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FROM DUTY-TIME PRESSURES TO FAMILY-CARE DEMANDS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF WORK–FAMILY STRAIN AMONG WOMEN POLICE PERSONNEL IN YAVATMAL DISTRICT

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Abstract

The inclusion of women in policing has increased the ability to address crimes and issues affecting women and children however creates work-life balance issues within police organisations. This exploratory research looks at how women in policing experience work-life balance issues within Yavatmal District Police. This includes looking at how they feel their working hours, night shifts, time off, supervisor support, physical tiredness, family events, gender friendly facilities, long bandobast shifts and childcare after maternity. Primary data has been collected by the researcher directly from women in policing. A population of 559 women were identified. A sample of 300 women were surveyed (this is 53.67% of the total population). This includes Police Constable, Head Constable, Assistant Sub-Inspector, Police Sub-Inspector, Assistant Police Inspector and Police Inspector. As there is no frequency data for each individual theme per respondent this paper will not include any artificial percentages. The themes were identified using thematic analysis and compared to research from published sources on women in policing in India and Maharashtra. The research shows that there are multiple factors that cause women in policing to suffer from work-life balance issues. This includes unpredictable working hours, lack of control over time off, night shifts, tiredness, family care and lack of gender friendly facilities. There was also identification of a gap between policy and practice. Overall work-life balance can be improved by having shorter or rationalised working hours. Also having predictable schedules, time off, adequate facilities for toileting and rest, good supervisor support, bandobast planning and childcare/return to work support.

Keywords : Women Police Work-Life Balance Working Hours Night Shift Supervisor Support Yavatmal Police

1. Introduction

Policing is a continuous service to the public and can include unpredictable working hours, responding to emergencies, maintaining order, investigation, patrolling, court related duties, bandobast and sudden demands. This makes the job very different to other jobs with predictable working hours. Women in policing can struggle with the demands of the job whilst also balancing their domestic lives, childcare,

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pregnancy/maternity. This can cause the question of whether women can join and stay within policing and whether they can perform well within the organisation without causing avoidable and constant work-life conflict. The increase in women within policing in India has caused organisations to have more of an emphasis on incorporating gender friendly human resource policies. A study by Meeran Chadha Borwankar looked at gender friendly policing within the Maharashtra Police. This looked at female uniformed officers from constable up to sub-inspector level. Gender friendly was defined as having a gender friendly working environment, respect for gender, equality and cooperation.

Of the 384 women constables surveyed 17% were satisfied/very satisfied, 36% were average, 23% were unsatisfied and 25% were very unsatisfied. Of the fully completed sub-inspector responses 20% were satisfactory/very satisfactory, 32% were average, 28% were unsatisfactory and 8% were very unsatisfactory. The study identified issues with toilet facilities, rest rooms, bandobast facilities, rationalised shifts, time off, weekly offs, pregnancy and post pregnancy. Issues also included role conflict due to unpredictable and long working hours. Since this study there have been several other studies across India looking at work-life balance for women in policing. These have looked at issues such as unpredictable working hours, domestic issues, supervisor support, stress, childcare and job satisfaction. A recent review by the Bureau of Police Research and Development has also identified long shifts and lack of gender friendly facilities for women traffic police officers within India.

Studies have also been done in Kerala looking at policewomen and have identified working hours and childcare as an important factor in causing stress. Studies in Hyderabad, Kerala, Jharkhand and Chennai have also looked at unpredictable working hours, domestic issues, supervisor support and work-life balance. This study focuses on Yavatmal District Police and looks at how women in policing face recurring issues. This is useful as work-life conflict can be generated from unpredictable events. This could include sudden deployment, long bandobast shifts, not getting time off in a timely manner, lack of suitable toilets, night shifts and domestic issues. This can also be linked to the experiences of senior women police officers. The book Madam Commissioner by Meeran Chadha Borwankar looks at a long career in law enforcement in India and the pressures and challenges within policing. I Dare! By Kiran Bedi looks at the professional career, leadership and approach to policing of a female officer. These are not empirical data sources but have been used to give context and experience. Overall this research has attempted to link three things. The real experiences of women in policing in Yavatmal, previous empirical research on women in policing and the experiential literature from senior women police officers.

2. Objectives

1) To Identify the main causes of work-life balance issues for women in policing in Yavatmal District.
2) To identify how working hours, night shifts, time off and long deployment can cause work-life issues.
3) To identify how working demands can cause issues with caring for families.
4) To identify gender friendly issues with the workplace and facilities, including rest and toilet facilities.
5) To identify issues with bandobast and long deployment.

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6) To identify issues with maternity and childcare.
7) To Provide actionable recommendations to improve work-life balance within policing.

3. Methodology

The methodology of this research is exploratory and descriptive. The research has focused on Yavatmal District Police. There was a population of 559 women in policing identified. 300 women were included in the data collected by the researcher in the field (approximately 53.67%).

The survey was sent to:

Police Constable

Head Constable

Assistant Sub-Inspector

Police Sub-Inspector

Assistant Police Inspector

Police Inspector

Primary data was collected directly by the researcher.

The responses received were categorised under the following 10 themes:

1) Irritation with work impacting family life
2) Tiredness after working
3) Unable to attend festivals and important family events
4) Lack of time off, lack of supervisor support and night shifts causing imbalance
5) Lack of proper rest and toileting facilities
6) High pressure working causing stress with having to manage both work and home
7) Need for easy to reach deployment, toileting facilities and time off
8) Need for rationalised 8 hour shifts
9) Issues with bandobast and long deployment
10) Maternity, adjustment after maternity and childcare

An issue with this research is that there is no frequency data for each of the 10 themes for each respondent. Instead the themes were identified using thematic analysis. These were then compared to findings from published research. The secondary data was used to help triangulate and provide context but was not combined with the sample from Yavatmal. For example if a previous study said 36% of respondents fell

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into a certain category this would refer to the sample of that study and could not be applied to our sample of 300.

Sampling : 300 women were sampled from the total population of 559.

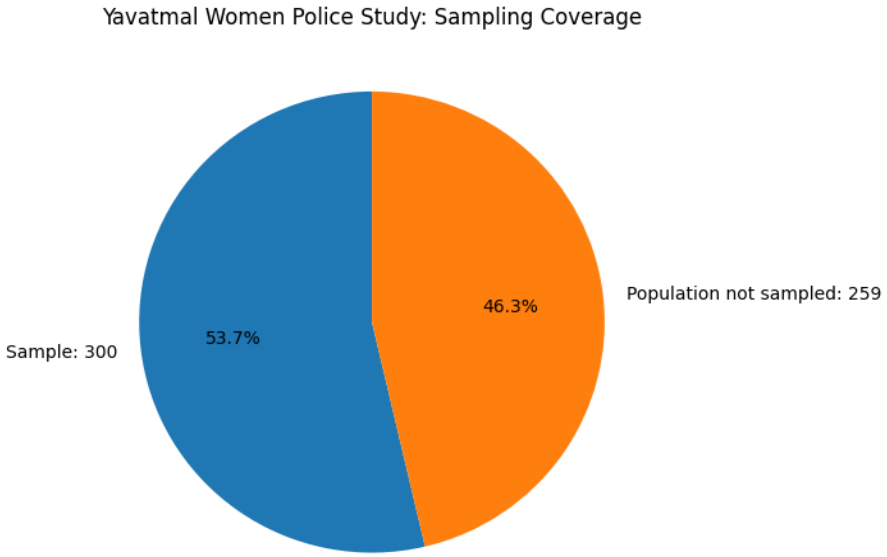


Figure 1: Sampling Coverage of the Present Study

This is 53.67% of the total population. 46.33% were not included in the sample.

Analytical Approach

The research looked at four areas:

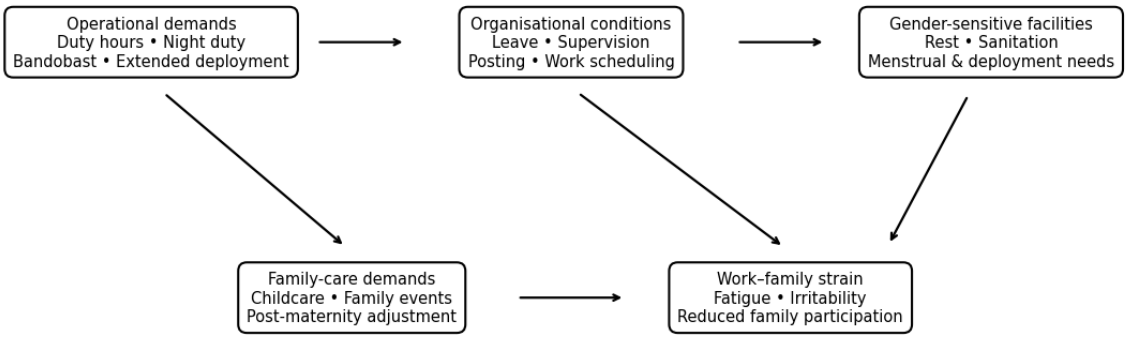
Working demands

Working conditions

Gender friendly facilities

Family care

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4. Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Working Hours

The most recurring issue mentioned in the field was working hours.

Respondents mentioned that they would like to have 8 hours of work. They also mentioned that often they work for longer than expected. Policing can often mean that you are not working the amount of hours you are meant too due to responding to emergencies, bandobast, investigation, escort, night shifts and unexpected public order issues. This can be a major issue as you are under time pressure at work and also at home. Long shifts mean they do not have time to eat, rest, travel, look after their child, complete household tasks and attend family events. This can cause a build-up of stress.

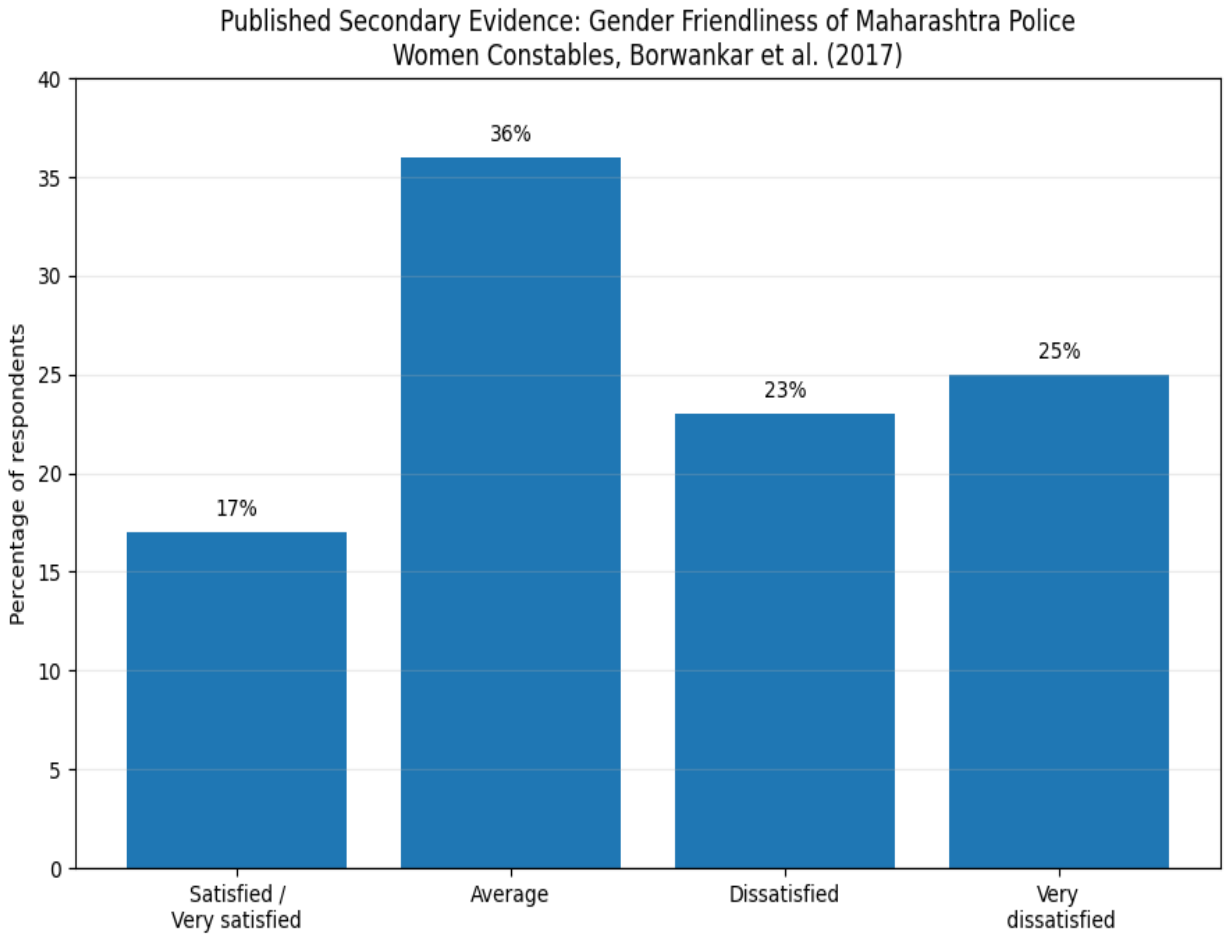
Within Maharashtra in 2021 the police leadership made the announcement that women in policing would have 8 hour shifts. This was to be rolled out across the state. Current news shows that women constables have expressed concerns that they are working long hours and this is impacting their family.

The previous gender friendly study in Maharashtra also identified working shifts, rationalised working hours and time off as an issue

4.2 Night Shifts

Night shifts can cause work-life balance issues. This impacts sleeping patterns, domestic life, childcare and attending family events. Night shifts were identified as a recurring issue by respondents. Women can be deployed in the morning and have to stay until very late. Bandobast can also be an issue as it can be uncertain how long they will be on shift. They may have to stay for long periods of time due to festivals, political programmes, public gatherings and emergencies. The Borwankar et al study in Maharashtra was particularly relevant as interviews with senior police officers showed female officers faced role conflict due to having to take on domestic roles whilst working odd hours and not 8 hours.

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4.3 Time Off and Predictable Weekly Offs

Time off was another major theme mentioned. Respondents mentioned that they did not get enough time off, they did not get it in a timely manner and they could not get time off for important family events. Within policing you may not always be able to give time off as you need to maintain working demands. If time off is unpredictable it can make it hard to plan childcare, family events, medical appointments and personal commitments. This is an issue with predictability and fairness. Whilst you may have a time off policy this can cause work-life balance issues if it is not guaranteed or weekly offs are constantly being disrupted. The gender friendly study in Maharashtra specifically identified time off and weekly offs needed to be rationalised. They also found that women police officers felt they did not get time off in a timely manner or at all, particularly during festivals and holidays. This links back to the previous study in Maharashtra meaning we can argue that time off should be seen as a variable within policing.

4.4 Tiredness and Irritability

Respondents mentioned they felt very tired after working. They also mentioned they can get irritable at home due to pressure from work. This shows issues with spillover. Qualitative research with police officers in South India has shown that they do not have enough time for personal needs, issues with sleeping and

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women in policing facing issues with managing their multiple roles. Research on policewomen in Kerala has also shown that increased working hours and childcare can cause increased stress. It is important to note that not every mention of tiredness and irritability means they have a mental health issue. This is just an issue they are facing at work and within their family. The correct action to take would be to manage their workload, give them enough rest, provide support and provide professional support if needed.

4.5 Missing Family Events

Respondents mentioned they could not attend festivals or important family programmes. Whilst this may seem like a small issue it can cause perceived work-life balance issues if they are constantly unable to attend family events. Police officers are part of families and communities and need to strike a balance between being ready to work and being able to attend family events. Having predictable schedules, knowing when you will be deployed and having a clear plan for time off can help reduce avoidable conflict.

4.6 Lack of Supervisor Support

A lack of support from senior officers was also identified as causing work-life balance issues.

Having support from within the organisation is important as your supervisor will decide or influence how much you will be working, time off, deployment and how administrative instructions will be interpreted.The Borwankar study identified there was a gap between policy and practice and mentioned concerns around leadership not caring about the wellbeing of female officers. This is relevant to Yavatmal as just because there is a policy in place it does not mean it will be consistently applied at police station level. Having supportive supervisors does not mean giving preference. It means having a transparent, predictable and gender friendly administration within legitimate working demands.

4.7 Toilets and Gender Friendly Facilities

Respondents mentioned there were not enough rest and toilet facilities for women. This is a basic issue with facilities and can impact on their dignity, comfort and performance. This is particularly an issue when they are on long deployment. The Borwankar study specifically mentioned toilets and rest rooms should be provided in the police station/unit. Portable toilets should also be provided during bandobast.

The BPR&D review on issues women traffic police officers face in the workplace also mentions toilet issues. Respondents also mentioned women who are menstruating should be given lighter or rest shifts for at least 2 days if possible. This is a suggestion from the field. Any administrative action would need to be looked at in terms of service rules and working demands.

4.8 Deployment and Location

Respondents identified issues with deployment being in an easy to reach location. Long travel times can cause an increase in working hours. Whilst they may be working 8 hours they are actually working a lot longer when considering travel time, preparation and domestic issues. This can be particularly an issue for women with childcare. If possible deploying closer to their home can reduce the travel burden and make it easier to deal with any family emergencies. This does not mean they will be given preference to be deployed somewhere. But having transparency around the relevant family and wellbeing factors can be incorporated into a wider human resource approach.

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4.9 Bandobast and Long Deployment

Respondents mentioned that they can be deployed early and have to stay until late during bandobast and long deployment. This was particularly an issue for mothers of young children. There is no way to remove the need for women in policing. There are many situations where women are needed due to female victims, female suspects and public order. The correct policy would be to plan deployment in a gender friendly way. Having predictable schedules, relief, adequate facilities for toileting, transport, safe rest areas and rotating long deployment can reduce unnecessary stress. The suggestion from the field that some roles should be given to men should be seen as a suggestion from the respondents. Roles should be allocated based on working demands, competency, safety and policy.

4.10 Maternity, Return to Work and Childcare

Respondents mentioned maternity leave was 9 months. They suggested that they may need extra support during the adjustment period after childbirth, particularly if their child is between 1-4 years. This is just a perception and suggestion from the respondents. The key issue from an analytical point of view is the return to work after maternity leave. Returning to full working duties can be difficult if childcare is not stable. Research on policewomen also shows that childcare is relevant to understanding stress. A gender friendly police organisation will need to think past maternity leave. This could include having predictable return to work schedules, childcare/crèche if possible, appropriate nursing support, reasonable considerations for working location and transparent time off/half pay if allowed by service rules.

5. Findings

Below are the key findings from the study.

1. Duty timings are a significant factor causing work-family conflict.

2. Night duty and vague end times are problematic.

3. Issues with leave are problematic due to lack of flexibility and planning for family events.

4. Fatigue caused by the duty can cause issues at home such as being irritable.

5. Women police officers will miss festivals and key family events.

6. Supervisor support is a key organisational factor.

7. Toilets, sanitation and gender friendly facilities are an important factor to consider.

8. Bandobast issues and long periods in duty can cause issues with planning.

9. Children and post maternity issues need more attention within the organisation.

10. Concepts from this study have aligned with previous studies in Maharashtra. These include duty times, leave, facilities, bandobast and family conflict.

11. There may be a lack of policy to ensure the issues are properly implemented. Monitoring how well they are implemented needs to be considered.

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12. This shows the importance of moving away from a restrictive work-life balance model to having a more flexible organisation by allowing more predictable times, good supervisor support, gender friendly facilities and accommodating for looking after family.

6. Conclusion

Work-family issues within Yavatmal District should be seen as an organisational issue. As police officers there will always be emergency duties, night shifts, public order issues and unpredictable duties. As a result, it is impossible to completely remove unpredictability from the human resource policies but we can reduce the unnecessary unpredictability and ensure the unavoidable issues are handled sensibly.

This study has shown that duty times, night duty, leave, bandobast, supervisor support, sanitation, fatigue and children are all connected. Long and vague duty times can cause less time to rest and spend with family. Unpredictable leave times can cause problems with planning family events. Long periods in duty can cause issues with sanitation and children. A lack of support within the organisation can increase the impact of these issues. This study has shown that these issues are not completely new. Previous studies in Maharashtra have shown similar issues with duty times, leave, facilities, bandobast, pregnancy and role conflict. Recent studies in India have also shown the importance of duty times, children, stress and organisational support. This study has shown the importance of these themes by gathering primary data from a large sample of women police officers within Yavatmal District.

A sustainable solution should be to manage duty times sensibly, ensure leave times are clear, provide sufficient rest and sanitation facilities, gender friendly bandobast planning, good supervisor support, child care facilities and structured maternity leave.This does not need to negatively affect policing. By having predictable and humane workforce management, police organisations can keep experienced staff, reduce unnecessary stress and improve their capacity. Further research should be done to gather quantitative data for each theme from each respondent. Ideally using a validated likert scale. This should also look at differences in these issues depending on rank, marital, parental status, rural/urban location and years of service. A longitudinal study could also be done to see if changes to duty times and organisational support can be seen to improve work-family issues. This would allow police administration to make specific recommendations based on the evidence.

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