal challenges towards female police officers.

#### **4.4.6 Discrimination and harassment**

All of the participants indicated gender discrimination issues as a main barrier to overcome in order to achieve longevity in the police profession. CIFPO7 stated,

*Lately where I am, they are happy to have us. We work as hard as the men or even better. They try to keep down problems and confusion, so I can't say I have any real problems with discrimination at this sector.*

CRFPO6 said that “gender difference by itself is not a problem. But, when come to practical implementation in representation or delegation of a higher position, there is clearly a gender bias.”

The participants recognized that harassment and discrimination were two major challenges that female police officers faced and there was a limitation of awareness with both the public and male police officers. They recognized that already existing legislations related to harassment with their mandated mechanisms were not properly implemented within the police.

This is the case history of CIFPO4 related to discrimination against women:

*A male coworker of mine had done something wrong related to traffic crime investigation. Nothing horrible, but mere stupid mistake, though I was there at the time, I did not care. I told him to pay better attention next time, and was done with it. But my superior did not agree. They wanted him gone, so they ordered me to make the facts worse than they actually were. I was supposed to lie for them. I refused on the spot, and they told me that my actions could harm my career. I said I did not care, and shouldn't behave in such ways. Before I knew it, they found someone else that lied about what he did and what I did. As we had no way of disproving what they told people we did, I got fired without honors. It was done publicly, striped of rank and honors. I laughed and told them that this is not the kind of people we wanted to work for in the first place. It was clearly discrimination against me but I got other position shortly after that and made almost twice the money I did there. Best decision of my life, and I have no regrets for not putting in a false statement. So I decided not to press charges as I had no way of proving that we did not do the things they claimed.*



#### **4.4.7 Physical and mental health problems**

The participants of the study disclosed that the profession of crime investigator is dangerous work, and the danger lurks not on the streets alone particularly for females. The participants argued that the pressure of this profession put officers at risk for high blood pressure, insomnia, and increased levels of destructive stress hormones, heart problems, post-traumatic stress disorder and suicide. CIFPO5 stated about its impact on physical and mental health problems as follow: “Crime investigator is psychological stressful work environment filled with danger, high demands, and ambiguity in work encounters, human misery and exposure to death.”

According to the participants of the study, it is possible that women may feel more unease and stressed in daytime shift, where there can be more opportunity for conflicts and negative environment. There is also problem of physiological disruption of circadian rhythms. Being awake all night while one should be sleeping can affect judgment and decision making. They argued that the combination of these two could increase their stress levels. The findings indicate that female detectives are probably under more stress than male officers. It is still basically a male occupation, and women can feel socially isolated on the job. Also, most women have more home responsibilities to worry about their family and children.

CIFPO2 recounted the health impacts of her profession as follows:

*I have never ever forgotten that situation because still it has negative impacts on my life. The crime happened three years ago in an area named Meshenty around Bahir Dar city. The crime was a murder of one among two close friends who were working together. They were sometimes in conflict about how to manage their profits but not much more. One day, when they were enjoying themselves at a bar at night, the next morning one of them came to our station and reported his friend was killed by thieves in a loudly and frequently crying loud. Then we tried to collect basic information from him and then we went over to his home where we found eviction notice around his home. His wife claimed she had no idea about the situation but we all knew she knew something. But while we were trying to investigate further and collect information, we saw blood, it looked like someone tried to clean the blood but there was bad smell ... that situation still made me sick.*

#### **4.5 Coping strategies to address the challenges**

The participants of the study mentioned coping strategies they used to address the challenges they encountered in the police force. Two participants described they still had not taken any measures to overcome the challenging situations and still they did not know what they would

like to do for the future. There were several differences among the participants as they identified their coping mechanisms and measures including conflicts with office administration, appealing to the concerned bodies and finding support from family members.

#### **4.5.1 Conflicts with office administration**

The participants recognized that they tried to report their challenging situation to the higher officials which was one of the coping mechanisms and strategies to get solutions to administrative and workplace attitudinal related problems. Three participants of this study also said that clear communication and disagreement with the management were used as coping mechanisms and they told them everything about their serious gender related problems and asked them that they needed solutions. CIFPO5 described her experience as follows:

*I am trying clearly communicating with higher officials about the real uncomfortable working environment of police stations for women. I frequently tried to explain to them that women police officers worked in challenging situations, but nobody wanted to accept us and give relevant response for our concern.*

The other participant CIFPO1 explained her effort as:

*I can't keep quiet when I see gender related discrimination in my office, on my part I tried to find solutions, but when the challenges are beyond me, I tried to communicate and discuss with them again and again until getting relevant response, but sometimes there was no solution for the problems.*

#### **4.5.2 Appealing to the concerned bodies**

The participants discussed that appealing to the concerned governmental organization including the police commission and regional administration offices were used as coping mechanisms to overcome the challenges when the challenges could not be resolved by the local police office. Three participants could not report gender related challenges at the office level and used frequently appealing to regional higher officials as a coping mechanism. Three participants identified that the challenging work environment, low rate of salary and administration related problems were not solved at the office level and appealing to higher regional official was a way of addressing the problems as a coping strategy.

### **4.5.3 Find family support**

The participants of this study expressed that their family support served as a coping mechanism and strategy to handle the challenges that they faced related to family responsibilities. Five of the participants, when they were facing challenges took care of the household, due to the unconventional nature of this job, long hours and tough duty; they tried to find the support of their family members to cover the domestic household responsibilities.

In addition, participants described the support they found from their husbands, friends and neighbors to share their family related challenges, especially taking care of their children as coping mechanisms at the time tough duty at work place. CIFPO6 stated: “I have had support from my husband’s little sister as well; they are always properly taking care of my child when I am in tough duty at office. I also tell them to do the household activities and they are committed to help me.”

## **5. Discussion**

A review of the literature revealed minimal scholarly research available on the personal experiences of female police officers, especially those in higher ranking positions, specifically, as it relates to female detectives’ challenges, opportunities and coping mechanisms.

### **5.1 Motivation for being a police officer**

The findings of this study related to motivation for becoming a police officer and an investigator revealed that some were in line with the findings of past studies. Researchers like Arlether (2016), Vanessa (2018), UN Woman reports of (2008 and 2015), have supported the belief that only men have the physical and emotional capacity to do police work. Additionally, the women in this study explained the importance of supporting each other. The participants of the study identified peer influence, interest of helping others, the influence of family members and marital relationships as motivations for becoming police officers. The findings also showed that having personal relationships with other officers inspired them to become police officers and also helping others as a motivation to enter the profession, while the other participants reported the influence of their best friends as an inspiration for becoming police officers.

This study confirmed the findings in Crank (2014). The study indicated that female police officers placed more emphasis on helping the public while male officers favored the power and status provided by the position. Furthermore, the findings were consistent with previous studies when examining their motivation for remaining in the profession. In addition, the findings were in line with earlier research when exploring the participants' interest of helping others, the influence of family members and marital relationships for entering the profession.

On the other hand, the study contended that financial security and job security were major motivations for women to enter the law enforcement profession. Necessary to survive in a male-dominated organization as well as to overcome any barriers they encountered, women had to be assertive and go against the norm (Burligame & Baro, 2015). As shown in the findings, the participants disclosed that financial security and job security were not motivations to enter the profession. Overall, compassion for others and devotion to the job appeared to be major factors for the participants remaining in the law enforcement profession.

## **5.2 Benefits gained by female detectives**

This study revealed that the benefits for being female detectives and their entire families as well as themselves benefited at the community level. The findings of the study showed that there were many opportunities for being a female detective as an individual. The participants discussed and identified the psychological benefit of being female detectives such as self-reliance and self-confidence, feeling independent as well as getting happiness and satisfaction. The present study identified self-reliance and self-confidence as benefits of being female detectives and this finding is congruent with the earlier study discussed by Brandl, Stroshine, and Frank (2011). Brandl, Stroshine, and Frank (2011) pointed out that policing for women plays a prominent role in enhancing their self-reliance and self-confidence.

Crank (2014) also identified the benefits of being a female detective including feeling independent as well as getting happiness and satisfaction related with helping others. In addition, the present study identified additional findings that policing can help the participants to improve their ability to manage challenging situations and increase their sense of happiness and it is consistent with the psychological benefits of the profession for women.

With regard to family related opportunities for female detectives, the participants of the study described that there are positive impacts as role model for their families including enhancing the discipline of their families. They noted that members of their families have been able to learn discipline and demonstrate compassion since they start working in the police force. The participants identified capability of the family to learn discipline as the positive impact of being female detectives and this result was consistent with the literature noted by Cowan and Bochantin (2009).

As addressed in the previous literature, the participants of the present study appeared to have an understanding for the social benefit of foster care services to strengthen their relationship with the community and broaden their support network through exposing them to people with common interest (Burligame & Barco, 2015). Similarly, the participants of the study stated that the opportunity for policing for women are the impact at the community level and helping the other is often the glue that holds a community together. In addition to the earlier research, the present study identified that female detectives have an opportunity to know the social behavior of communities, practices and develop their social skills through participating in different social activities around their localities.

### **5.3 Challenges experienced by female detectives**

Challenges of female detectives vary for all participants based on the thematic areas and the nature of the policing profession. The findings of this study revealed that female detectives face tremendous and serious challenges throughout their career. Some of these challenges such as administrative problems, low scale salary, lack of favorable work environment, family responsibility, attitudinal challenges and discrimination and harassment.

The administrative challenges, stigma, harassment and discrimination of female police officers in work areas, negative attitude towards female police officers and their own attitudinal problems towards themselves are the major challenges of female detectives and it is consistent with the findings of the research conducted by Brandl, Stroshine, and Frank (2011), who found different challenges to those identified in this study, and who arranged these challenges into categories of economic challenges related to workload of the profession and their responsibility.

In addition, the finding is consistent with a study conducted by Crank (2014) in which it was reported that female police officers encountered challenging situations in the community as well as from men officer's attitudinal challenges and discrimination and harassment. However, the present study also discovered new findings that are inconsistent with previous studies. Many of previous studies found that female police officers did not experience low salary, lack of favorable work environment and challenges related to family responsibility, lack of enough time related to their workload to manage their responsibilities at family level.

The findings of the present study related to absence of a proper merit system for recruitment, promotions and transfers and lack of relevant training in crime investigation are in agreement with the study by Cowan and Bochantin (2009), who found that a policing merit system was one of the challenging situations for female police officers. The challenges that female police officers further identified was lack of training. The lack of training or preparation may largely contribute to a female police officer's inability to manage challenges as they are encountered as well as maintaining and enhancing a level of awareness.

#### **5.4 Coping strategies**

The study participants discussed coping mechanisms of female detectives to overcome the everyday challenges in working areas and in their households. Therefore, coping could serve as a framework to explain how female detectives overcome various challenges. The skill to reduce or manage work strain is essential for any person, but especially for someone who is working in a challenging environment (Burligame & Baro, 2015). The finding also indicated that the ability and capacity of female detectives to address the challenges of uncomfortable working environment and attitudinal related problems need to be emphasized.

The participants identified their coping mechanisms and measures including confronting office administration, appealing to the concerned bodies and finding support from family members. The ways in which participants of the study sought to address attitudinal related challenges as well as administrative problems were to some extent inconsistent with earlier research. According to Brandl, Strohine, and Frank (2011), many female police officers further developed an understanding and awareness of the administrative, attitudinal and family related problems that

the female police officers had been exposed to throughout their experiences, but they couldn't take any measures to address their challenges. Female police officers recognized their measures to cope with administrative challenges through the need to step away from the situation and allow the opportunity to become calmer and tolerate the situation, instead of becoming reactive in the moment through discussion with the concerned bodies.

In addition, female police officers demonstrated skills and the importance of being emotionally sensitive to communicate with other female coworkers in line with the literature discussed in James (2016). Walker (2008) identified the importance for workers to master the ability to manage their emotions before being capable of effectively addressing and managing different challenges related to the work environment. Therefore, as the participants acknowledged, they had communicated with the concerned bodies in order to solve the problems.

In the case of other coping strategies of female police officers, the related body of literature shows that social support can stem from their one's family and this could help reduce the stress of female police officers (James, 2016). As presented in the related literature, the participants of the study acknowledged the outside support from their families and friends to address their family related problems.

Overall, the experiences of female detectives in coping mechanisms were inconsistent among the majority of the participants as individuals employed different coping mechanisms. The skills demonstrated by participants to manage behaviors in the immediate moment and the skills following any incident were somehow consistent with skills previously discussed in the literature.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings showed that the reasons of female detectives for choosing their profession include peer influence, interest of helping others, the influence of family members and marital relationships. According to the findings, the work environment of the police work is not free from challenges particularly for women. The participants experienced various multi-dimensional challenges, but they are different across different participants and were influenced by individuals' histories. Additionally, the findings showed that regardless of the women's years of

experience, female detectives acknowledged that gender inequality exposed them to a greater risk for inequitable treatment.

Most of the female detectives were not well prepared before being promoted to their positions and they have not developed appropriate skills and received technical training that can help them enhance their capacity and lack of continuous support throughout their careers. The findings of this study confirmed that women still face unique barriers such as officer resistance, outdated standard operating procedures, limited promotional opportunities, and a lack of administrative support. These challenges often began at the police academy and persist throughout the female police officer's career. The study found that female detectives are working in challenging environments and they are facing various complex problems and challenges including uncomfortable work environment, lack of relevant technical skill training, economic problems related to low payment, various family related problems and negative perceptions and attitudes towards female police officers.

On the other hand, working in the police force has also significant positive impacts in the everyday life of female detectives. The study identified that there are different opportunities for becoming police officers, which helps them to improve their ability to work in a challenging environment and increase their sense of self-confidence and life satisfaction when they work and perform in the police force. The study found that female detectives tried to cope with their complex and various challenges related to their profession through discussion and confronting office administration, appealing to the concerned bodies and finding external support from the concerned government organization, their families and friends.

In conclusion, the working condition of female detectives in the study area are dominated by a challenging environment that is both extensive and multifaceted in nature; therefore, all concerned bodies should properly address the existing complex problems of female police officers through empowering their capacity and participation.

## **6.2. Implications for practitioners and future research**

The key implications of this study are identified at the policy, practice, as well as research levels. The results of this study provide an initial portrayal of under-researched and underserved



population. It also highlights the challenges, opportunities, and coping mechanisms and suggests concrete ways to address their problems and needs in terms of policy, practice and research.

The study identified a lack of awareness to address the complex challenges and, as a result, they reported teaching themselves or sought additional advice from their natural support in the participation of females in law enforcement activities. Therefore, police administrators need to develop a standardized training program that includes a formal mentoring program for female police officers. Given this, the program should begin at recruitment and include provisions for long-term support, which extend throughout their law enforcement careers.

The law enforcement activities need the involvement of skill and technical practitioners particularly for women in the process of each activity regarding the capacity and self-confidence of female employees through assessing the work environment of the police sector, facilitating, and guiding the psychological and technical training for potential workers. Accordingly, raising awareness about the current roles and concerns of female police officers and playing a prominent role in addressing the negative attitudes and discriminations against women participation of law enforcement activities and issues related to unintended impacts through continuous awareness creation are vital.

The issues like the empowerment of female police officer in proper law enforcement processes, identifying difficulties in high level female police officers, monitoring the implementation of the law enforcement activities, roles and responsibilities to ensure women participation as well as enhancing the bond and relationship between female police officers and the police sector are areas where the practitioners need to guide and promote the right of women participation as well as its effective implementation.

Moreover, the eagerness and willingness of the participants to share their experiences in law enforcement further reveals the need for additional research in this area to address issues such as the inconsistencies in the literature review and earlier research with the findings of the present study as well as uncovered areas. This research comes up with findings that can contribute to information for further study by addressing the delimitation of this study by considering female

officers working in different positions, men police officers as well as other family members of female detectives and concerned governmental organizations' perspectives.

Additionally, the present study was a small sample of only eight female detectives. The present findings, therefore, cannot be generalized to larger groups of the population. Nonetheless, the present findings still point out the constantly evolving reality of women in policing and add to the little recent literature and studies on female officers that exist. If all these issues still exist today more research should be done on them to clarify more recent status of females in policing.

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